

Test Comparisons

Internationally Recognized English Language Exams: How They Map to the Common European Framework (CEFR) Levels

How are tests mapped to the CEFR?

This document shows how the most widely-used English language proficiency tests relate to the CEFR scales, published by the Council of Europe. The methodology for mapping an exam to the CEFR scales essentially involves human judgment: a group of experts are collected together and they make a judgment about where a particular test taker, language sample, or test question fits on the CEFR scale. The larger and more diverse the group of experts, the more accurate the final judgment is likely to be. However, this means that mapping exercises conducted on different occasions and with different human judges might give different results, e.g. one institution might judge that CEFR Level B1 relates to TOEIC 530, and another institution might conclude that Level B1 relates to 570. The most reliable “maps”, therefore, are those which have been refined through two or more iterations of mapping exercises.

How should we interpret the table?

In this document, we have collected together the CEFR mappings that are officially endorsed by each test provider for their own test. In other words, the IELTS mapping was conducted by Cambridge ESOL, the TOEFL and TOEIC mappings were conducted by ETS, the PTE Academic mapping was conducted by Pearson, and the Versant mapping was conducted by the Knowledge Technologies group of Pearson. In this way we hope to provide the most accurate information.

It is important to keep in mind that the examinations given here have different designs, purposes, and test methods, e.g., spoken vs. written. Since they assess different constructs (types of language proficiency) it is very difficult to give exact comparisons across different tests and test scores, even when the scores they generate are used for similar purposes¹.

Candidates’ aptitude and preparation for a particular type of test will also vary from individual to individual (or group to group), and some candidates are more likely to perform better in certain tests than in others.

¹ Please see Cambridge ESOL’s Research Notes (2004) Issue 15 for a more complete explanation and cautious interpretation of such charts.

Wilson, N., & Van Moere, A. (2010). Mapping the Versant Pro – Writing on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). White Paper available on request; Pearson Knowledge Technologies.