# Sample Paper: Foundation Year Admissions Assessment (2023 entry)

## Overview

The purpose of the Cambridge Foundation Year Admissions Assessment is to determine a candidate’s potential to thrive on the course. It assesses key academic competencies (as outlined in each section) and is important to help us assess candidates against each other. Candidates should expect to encounter potentially unfamiliar concepts and to find that the tasks are challenging and require concentration.

Applicants can use whatever resources they wish (for example dictionaries or online sources). However, they must complete it independently (i.e. without the help of other people). If applicants are found to have plagiarised (copied the work of others) or drawn on external support (not completed it independently), they will be instantly removed from the selection process for the Foundation Year.

This sample is designed to allow applicants the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the format of the assessment and practice if they wish. Full guidance is available in the Guide to Completing the Foundation Year Admissions Assessment available at [www.foundationyear.cam.ac.uk/admissionsassessment](http://www.foundationyear.cam.ac.uk/admissionsassessment)

The assessment for 2023 entry will be emailed to shortlisted applicants only and will need to be completed by a deadline using an online examination portal. While the Foundation Year Admissions Assessment requires you to complete just one of the options in each section, you may choose to attempt more than one of the options available here to help you prepare. We recommend at least one of your practice sessions should be to the timings suggested below.

Some of the introductory text on navigating the examination will not apply as this is not being delivered through the online examination portal, but it has been included for your information.

## Structure and Time Required to Complete

The Foundation Year Admissions Assessment is comprised of two sections. Applicants should complete both. We expect it should take approximately 2 hours to 2 hours and 30 minutes to complete the entire assessment (with extra time offered as a reasonable adjustment for Special Educational Needs). Ideally, it would be completed in one go, but if you can’t find the time to do this, you should complete Section 1 in one sitting and Section 2 in a second sitting.

### Section 1: Comprehension

In this section, you will be asked questions based on the material provided for you. This section is time-limited and you will have 45 minutes to complete this section (with extra time offered as a reasonable adjustment for Special Educational Needs).

### Section 2: Academic Writing and Argument

In this section, you will first see some reading material that you can spend as long as you wish reading. When you are ready to start, you should select your essay question number and click proceed. This is when your chosen essay question will be revealed.

Once you see the question, you will have 1 hour to complete this section (with extra time offered as a reasonable adjustment for Special Educational Needs). In that time, you should write a response of around 800-1,000 words. Again, read all instructions carefully as there are options.

## Instructions for Completion

You can only make one attempt at this assessment. If you move forward before completing each section fully you will not be able to return and complete it later. Before proceeding, you should consult the guidance available to ensure you are fully prepared: foundationyear.cam.ac.uk/admissions-assessment

Before continuing, we strongly advise:

* That you have to hand key personal information such as your UCAS ID which you will need to input to proceed;
* That you have made arrangements to be able to complete the timed sections fully in a single sitting or two subsequent sittings, ideally in a quiet environment where you can concentrate fully;
* That you are using suitable IT equipment, for example, a screen large enough to read a body of text easily and with a stable internet connection.

If you encounter IT difficulties during the test, email foundation.year@admin.cam.ac.uk as soon as possible after you complete it to make us aware. You should provide as much information about the difficulties you faced, including screenshots if you are able.

I confirm that I have read and understood the instructions for completion and am ready to complete the Foundation Year admissions assessment now.

Yes

The purpose of this assessment is for the University of Cambridge to determine your potential to thrive on the course that you have applied for. As such, it is very important that all the work submitted must be your own and have been completed in a way that meets our requirements (i.e. within the time allocated if applicable, without the input of other people or plagiarism). You can, however, use whatever resources you wish (for example, dictionaries or online sources) to help you. The timed sections of this assessment can be 'reset' by Page 3 of 35 refreshing the page. However, to do so would be classed as academic misconduct. We will check how long you have spent on each section and if the evidence shows you have attempted to abuse the assessment in this way you will be automatically deselected from the admissions process. Before proceeding, you must confirm the following statements to indicate that you have understood the behaviour expected of a candidate for this assessment.

