



# The Standardized English Proficiency Test (SEPT)

## What is SEPT?

The Standardized English Proficiency Test (SEPT) is a test that is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) which is an international benchmark used to describe language ability. SEPT is designed to measure the communicative language ability of individuals for whom English is a second or foreign language. The scores obtained for the SEPT are used for placement decisions of learners into the different levels of the School of Continuing Education (SCE) CEFR-aligned English Language Program, Graduate School of Education and School of Business (Executive Education) programs. The scores can also be used for additional purposes such as occupational appointments, promotion, travel abroad and scholarships.

Three language skills are covered by this test, namely listening, reading and writing. These skills address four main contexts of language use as defined by the CEFR, namely personal, social, occupational and educational.

## What is the format of SEPT?

SEPT is a paper-and-pencil test that is divided into three parts: Listening, Reading and Writing, each with its own time limit. The three parts are always given in the same order. The test takes two hours and 45 minutes to complete. The first two parts consist of multiple-choice questions (MCQs) while the third part includes writing tasks. The following table shows the test components and time required in detail.

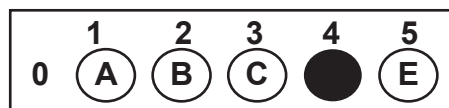
Parts	Number of Tasks	Types of Questions	Estimated Time (minutes)
1- Listening	8	Multiple Choice	45
2- Reading	8	Multiple Choice	60
3- Writing	3	Writing	60

## What are SEPT materials?

The test taker is given **two** questions booklets and two answer sheets. One of the **questions booklets** is for multiple choice questions of parts 1 and 2 (i.e. Listening and Reading) and the other is for the writing tasks of part three (i.e. **Writing**). Similarly, there is an optical mark reader answer sheet, known as the **RED** Answer Sheet, used to answer the MCQs of parts 1 and 2 (i.e. Listening and Reading), and there is also an answer sheet used to answer the writing tasks of part 3 (i.e. **Writing**).

## How to answer the questions?

In the **MCQ** booklet (parts 1 and 2: Listening and Reading) the test taker will read several questions and four optional answers for each question (marked A, B, C, and D). On the **RED** Answer Sheet, the test taker should choose the correct answer, for each question, from (A, B, C or D) and blacken the circle completely (as shown in the example below). The test taker must **NOT** select option E as there is no Option E in the MCQ booklet. The following is an example of an answer on the RED Answer Sheet.



In the **writing question booklet**, the test taker will find the description of three obligatory tasks they are required to write about. The test taker should write about the three topics in the **writing answer sheet**.

## Sample Questions and Guidelines for Answering Questions

### Part 1: Listening [8 tasks; 45 minutes]

The purpose of this part is to measure your ability to understand spoken English in various authentic contexts. It consists of eight tasks varying from monologues to long conversations. The directions of this part is given on a CD as well as printed in your test booklet. The **questions** on each task are **not** printed in the test booklet; rather, they are spoken. The questions are said only **one** time; they are not repeated. The options for each question, however, are printed in the test booklet. All the questions are of multiple-choice format. Here is an example:

On the recording, you will hear:

*John can't meet you at the library, but I can.*

Question 0: What does this mean?

In your test booklet, you will read:

0. ....

- (A) John can meet you at the library.
- (B) Only I can meet you at the library.
- (C) Neither John nor I will meet you at the library.
- (D) Both John and I can meet you at the library.

	1	2	3	4	5
0	<input type="radio"/> A	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> C	<input type="radio"/> D	<input type="radio"/> E

To perform well on this part and get accurate results, consider the following information:

- Be familiar with this part by practicing listening to various listening samples from different contexts, especially those related to personal, social, occupational and educational situations.
- This part of SEPT is always given first.
- Be relaxed and do not be nervous. The more relaxed you are the more focused you will be.
- Focus your attention on the CD and on the choices you have in the question booklet.
- The directions are given on the CD and printed in your test booklet.
- There is a trial for the sound before the start of the Listening part. If you have any difficulties regarding the sound, inform the proctor(s) during the trial phase. Once the test has begun, the proctor(s) cannot stop the CD.
- Plan your time appropriately where questions are spoken only one time.
- All the questions of this part are multiple-choice.
- Skim the answer options to guess the questions before listening to the passage and the questions.
- Do not spend too much time on any question not so as to lose your chances for the following ones.
- Do not take notes while listening.
- Do not exit this part until time is up and you are allowed to move to the next section.

Q  
&  
A

**Part 2: Reading [8 tasks; 60 minutes]**

The purpose of this part is to measure your ability to understand what you read in English. It consists of eight tasks varying in topics, length and purposes of questions. The questions measure your ability to find out main and/or supporting ideas, and details; use context clues to understand the meaning of specific vocabulary items given, draw inferences, recognize coherence, and perform other required reading skills. All the questions are of multiple-choice format. Here is an example:

**Reading Task 0**

My name is Sara. I am an accountant. I usually stay at home on Fridays relax – cook, watch TV, clean the house, etc. Today, I am at the super-market. I am buying some things for my children.

Questions:

0. Sara is ..... today.

- (A) cooking
- (B) cleaning
- (C) shopping
- (D) resting

	1	2	3	4	5
0	<input type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/> B	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> D	<input type="radio"/> E

To perform well on this part and get accurate results, consider the following information.

