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1. What is OET?

OET is an international English language test that assesses the language proficiency of healthcare professionals seeking to register and practise in an English-speaking environment.

OET provides a valid and reliable assessment of all four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking – with an emphasis on communication in healthcare professional settings.

2. Where is OET available?

OET is available monthly in over 100 locations in 40 countries with new venues added regularly. See <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/test-information/test-dates-locations/> for an up to date list of test venues.

3. Who is OET for?

OET tests health practitioners from the following 12 professions:

Dentistry

Dietetics

Medicine

Nursing & Midwifery

Occupational Therapy

Optometry

Pharmacy

Physiotherapy

Podiatry

Radiography

Speech Pathology

Veterinary Science

4. What's in the test?

The test is divided into four sub-tests: reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The Listening and Reading sub-tests are designed to assess a candidate's ability to understand spoken and written English, based on health-related topics and tasks common to all professions.

The Writing and Speaking sub-tests are specific to the 12 individual healthcare professions – designed to reflect common tasks performed in the workplace.



The Writing Subtest

Writing a profession-specific letter of referral or discharge; or a letter to inform or advise a patient/carer/group.



The Speaking Subtest

Profession-specific scenario role-plays with an interlocutor who plays the part of a patient/relative/carer.



Reading Subtest

Completion of a health-related summary paragraph and multiple choice questions on a longer health-related text.



The Listening Subtest

Note-taking on a recorded professional consultation and a range of questions on a health-related talk.

5. How is OET different to general and academic English tests?

OET tests real communication scenarios candidates will meet in the healthcare workplace, whereas general or academic tests assess English language skills using everyday or academic scenarios. For example:

- » **For writing**, most healthcare professionals are required to prepare referral letters based on case notes as part of their regular practice, so this is one task that is tested in OET.
- » **For speaking**, OET uses role-plays which test the healthcare professional's ability to proficiently conduct a healthcare consultation with a patient or carer.

6. Why do candidates choose OET?

- » **Recognition:** OET is accepted by healthcare regulators in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Namibia, Singapore and Dubai for registration purposes, as well as both Australian and New Zealand immigration for all visa categories where proof of English language skill is required.
- » **Confidence:** OET is recommended by past test takers because preparation and test materials reflect real healthcare scenarios leading to increased confidence on test day.
- » **Relevance:** OET ensures health professionals have the required English language communication skills to deliver safe and high-quality care.
- » **Support:** OET provides a wide range of preparation resources, many of which are online and free of charge.

7. Who recognises OET as proof of English proficiency?

OET is used as proof of English proficiency by health regulators in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Namibia and Dubai for registration in 12 healthcare professions. OET is also accepted by major health educators and recruiters. For an up to date list of organisations, go to:

<http://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/test-information/who-recognises-oet/>

8. Can OET be used as proof of English proficiency for visas as well as registration and employment?

In Australia and New Zealand OET is accepted by immigration and border control as proof of English proficiency for all visas where an English test may be required.

Currently OET is not accepted for visa purposes by UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI). Doctors, nurses and midwives will benefit from taking OET for registration because OET is a healthcare-specific test, where test content is familiar and appropriate for healthcare professionals. UKVI recognised tests can be taken for UK visa purposes and usually the level required is lower than the level required for healthcare registration.

9. How are the tests graded and how do test scores correlate to IELTS?

Candidates receive a separate grade for each sub-test ranging from A (highest) to E (lowest). There is no overall grade.

Here are the descriptions for each grade that appear on the printed Statement of Results:

OET grade	Description of ability	IELTS
A	Very high level of performance	8.0–9.0
B	High level of performance; i.e. able to use English with fluency and accuracy adequate for healthcare registration, ² appropriate visa categories, healthcare courses and workplaces	7.0–7.5
C+	Very good level of performance; adequate for appropriate visa categories, healthcare courses and workplaces	6.5
C	Good level of performance; adequate for appropriate visa categories, some healthcare courses and workplaces	5.5–6.0
D	Moderate level of performance: requires improvement	4.0–5.0
E	Low level of performance: requires considerable improvement	–

¹ You can also find a list of training providers who have completed preliminary training and offer limited hours courses.

² Check with the relevant professional body or organisation to find out the minimum OET grade level required for registration.

10. How do candidates apply for OET?

Candidates can apply and pay for the test online three weeks or more before their selected test date at: www.occupationalenglish.org

In addition, an offline group application process is available for organisations who want to register two or more candidates and make payment in a single transaction. Go to this link for more information: www.occupationalenglishtest.org/organisations/bulk-payments/

11. How do candidates prepare for OET?

OET offers a range of preparation materials developed by the Education team, which candidates can access via the OET Preparation Portal. In addition, English language schools around the world offer OET preparation courses. To see the OET Preparation Portal and list of OET preparation providers, go to <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/preparation-portal/>

Prior to registration, the following resources are FREE of charge in the OET Preparation Portal:

- » Free online Start for Success package, which includes videos, guides, practice tests, sample answers and lessons. For more information, visit: www.occupationalenglishtest.org/start/
- » Free sample practice tests
- » Two free masterclasses with the opportunity to ask questions
- » Free test tips for each sub-test

The following resources are available for purchase in the OET Preparation Portal:

- » Online 8hr preparation course
- » Practice books and CDs for each profession
- » Personalised feedback for speaking and writing

12. How do candidates receive results?

Results are published online 16 days after the test and candidates can login to a secure system to view their results.

13. What are the success rates for OET candidates?

Success rates are something that many schools and candidates are interested in, but there are a couple of points to consider:

1. There is no pass or fail in OET. The minimum requirements are set by the organisations accepting OET results.
2. Just focusing on pass or fail raw data is not helpful as it does not provide the profile of the candidates it includes. For example, a candidate could take OET without completing any preparation, or with a level of English not high enough to have a chance of successfully meeting the set minimum requirements for that profession.