Yes

I have read, understood and confirm the following:

* The following assessment was completed by myself, the intended recipient of the assessment, without the help, input or assistance of others (teachers, family members, friends etc);
* I have read the University's Definition of Academic Misconduct {https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/definition} and understand the academic rules of behaviour required of me when completing this assessment including the rules related to plagiarism;
* I will complete the timed portions of this assessment as intended;
* I accept that any attempt to tamper with the timed portions, seek outside assistance or plagiarism will result in my automatic deselection from the admissions process;

The University of Cambridge and the Cambridge Colleges will use the personal information you have provided for the purpose of determining your suitability for the Foundation Year, processing your application and deciding whether to offer you a place for the course you have applied for. We will handle that information solely to assess your suitability for the Foundation Year and to compile any relevant internal statistics, and it will not be retained for longer than necessary for these purposes. This form uses the Qualtrics platform and appropriate measures are in place to ensure the security of the data and any documentation you submit. For further information on the use of your personal information during the application process, please see the University's Information Compliance website: https://www.information-compliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/

* I accept these terms and conditions.

**Personal Information**

This section is used to help us link this form to your UCAS application. Please provide the same information that you submitted in your UCAS application.

First/given name\*

*Please enter your first name and middle name(s) exactly as they are stated on official documents, such as your passport, birth certificate or driving licence.*

Surname/family name\*

*Please enter your last name(s) in the box exactly as they are stated on official documents, such as your passport, birth certificate or driving licence.*

UCAS Personal ID\*

*This is the ten-digit number you get when you register for UCAS. It is displayed in 123-456-7890 format on every email UCAS send you and you use it to log in on UCAS. Input it here without the dashes (i.e. 1234567890).*

## Section 1: Comprehension

In this section, we are assessing:

* Your potential for critical analysis, for example, grasping complex new ideas and showing flexibility and creativity;
* Your academic communication skills, for example, understanding an argument and engaging with it;
* Your potential to assimilate knowledge, for example, your ability to recognise and understand new information and apply it;
* Your conscientiousness, for example, your diligence in carefully completing the tasks as requested;

Below are 3 different texts of around 1,000 words. Each addresses a different topic but be assured that no prior knowledge of any of the topics is required to successfully complete this task.

Applicants will only be able to answer one set of questions on one extract included in this section. Applicants may select the one they wish to focus on. Once selected, you will then proceed onto the next page where you will see some multiple choice and open form questions related to the extract you have selected.

You will have 45 minutes to complete this section (with extra time offered as a reasonable adjustment for Special Educational Needs).

Please time yourself if you are completing the assessment via the paper copy.

Tips for completion

* You are welcome to use a dictionary or other online source to help you understand any words you are not familiar with for this task.
* To approach this task, you could first read the extract titles to choose one to focus on in detail.
* Once you have chosen, take the time to go through the extract carefully.
* You could identify any words you don’t understand. Write them down and look up the definitions.
* In answering the multiple-choice questions, read each of the options carefully to understand if it applies.
* You could make notes as you read that you can refer back to.

**Section one extract:**

* Extract A: An article looking at translation
* Extract B: ‘How science fiction’s hopes and fears can inspire humanity’s response to climate change’
* Extract C: ‘Why some people switch political parties’

### Extract A: ‘Why you shouldn’t be too hard on translators’

*Squid Game* has recently become Netflix’s biggest debut ever, but the show has sparked controversy due to its English subtitles[[1]](#footnote-1). This occurred after a Korean-speaking viewer took to Twitter and TikTok to criticise the subtitles for providing a “botched” translation, claiming: “If you don’t understand Korean you didn’t really watch the same show.”

[…] Just because the translation doesn’t say exactly the same as the original, it doesn’t mean it’s wrong. Films and TV series are packed with cultural references, wordplay and jokes that require changes and adaptation to make sure what’s said and seen on screen makes sense across languages.