- Be familiar with this part by practicing reading various reading samples from different contexts, especially those related to personal, social, occupational and educational situations.
- Read the passages at a comfortable speed and try to get a general idea about each paragraph and each passage.
- Do not read word by word because this will slow you down and will affect your comprehension.
- For each passage, begin by looking over the questions (but not the answer choices or details) and try to keep in mind these questions while reading the passages.
- You can use context to find out or guess the meaning of the vocabulary items that you do not know. The vocabulary needed to be figured out are in bold and shaded.
- Plan your time appropriately. You need almost 6 to 7.5 minutes to read each passage and answer the questions on it.
- If you run out of time before finishing all the passages, do not panic. Just be strategic. Start with skimming each remaining passage, answering the main-idea question and then the vocabulary and reference questions – because they do not require much time. Next, go back and answer any remaining question. Do not refer too much to passages.
- If you finish this part before the time is called, go back to the questions with which you had troubles the first time.
- All the questions of this part are multiple-choice.
- Do not exit this part until time is up and you are allowed to move to the next section.

### Part 3: Writing [3 tasks; 60 minutes]

The purpose of this part is to measure your ability to write in English. It consists of three obligatory tasks (descriptive, business letter and argumentative) varying in topics, length and purpose. You must write about the three tasks. The tasks are translated into Arabic to make sure that you understand them. You have to understand the topic very well because off-point writing does not get marks! The writing tasks require you to describe a picture (30 - 35 words), read and reply to a formal business letter (100 - 150), and write an argumentative essay (200 - 250). Here is an example.

#### Writing Task 0: Picture Description

Look at the following picture; then write a 30 - 50 words descriptive paragraph. Rating criteria will include vocabulary range and control, grammatical accuracy, orthographic control, thematic development, and coherence.

انظر إلى الصورة التالية، ثم اكتب فقرة وصفية من 30 إلى 50 كلمة، مع مراعاة دقة اختيار الألفاظ، والسلامة النحوية، وقواعد الإملاء والكتابة، والترابط وتسلسل الأفكار.



To perform well on this part and get accurate results, consider the following information:

- Be familiar with this part by practicing writing various genres, especially those related to description, formal business letters and argumentation.
- Read the task carefully where you must write on the topic exactly as given.
- Plan your time appropriately and do leave time for reviewing and editing.
- For all the tasks, use various styles, structures and vocabulary.
- For the **descriptive task**, describe the picture given and do not write imaginary stories.
- For the business letter task, read the letter given carefully and reply to it using appropriate language.
- For the **argumentative task**,
  - Follow a clear, logical organization. It is better to divide your essay into three parts: an introduction, a body of two or three paragraphs and an appropriate conclusion
  - Use examples and specific reasons whenever suitable
  - Use transition words to link your sentences and paragraphs. Linking words make it easier to move through your essay smoothly.

#### Where is SEPT offered?

SEPT can be offered inside the AUC School of Continuing Education in AUC Tahrir and New Cairo campuses. Also, the test can be offered to organizations such as universities, schools, companies, institutions, banks, etc. at their premises.

#### What documents must a test taker bring on the test day?

To sit for a SEPT testing session, the test taker **must** bring any valid official ID that includes a recent photo such as national IDs, passports and driving licenses. Test takers will not be admitted to take the test without an official ID. In this case, the test is cancelled and a **new registration fee** is required to sit for another testing session.



### **How is SEPT scored?**

Parts 1 and 2 (Listening and Reading) are scored electronically. Part 3 (Writing) is scored by two professional raters based on a standardized rubric. The scores obtained from Parts 1, 2 and 3 are added together for each test taker to form a total score.

### **What is a passing score?**

There is no passing score on SEPT. The SEPT score is a measure of test takers language performance on the CEFR scale. The SEPT score reflects the extent to which the test taker can use English in real life situations. Within SCE, there are various cut-off scores for applicants to be admitted in a certificate or diploma.

### **What are the actions that cancel a SEPT score?**

SEPT has strict policies to warrant equal opportunities for each test taker whereby they can show their best performance on the test. If any of the following cases occurs during the testing session, this may seriously affect test fairness. Consequently, you may be not permitted to attend/continue your test and your scores may be cancelled. These cases include:

- Impersonalizing a test-taker
- Giving or receiving help of any kind
- Using or sharing any testing aids including mobile phones, watch alarms, iPads, tablets or any similar electronic device that may cause disturbance
- Sharing test questions with anyone during the testing session
- Communicating with or signaling other test-takers or any outside parties by any way including, but not limited to, mobile phones, personal computers, the Internet or any similar electronic means
- Attempting a test section or question before official permission
- Attempting a test section or question after time is called
- Writing on question booklets
- Taking notes during the Listening Part
- Copying any test material
- Attempting to remove any test material outside the testing room
- Eating, drinking or smoking in the testing room
- Causing any disturbance for test takers whether before, during or after the testing session
- Leaving the testing room without official permission

### **When are the SEPT results obtained?**

Test takers may officially get the score in five working days if they register for a regular testing session or within 24 hours if they register for a “one-day” testing session.

### **How are the SEPT results received?**

Test takers can get their scores in person at the Strategic Enrollment Management Office, in SCE Tahrir or New Cairo campuses; also they can get them by dialing the SCE Hotline number 16723 or by sending an email to [sce@aucegypt.edu](mailto:sce@aucegypt.edu) provided that they provide some information such as names, IDs and date(s) of tests to validate their identity. They can also obtain an official letter “To Whom It May Concern” with a description of their language ability according to CEFR.

### **How many times are test takers allowed to re-take SEPT?**

Test takers who wish to retake a SEPT may retake the test after a minimum period of one month, starting from the date of the last SEPT session.

### **For more information:**

<http://schools.aucegypt.edu/sce/EvaluationTestingAssessment/Pages/default.aspx>