Our advice for schools and candidates is to focus on establishing the current level of English and then completing the recommended number of hours' preparation to achieve the score they require. For example, for a candidate with a previous grade of C+ in OET (IELTS 6.5), the recommended number of hours of preparation required would typically be 100.

14. Why do employers, educators and healthcare regulators use OET as proof of English proficiency?

- » **Healthcare regulators, boards and councils** can ensure that internationally trained healthcare professionals have appropriate standards of English, specific to the healthcare sector. This is key to guaranteeing patient safety and well-being.
- » **Hospitals and other healthcare employers** can ensure that their employees (doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals) have the necessary English language communication skills for delivering quality healthcare.
- » **Healthcare educators** can ensure that graduating students have employment-ready or registration-ready language skills by including OET preparation and testing in their courses.

15. What are the benefits of using OET as proof of English proficiency?

- » **Protects patient safety** and improves quality of care by optimising communication with patients, carers and colleagues
- » **Reduces the training burden** for hospitals and other employers
- » **Establishes a fair way to select** internationally trained health professionals
- » **Attracts candidates** committed to excellence and professionalism

16. How long is an OET result valid?

The length of time that OET results are valid is determined by the regulatory authority, government agency, educational institution or other organisation that accepts OET results. To ensure they meet individual requirements, candidates need to contact the OET recognising organisation. In most situations, it is two years for registration purposes and three years for immigration purposes.

A list of organisations accepting OET is available at:

<http://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/test-information/wh0-recognises-oet/>

17. Why is OET needed?

- » **Language proficiency is a barrier to effective communication in healthcare.**

Source: Elder, C. et al (2013) Towards improved healthcare communication.

- » **Top source of complaints in healthcare are treatment and communication.**

Source: Reader, T.G. (2014) Patient Complaints in Healthcare Systems: a systematic review and coding taxonomy.

- » **Ageing populations and chronic diseases are putting pressure on healthcare systems in English speaking countries, resulting in a shortage of healthcare workers and demand for foreign-trained healthcare professionals.**

Source: WHO 2013, A universal truth: no health without a workforce:

<http://www.who.int/workforcealliance/knowledge/resources/hrhreport203/en/>

- » **An increasing number of foreign trained healthcare professionals are being recruited to fill shortages.**

Source: OECD 2016 Health workforce policies in OECD countries:

<http://www.oecd.org/publications/health-workforce-policies-in-oecd-countries-9789264239517-en.html>

- » **Ensuring that foreign trained healthcare professionals have healthcare specific language skills is important for safeguarding patient safety and quality of care.**

18. Has research been carried out into the validity and authenticity of OET?

OET has featured prominently in research literature relating to language testing in specific-purpose contexts. Findings and recommendations from key research studies have informed the development of OET test material and tasks, ensuring the test remains relevant. The full list of research publications published can be viewed here: <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/research/>

19. Has any stakeholder research been carried out?

Stakeholder perception research was carried out in 2013 by Vidakovic and Khalifa, which showed that OET is a reliable test of English language communication skills, stating: "OET test takers are perceived as effective communicators able to communicate on matters that are both technical and emotional and who can use lay language so that patients can easily understand what they are saying."

Significant findings include:

- » 93% of healthcare professionals said that their colleagues who have taken OET communicated effectively in the workplace.
- » 83% said they performed well at the writing tasks in their workplace.
- » Over 70% of healthcare professionals said that preparing for OET made them confident about communicating in English in their profession.
- » Close to 70% felt confident about communicating with patients and carers.

<https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/resources/uploads/2015/08/Vidakovic-and-Khalifa-2013-Stakeholders-Perceptions-Research-Notes-54.pdf>

20. What does the test cost?

Candidate research shows that 85% consider OET to be excellent or above average value for money. The test costs AUD\$587 globally (approximately 360 GBP), which includes test preparation support for all registered candidates, at no extra cost.

Candidates regularly report that the familiarity of the test content in OET makes them feel more confident about taking the test. And, for many candidates the test provides more than proof of English language skills, it prepares them for success in the healthcare workplace in the following ways:

- » OET tests include healthcare-specific scenarios that prepare professionals for real workplace situations.
- » OET preparation gives candidates the opportunity to learn healthcare-related English vocabulary necessary for communication in the healthcare workplace.
- » OET assesses the ability to deal with sensitive topics, reassure someone who is anxious, translate specialist register into lay language and control the power relationship between the healthcare professional and the patient/carer in a consultation.

21. How is validity and reliability of OET ensured?

- » Candidates undergo a rigorous ID check upon initial registration, on the test day and for each sub-test.
- » A strict code of practice for the storage and transportation of test materials is followed.
- » Candidate scripts are securely dispatched and returned directly to the OET Centre in Melbourne from all test venues globally. All sub-tests are assessed at The OET Centre in Melbourne by trained expert assessors.
- » Assessment processes routinely include double marking and statistical analysis to ensure that candidate results are accurate and fair.
- » Leading language testing academics contribute to the continued development and improvement of the test.
- » Input from subject matter experts who are healthcare professionals or healthcare academics to ensure authentic test materials.
- » Numerous studies have been published exploring various aspects of the test's validity and can be found at: <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/research>

22. Who owns OET and where is it based?

OET is owned by Cambridge Boxhill Language Assessment, a venture between Cambridge Assessment English (part of the University of Cambridge) and Box Hill Institute, Australia. OET is based in Melbourne and works closely with global partners, including stakeholders, Cambridge staff, and test venue managers in 40 countries.

More information

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