



## Access Technology

This Guide contains information for disabled candidates and their teachers on arrangements which are possible if they wish to use these types of access technology in Cambridge ESOL examinations.

- **Screen Readers**
- **Scanners**
- **Screen Magnifiers**
- **Braille Displays**
- **Braille Notetakers**
- **Braille Keyboards**
- **Assistive Listening Devices**

## Introduction:

### What is Access Technology?

Access Technology is specialist equipment or devices that either:

- give disabled people access to standard technology (for example, a computer)
- enable disabled people to read, write, speak or listen.

### Who may want to use it?

Candidates with:

- visual difficulties (including blind candidates)
- hearing difficulties
- speech difficulties
- specific learning difficulties (eg: dyslexia)
- candidates with physical (motor) disabilities (eg: cerebral palsy).

### Who supplies the equipment?

**Normally disabled candidates use their own equipment. Cambridge ESOL Centres cannot normally supply appropriate equipment.**

Cambridge ESOL Centres are responsible for checking the candidate's equipment, and monitoring users before, during and after taking an examination, to ensure security of examination material.

### How can a candidate apply to use Access Technology?

The candidate, or their teacher, must first contact a Cambridge ESOL Centre to discuss the type of equipment the candidate wishes to use. The Centre will then apply to Cambridge ESOL on the candidate's behalf.

### Can candidates use access technology at all Cambridge ESOL Centres?

If a candidate makes a request to use access technology which is impractical for a centre to meet, the candidate may be referred to another nearby centre which may be able to meet the request.

### What equipment can the candidate use?

Details of various types of access technology follow. Candidates should discuss with their Cambridge ESOL Centre (well in advance of the test date) the type of equipment/software they wish to use

The latest date for applications for these arrangements is normally the closing date for entries for the examination in question.

### Where do candidates actually take the exam?

Candidates using access technology are normally accommodated in a **separate room** with **separate invigilation**.

**Candidates wishing to use Access Technology in Cambridge ESOL examinations should contact their local Cambridge ESOL Centre as soon as possible.**

## Notes on specific types of access technology

### Screen Readers:

**Description:** These are speech output systems to convert screen text (including features of web-pages such as menus, icons, dialogue boxes, etc) to speech. They can be installed on a standard desktop or laptop computer.

Software also includes a screen magnification tool for the partially-sighted, and programs can usually produce Braille output via a Braille Display/Notetaker or Embosser. [See *Magnifiers*]

#### Suitable for:

- Blind candidates, partially-sighted candidates who may wish to use the above programs as Screen Magnifiers, physically disabled candidates (motor-impaired, cerebral palsy) who cannot focus on text well enough to read it.

NB: Candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties (dyslexia, etc) are not permitted to use screen-reading software except as a Screen Magnification tool.

#### IMPORTANT NOTES:

- **Texts in Reading Tests:**

If a candidate is given permission to use a screen reader to listen to **texts** being read out in Reading Tests, the candidate's certificate will currently receive a certificate indication/endorsement. Candidates may listen to texts in other components, including Use of English papers, without receiving a certificate indication/endorsement.

- **Writing answers/responses (all components):**

In all components, including Reading Tests, candidates may listen to **questions** and record/edit/proof their answers before printing them off (in Braille if appropriate).

- **Spelling/grammar check/punctuation check functions:**

If the candidate is using screen-reading software to write their answers on a computer, spelling/grammar check/punctuation and other similar functions may not be used.

### Scanners:

**Description:** Scanners are reading aids (either self-contained or PC-based) which scan and translate printed text into a computer readable file. This can then be read with synthetic speech, magnification software or a Braille display.

Stand-alone types consist of an integrated unit with scanner, Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software and speech software.

PC-based types consist of a traditional scanner attached to a computer, with Optical Character Recognition software and sometimes magnification software for the visually impaired. PC-based scanners have many of the features of screen-readers and some allow editing, etc, of text scanned in.