Making allowances and adapting what’s said are common practices in translation because, otherwise, the translators would need to include detailed notes to explain cultural differences.

Consider the representations of *washoku* (traditional Japanese cuisine) which are so beautifully embedded in Studio Ghibli films. While additional explanations about the significance of harmony, kinship and care represented in the bowls of ramen in *Ponyo* or the soft steaming red bean buns in *Spirited Away* could be interesting, they might get in the way of a viewer who just wants to enjoy the production.

Professional translators analyse the source content, understand the context, and consider the needs of the variety of viewers who will be watching. They then look for translation solutions that create an immersive experience for viewers who cannot fully access the original. Translators, similarly to screenwriters and filmmakers, need to make sure they provide good, engaging storytelling; sometimes that implies compromises.

For instance, some original dialogue from season two of *Money Heist* uses the expression “somanta de hostias”. Literally, “hostia” means host – as in the sacramental bread which is taken during communion at a church service. But it is also Spanish religious slang used as an expletive.

Original: Alberto, como baje del coche, te voy a dar una somanta de hostias que no te vas ni a mantener en pie.

Literal translation: Alberto, if I get out the car, I’m going to give you such a hell (hostia) of a beating that you won’t be able to stay on your feet.

Dubbed[[2]](#footnote-2) version: If I have to get out of the car, I’m gonna beat you so hard you don’t know what day it is.

Subtitles: Alberto, if I get out of the car, I’ll beat you senseless.

The dubbed version of the dialogue adopts the English expression “to beat someone”. The subtitled version uses the same expression but offers a shorter sentence. The difference between the two renderings reflects the constraints of each form of translation.

In dubbing, if the lip movements don’t match the sound, viewers often feel disconnected from the content. Equally, if subtitles are too wordy or poorly timed, viewers could become frustrated when reading them.

[…] [I]n the above example, the translations do not reflect the reference to religious slang, typical of Spanish culture. Rather than fixating on this reference and assuming it is an essential part of the dialogue, a good translator would consider what an English-speaking character would say in this context and find a suitable alternative that will sound natural and make sense to the viewer.

[…] Translators do not blindly look for literal translations. On the contrary, in the translation profession, hints of literal translation often signal low-quality work. Translators focus on meaning and, in the case of films and series, will endeavour to provide viewers with a product that will create a similar experience to the original.

David Orrego-Carmona, ‘Squid Game: why you shouldn’t be too hard on translators’: <https://theconversation.com/squid-game-why-you-shouldnt-be-too-hard-on-translators-169968>

### Questions on Extract A: ‘Why you shouldn’t be too hard on translators’

1. What is the controversial element being described about the recent drama series Squid Game?
	1. The subtitles were not a helpful translation so people had a different experience of the show
	2. People who aren’t Korean can’t understand the programme at all because of the lack of subtitles
	3. There were so many notes on the context that it ruined the experience of watching it
	4. The voice acting in other languages was not very well dubbed
2. What does the author consider a good professional translator should do?
	1. Give as literal a translation as they can to be accurate to the source material
	2. Make compromises if required to ensure an immersive experience
	3. Make the translation more culturally relevant to the new language by removing reference to bits a new audience wouldn’t appreciate anyway
	4. Describe the many different meanings of the source material in detail
3. Which elements in particular are especially hard to translate across languages and cultures?
	1. Cultural references or wordplay like jokes
	2. Religious terminology
	3. Dialogue
	4. Non-verbal elements like food
4. What does the extract from *Money Heist* reveal about the translator’s interpretation?
	1. The translator found a way to shorten the original Spanish dialogue which was too long for a subtitle
	2. The translator ignored the cultural reference in the original because they didn’t notice its significance
	3. The translator didn’t include the cultural reference because it was an expletive
	4. The translator gave an interpretation of the original meaning that reflects what an English-speaking character would say in this context

