

COMMON ENTRANCE (CE) 13+

SUBJECT GUIDE FOR FAMILIES: ENGLISH

CE 13+ exams are taken by pupils as part of their entrance applications to senior independent schools for entry into Year 9. **English** is one of the compulsory core subjects assessed in CE 13+ exams, along with **maths** and **science**.

This guide includes an explanation of the **CE 13+ English exam structure**, what knowledge and skills are assessed, and what your child can expect from each paper. It also contains **tips and tricks for using past papers as practice resources** at home, as well as links to further support your family throughout your admissions journey. Let's get started!

WHAT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DO CE 13+ ENGLISH EXAMS ASSESS?

The CE 13+ English exam is designed to test pupils' ability to:

- **Read and understand** substantial passages independently and answer questions that require a range of comprehension skills.
- **Analyse literature**, showing evidence of personal interpretation and understanding of an unprepared text.
- **Produce original creative work** in the form of their choice and within the time limit of the exam.

HOW IS THE EXAM STRUCTURED?

The CE 13+ English exam is divided into two papers: **Reading** and **Writing**. The reading paper can be taken at either **Foundation** or **Core** level. The Foundation paper will contain a slightly easier extract and question style than the Core paper. Your child's current school will usually make this decision after discussing it with prospective senior schools and assessing your child's ability. All pupils take the same writing paper.

Reading paper (1 hour 10 minutes, 50 marks)

- **Foundation level:** The reading paper will assess **understanding of a piece of prose** that pupils won't have seen before. This piece of prose is usually an extract taken from an existing story, and example extracts can be accessed as part of the [English CE 13+ Exam Packs](#) available on the [ISEB online shop](#). This paper may be used for assessment at CE 13+ by agreement with senior schools or to support learning in Years 6 and 7.
- **Core level:** The reading paper will also assess **understanding of an extract**, but the text can be either prose, poetry, or drama, and will be selected at the setters' discretion. This is to encourage the study of a variety of texts in Years 7 and 8, and different approaches to the development of reading skills.

The reading paper for both Foundation and Core includes three sections:

1. **Section A** consists of eight multiple-choice questions based on the given text.
2. **Section B** contains questions designed to invite and assess a deeper understanding of the text and effects of language.
3. **Section C** is a question requiring an extended written response to the text.

Writing paper (1 hour 15 minutes, 50 marks)

The writing paper assesses **writing skills** and **command of language**. Pupils must choose **two** prompts from a choice of four, which include:

- writing a narrative
- writing a descriptive piece or report
- writing a persuasive speech
- writing a letter or article discussing an issue and making recommendations to the reader

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXAM PAPERS PUBLISHED BEFORE AND AFTER AUTUMN 2022?

ISEB introduced an updated specification in 2021. The first exams that followed this specification were held in Autumn 2022. For English exams, the naming convention of the levels changed, so **'Level 1/Level 2'** became **'Foundation/Core'**.

Past papers from the earlier specification (for exams up until Summer 2022) remain valid and valuable practice resources for any upcoming CE 13+ English exams.

You can find more detailed information regarding the English specification via this link:

www.iseb.co.uk/assessments/common-entrance/english/.

HOW IS THE CE 13+ ENGLISH EXAM MARKED?

CE 13+ English exams can be marked in two ways:

- **Internally:** The exam is marked by your child's current school and the results are sent to the senior school.
- **Externally:** The exam is marked by the senior school your child is applying to.

HOW CAN PUPILS BEST PREPARE FOR THIS EXAM?

Students can prepare for their CE 13+ English exam in a variety of ways, but **practice** and **familiarisation** are crucial to achieving higher marks. Your child's teacher has already done an excellent job in teaching the knowledge required to achieve well - your child's job is now to practice.

PAST PAPERS

Past papers are the best form of **practice** for the CE 13+ English reading and writing papers, because they help them: **familiarise** themselves with the exam format, **identify gaps** in their knowledge or skill set, **practice** their comprehension and writing skills, and allow them to develop important exam techniques, i.e., **time management**. This preparation can help pupils feel confident and well-prepared when taking their real exam.

Our experts have compiled the following tips to help your child use CE 13+ English past papers at home.

Top tips for the CE 13+ English reading paper:

- **Read the extract carefully:** Spend 5-10 minutes reading the passage to make sure you understand it.
- **Multiple-choice questions:** For these, make sure to identify the answer by searching through the lines stated in the question. Only select one answer.
- **Longer answer questions:** Check how many marks each question is worth. This will indicate how much detail you should provide.
- **Use evidence:** If the question asks you to use evidence, select relevant quotes from the extract.
- **For Section C:** Address the bullet points provided, use quotes to back up your points, and fully explain how your evidence links to the question.

Top tips for the CE 13+ English writing paper:

- **Choose two prompts:** Read through all options available and choose **two** to write about.
- **Manage your time:** Spend around 35 minutes on each title – this should include time for planning, writing and checking over your work at the end.
- **Understand the prompt:** Make sure to read the title and carefully consider the form of your writing.
- **Focus on your writing:** Think about your storyline or line of argument, your choice of vocabulary, the presentation of your ideas, and spelling, punctuation and grammar.

You can use past papers in several different ways while practising at home. You can complete the papers under timed exam conditions or use them as an ‘open book’ exam and use the mark schemes to help form your answers. You can also use the papers as revision resources, and make sure you practice all the topics separately. There is a benefit to practising questions from all levels to build knowledge, no matter which exam level your child will take.

CE 13+ English past papers are available [on the ISEB online shop for families](#).

READING

Building in time for reading and writing creatively is also an excellent way for your child to develop their reading comprehension and command of language. Also, please encourage your child to be aware of and interested in current global affairs.

FURTHER SUPPORT

We provide a hub of support resources, articles, FAQs, and more on registration and preparation for CE and CASE exams on our [CE Admissions Toolkit](#).

You can also access further information and direct support from ISEB through our [CE Support Portal](#). Access over 100 articles or raise a ticket with our customer success team for direct and bespoke support.