**Suitable for:**

- Blind candidates, partially-sighted candidates (*as a screen magnifier*), physically disabled candidates (motor-impaired, cerebral palsy) who cannot focus on text well enough to read it.

NB: Candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties (dyslexia, etc) are not permitted to use scanning devices with speech output, but may apply to use a scanner as a Screen Magnification tool.

**Screen Magnifiers:****Description:**

These are screen magnification tools for the visually impaired. Screen reading programs often include a screen magnifier facility, as do Scanners.

Screen Magnifiers are commonly based on Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) systems, or take the form of so-called video magnifiers. All such devices enlarge print or handwritten text. Some can be run via a desktop PC, others are stand-alone models, comprising a single unit with a screen, above a movable table on which the item to be read is placed.

Portable versions are available with small hand-held cameras that connect to a computer or television.

**Suitable for:**

- Partially-sighted candidates, physically disabled candidates (eg: those with cerebral palsy)

**Braille Displays:**

**Description:** These are tactile devices placed in front of a conventional QWERTY keyboard to enable the user to read text on a computer screen by touch in Braille. Small pins move up and down displaying a Braille version of text on the computer screen.

Note: Braille displays are generally used in tandem with screen-reading programs to allow speech output – otherwise navigation around the screen can be extremely difficult.

**Suitable for:**

- Blind candidates who are expert users of Braille and prefer to work in the Braille environment.

**Braille Notetakers:**

**Description:** These are tactile devices to enable the user to take notes in Braille (a conventional QWERTY keyboard is also possible for candidates who are not Braille users or learning Braille). Most devices allow the user to choose between Braille Display and/or speech output. Devices are designed to be portable – along the lines of a palmtop.

**Suitable for:**

- Blind candidates who are expert users of Braille and prefer to work in the Braille environment.

**Braille Keyboards:**

**Description:** These are commonly-used devices to enable the user to type answers in Braille, either directly into a PC or with hard copy Braille output via a built-in embosser and/or speech output. Devices are designed to be portable/semi-portable.

Devices include mechanical 'Perkins' Brailleurs, and electronic 'Mountbatten' Brailleurs.

**Suitable for:**

- Blind candidates who are users of Braille and prefer to work in the Braille environment.

**Voice Recognition Software:**

**Description:** These are programs which convert **speech** to **text**, allowing users to dictate and record/edit/proof what they have spoken.

**At present, use of this technology is not permitted.**

However, candidates wishing to use Voice Recognition Software may apply for an amanuensis (someone who will write down their answers as they are dictated).

Note, however, that candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties may not apply to have an amanuensis.

**Augmentative Speech Devices****Description:**

These are free-standing/portable devices or PC software designed to enable communication via synthesized speech.

**Suitable for:**

- Candidates with severe speech problems or no speech at all (eg: motor neurone disease).

NB: If the word prediction function and/or a symbol-based interface are used, candidates will receive a certificate indication/endorsement on the grounds that all assessment objectives cannot be achieved.

Use in Speaking Tests:

At present, use of this technology is **not permitted in Speaking Tests**. Candidates who request to use augmentative speech devices in Speaking Tests should apply for exemption from the Speaking component of the examination.

## Assistive Listening Devices:

### Description:

These are sometimes known as 'conversation aids' and are used by people with a mild to moderate hearing loss who find it difficult to hear conversation. They are portable or semi-portable and often small enough to fit in the pocket. Systems usually include a microphone (which can be remote), an amplifier, and associated earphone/headphones/speakers.

### Suitable for:

- Candidates with a hearing impairment.

### Some important notes:

- Candidates may request to use equipment in any component but are most likely to wish to use it in either Listening or Speaking Tests.
- Note that hearing-impaired (lipreading) versions of most ESOL Listening Tests are also available, or candidates may apply, if appropriate, for exemption from listening or speaking tests.
- Candidates with a hearing impairment may choose to take a single-format version of most Cambridge ESOL Speaking Tests (ie: they are examined on their own without a partner).

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