5. How would you summarise what this article says? [200 words]



6. What examples does the author use in this article to support their argument? [150 words]



7. What questions would you ask the author? [150 words]



### Extract B: ‘How science fiction’s hopes and fears can inspire humanity’s response to climate change’

If there is something that we can be fairly sure of, it is that the future will be radically different to what we had imagined, and that it will demand adjustment […] Science fiction has certainly already played a part in this narrative. Harnessing the Sun’s energy has a long history in science fiction, and Arthur C. Clarke is often credited with coming up with the idea of the solar cell-powered geostationary communications satellite […] And of course, spaceships and space stations – indeed, our expansion into space – is an invention of science fiction.

What science fiction can do is imagine and think through the political, as well as the scientific, implications of the technological choices we make. […] The aim of science fiction is not to solve society’s problems (though specific works of science fiction do offer solutions that we as readers are invited to critique, revise, advocate for, and even adopt); nor is science fiction about prediction. We therefore shouldn’t evaluate science fiction according to its success or failure in this regard. Rather, the role of science fiction is to speculate on possibilities.

[…]

The idea of transforming places beyond Earth – planets or other spatial bodies – to make them more amenable to human life has been a mainstay of science fiction for decades. The necessity of maintaining life support systems in space habitats and spaceships draws on the same science that underpins technologies for addressing climate change. Such stories pose many pertinent questions that we should heed as we consider next steps on Earth – or beyond it.

In its broadest sense, terraforming refers to transforming other planets or cosmic bodies so that life from Earth can live there. Entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk, CEO of SpaceX, have brought terraforming and the colonisation of Mars to our imagination through an ambitious project to put people on the planet within the decade.[…]

Contemporary visions of terraforming Mars must contend with recent assessments that show it is not possible to terraform the planet with present day technology, given the lack of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that would enable an atmosphere to be created on Mars. But scientific research into terraforming continues to carve out a space for its future possibility.

Although it is the subject of current scientific research, the word “terraforming” was in fact coined by science fiction writer Jack Williamson (writing as Will Stewart) in the 1942 short story, *Collision Orbit*, set on a terraformed asteroid. The story describes terraforming technologies that include a “paragravity installation”[[3]](#footnote-3) sunk into the heart of the asteroid, which provides some gravity. Oxygen and water, meanwhile, are generated from mineral oxides, a process that releases “absorptive gases to trap the feeble heat of the far-off Sun”.

In the story, the greenhouse effect[[4]](#footnote-4) is harnessed to make other cosmic bodies habitable. What makes terraforming possible here are new ways of manipulating atomic matter. But Williamson is also concerned with the unintended consequences of new inventions and new ways of generating energy. New energy systems make terraforming feasible for small groups and large institutions alike, promising a re-configuration of power throughout the solar system by the story’s end.

[…] What makes science fiction valuable in our efforts against climate change is that it does not offer us a final word, but rather invites an open ended exploration and experimentation with stories and ideas. Science fiction encourages us to build worlds and to question the worlds that we are building. It asks us to choose a future from a range of possibilities and to put in the work to create it.

Chris Pak, ‘Climate crisis: how science fiction’s hopes and fears can inspire humanity’s response’: <https://theconversation.com/climate-crisis-how-science-fictions-hopes-and-fears-can-inspire-humanitys-response-167092>

### Questions on Extract B: ‘How science fiction’s hopes and fears can inspire humanity’s response to climate change’

1. What does the author suggest Arthur C. Clarke ‘invented’ through his fiction?
	1. Spaceships to allow humans to expand into space
	2. A way to use solar power to power satellites
	3. Terraforming
	4. The genre of science fiction
2. What does the author suggest is the aim of science fiction?
	1. To propose new technologies
	2. To solve society’s problems
	3. To speculate on possibilities
	4. To tell an engaging story
3. What is common to much science fiction of recent decades, according to the author?
	1. That it focusses on ways to travel to expand humanity’s influence beyond earth
	2. That is focusses on ways to make planets or other spaces habitable for humans
	3. That it is totally unrealistic escapism to be enjoyed
	4. That the main focus is on technology rather than society
4. What is the social benefit of the imagined technology of ‘terraforming’ in the short story *Collision Orbit*?
	1. It can reverse climate change making society healthier
	2. It stops an asteroid from hitting earth and wiping out society
	3. It may be able to be achieved using technology available today
	4. It is economically viable for all so power is redistributed more fairly
5. How would you summarise what this article says? [200 words]



