



BLOOMSBURY INTERNATIONAL

FCE Listening Exam Strategies and Tips



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The listening section of the FCE exam can be a worry for students. But if you prepare properly and understand the exam, you can lessen that worry and give yourself a greater chance of succeeding! Below is a brief guide to the exam including some tips and strategies to help you!

The exam has 4 parts. People will be speaking in different situations. Sometimes people are having a conversation and sometimes a person is speaking on their own. Each part is different from the last. So you will need to approach each part slightly differently.

Part 1

The first part of the exam is eight short recordings. For each recording there is a question with three sentences. Pick the sentence that answers the question best!

Part 1

You will hear people talking in eight different situations. For questions 1 – 8, choose the best answer (A, B or C).

1 You hear a message on a telephone answering machine.

Why is the speaker calling?

- A to confirm some arrangements
- B to issue an invitation
- C to persuade someone to do something

In this part of the test all options will be mentioned! So expect to hear about every picture in the recording. Be careful to pick the correct answer! There is only one! The correct answer could be anywhere in the recording. The beginning, the middle or the end. Be sure you have read the question carefully. Really pay attention to the available answers and know exactly what information you are looking for.

Listen for general meaning on your first listening. Get an understanding for what each recording is saying. Listen for the exact information you need the second time you listen. Then link it to one of the sentences.

To prepare for this part become familiar with different accents and styles of speaking. Podcasts and English films are a great help! Remember this is a Cambridge English exam. Get familiar with English accents and styles of speaking. Don't just watch old episodes of 'Friends' and American films on Netflix!

Part 2

The second part of the exam is one long recording. You will have 10 gaps in sentences to complete. This is called sentence completion.

Part 2

You will hear a woman called Angela Thomas, who works for a wildlife organisation, talking about the spectacled bear.

For questions 9 – 18, complete the sentences with a word or short phrase.

Spectacled Bears



Angela says that it was the (9) of the spectacled bear that first interested her.

Angela mentions that the bear's markings can be found on its (10) as well as its eyes and cheeks.

Angela is pleased by evidence that spectacled bears have been seen in (11) areas of Argentina.

Remember that the recording will often use different words to the ones in the questions. Think about possible synonyms and paraphrasing. The first listening should be for general meaning. But as you listen choose which word you think is best. On the second listening check your answers. If you miss an answer keep focussed and move onto the next question! You have two opportunities to hear the recording. Don't lose two marks instead of one because of loss of focus!

It is very important to read the questions carefully. Make sure you understand what information you are looking for. Expect to hear language that's different from the words in the question sentences. You need to quickly understand the possible meanings!

Part 3

In Part three you will hear five short clips from different speakers on the same subject. There are eight different options and you have to match the correct one to the speaker. Three of the options do not match any speaker. So be wary of them!

Part 3

You will hear five short extracts in which people are talking about their visit to a city. For questions 19 – 23, choose from the list (A – H) what each speaker liked most about the city they visited. Use the letters only once. There are three extra letters which you do not need to use.

A the efficiency of the public transport system

B the natural beauty of the scenery

Speaker 1 19

C the variety of goods in the markets

Speaker 2 20

D the style of the architecture

Speaker 3 21

E the well-designed plan of the city

Speaker 4 22

F the helpfulness of the people

Speaker 5 23

G the range of leisure opportunities

H the standard of the accommodation

First read the topic and look at the options and decide which ones are most likely to fit in with the topic. This will possibly eliminate some wrong answers

Be wary of traps. Just because the same words are mentioned in the recording and the possible answer, does not mean it is the correct one!

Also finish listening to the extract before you note down your answer. The correct information could be at the beginning, the middle or the end of the recording. Finish listening before deciding and use the second listen to check your answer.

The most important thing in most of this test is to read the questions and options thoroughly in the time that you are given. Try to really understand the questions and possible solutions. It can help to underline key words too!

Part 4

Part four will contain a dialogue between two people (often an interview or conversation). The last part of a listening test is always a challenge, as you may be tired. So dig deep for one last burst of concentration. You need to listen for the attitudes and opinions of the speakers and listen for detailed meaning. This section usually lasts for around three minutes and like the other parts of the listening test it is important to listen for detractors and linking words and to understand the meaning of what people are saying.

Part 4

You will hear part of a radio interview with a woman called Rachel Reed, who works in a commercial art gallery, a shop which sells works of art. For questions 24 – 30, choose the best answer (A, B or C).

24 What does Rachel say about her job title?

- A It makes her feel more important than she is.
- B It gives people the wrong idea about her work.
- C It is appropriate for most of the work she does.

It is vital you read all the information provided carefully. In part four it will tell you what the speakers are talking about. It can be helpful to try and guess the answer before you listen to the question. Just don't be afraid to change your mind if the recording goes against your guess! When practicing this part of the exam it can be helpful to not only understand why the correct answer is right, but also to understand why the wrong answers are incorrect.

Underline keywords in the statements and always be suspicious if you hear the exact words in the recording that is in the answers. They are trying to trick you!

Remember to read all the questions and information in the test carefully. Be aware of synonyms that could be used and don't just write down the first answer you think you hear. Make sure you understand the meaning!

Good luck with your FCE tests! Work hard and practice and you will succeed! Have you got any advice for fellow students about any parts of the FCE exam? What strategies worked for you!

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