1. What examples does the author use in this article to support their argument? [150 words]



1. What questions would you ask the author? [150 words]



### Extract C: ‘Why some people switch political parties’

Why do some people switch political parties? After all, if someone is committed enough to a particular vision of politics, wouldn’t they be relatively immune to the charms of its competitors?

It turns out, however, that switching parties at grassroots membership level is by no means uncommon, even giving rise in some quarters to accusations of “entryism”.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Our new research sheds light on the truth of party-switching politics – how many people really switch, why people are motivated to do so, and whether the claims of entryism are credible.

Patterns of party-switching

We surveyed nearly 7,000 members of British political parties (including registered Brexit Party supporters) within two weeks of the 2019 general election. When we analysed the data, we found a remarkably high proportion of our sample (23%) claimed to have previously been – or, if we allow for registered Brexit Party supporters as well, currently were – members of a different political party than the one to which they were now affiliated.

Some 29% of Tory[[6]](#footnote-6) members who admitted in 2019 to having been members of other parties claim to have been UKIP[[7]](#footnote-7) members. Interestingly, though, virtually as many were former Labour members. As a proportion of all Conservative Party grassroots members, these figures amount to 3% who were former members of UKIP, 4.5% who were simultaneously Brexit Party supporters, and 4% who were ex-Labour members.

This puts into perspective the scale of the entryist phenomenon. At most, 7.5% of all Tory members in 2019 had a history of connections with UKIP or the Brexit Party (probably fewer, given the likely overlap of UKIP and Brexit Party connections).

[…] It is worth bearing in mind that the smaller parties have generally experienced even higher levels of cross-party flows, proportionately speaking. For instance, three-fifths of Green members were former Labour members, as were around half of SNP[[8]](#footnote-8) and Liberal Democrat members.

Why switch?

But what drives some people to quit one party and join another? Our research suggests that the most telling reasons are connected with ideology[[9]](#footnote-9) and party leaders. If people feel themselves to be in tune with particular a party in terms of its core values and leader, they are naturally attracted to join it. However, they are equally inclined to eventually quit the same party if they feel it or its leadership has changed tack and become more remote.

In particular, we discovered that ideological radicals are especially prone to switching parties. The same goes for Brexiteers -– although this is perhaps a time-sensitive finding relevant to the past few years, given the special power of Brexit to cut across longstanding patterns of partisan alignment.

Ultimately, the traditional breadth of the major parties in Britain partly reflects the nature of the first-past-the-post electoral system, which makes it hard for minor parties to gain parliamentary representation unless – like the Scottish and Welsh nationalists or, more unusually, the Greens in Brighton – they have geographical concentrations of support.

As a result, both Labour and the Conservatives are coalitions of quite diverse types of people. We should not be surprised, then, that their grassroots members often find themselves at odds with their parties’ policies – particularly when there is a change of direction brought about by a change of leadership.

Paul Webb and Tim Bale ‘Why some people switch political parties: new research’: <https://theconversation.com/why-some-people-switch-political-parties-new-research-164112>

### Questions on Extract C: ‘Why some people switch political parties’

1. Is switching parties…
	1. Common at grassroots level
	2. Uncommon at grassroots level
	3. Illegal
	4. Only ever used to infiltrate another party to sabotage it
2. What was the method by which this research was conducted?
	1. Party members took part in a focus group
	2. Party members were surveyed
	3. Party members were interviewed individually
	4. Data from party member lists were reviewed and compared
3. Which of the following does the research data recounted in this article suggest?
	1. Very few people ever change their political party
	2. Brexit has had no impact on people changing political parties
	3. Proportionately, smaller parties see more changes of membership
	4. Leaders of a party are the most likely to change their allegiance
4. What characteristics does the research indicate may make someone more likely to change political parties?
	1. Those located in Scotland, Wales or Brighton
	2. Those with more mainstream ideologies
	3. Those with more radical ideologies
	4. Those who don’t have strong political views on anything
5. How would you summarise what this article says? [200 words]



1. What examples does the author use in this article to support their argument? [150 words]



1. What questions would you ask the author? [150 words]

## Shape

## Section 2: Academic Writing and Argument

In this section, we are assessing:

* The applicant’s potential for critical analysis, for example grasping complex new ideas and showing flexibility and creativity;
* The applicant’s academic communication skills, for example, their ability to share their own ideas in an appropriate format.
* The applicant’s potential to assimilate knowledge, for example their ability to recognise and understand new information and apply it;
* The applicant’s conscientiousness, for example their diligence in carefully completing the tasks as requested;

Applicants will first see some recommended reading on three different themes. Choose to read the material that you find most interesting or that is closest to your prior study or preferred degree subject. You can take as long as you wish to do this and further research to support your answer is not expected or required. When you are ready to proceed, you should move onwards and then you will see an essay question on a theme related to the reading you have done.

Once you see the question, this section is time-limited and you will have 1 hour to complete this section (with extra time offered as a reasonable adjustment for Special Educational Needs).

In that time, you should write a response of around 800-1,000 words.

Please time yourself if you are completing the assessment via the paper copy.

Tips for completion

* Spend as much time as you like doing the recommended reading. Feel free to look up unfamiliar terms.
* In your reading time, you could make notes summarising key points or pick out some quotes that stand out to you.
* Do not move forward until you are ready to see the question and begin to write your response. The timer will begin and you cannot go back.
* Before you start to write, plan how you want to structure your essay.
* You might like to note down all your ideas and then just pick out the best ones to include as the essay is quite short.
* While referring to the work or ideas of others can be helpful, we primarily want to hear your ideas so be sure your own argument and thoughts come across.
* Avoid repeating the same point several times or taking too long on one thing at the expense of other points.
* Think about what your own experiences or studies in the past have shown you that you could apply here.

#### Recommended reading 1

Enrique Rueda-Sabater, ‘How can we go beyond GDP to measure the success of nations?’, LSE Blog: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2015/06/27/how-we-can-go-beyond-gdp-to-measure-the-success-of-nations/>

Murat A Yulek, ‘Book Review: How Nations Succeed: Manufacturing, Trade, Industrial Policy and Economic Development’, LSE Blog: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2019/03/21/book-review-how-nations-succeed-manufacturing-trade-industrial-policy-and-economic-development-by-murat-yulek/>

#### Recommended reading 2

Michelle Smith, ‘”Great books”, nationhood and teaching English Literature’, The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/great-books-nationhood-and-teaching-english-literature-27476>

Alice Vincent, ‘Who decides which books you study in school’, Penguin Blog: <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2021/april/who-decides-books-studied-school-curriculum-english-literature-gcse-set-texts.html>

#### Recommended reading 3

Catherine Schenk, ‘Banking’s future depends on learning lessons from the past’, The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/bankings-future-depends-on-learning-lessons-from-the-past-18211>

Tom Holland, ‘History lives, for good and ill’, Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/26/uses-abuses-history-macmillan>

### Essay questions

#### Essay question 1

What does success mean for a modern society?

#### Essay question 2

How should we decide which books to study at school?

#### Essay question 3

Should policy-makers be informed by history?

Type your answer in this box (maximum 1000 words)

|  |
| --- |
|  |

## Answers for Section 1 (multiple-choice)

Extract A: 1:A, 2:B, 3:A, 4:D.

Extract B: 1:B, 2:C, 3:B, 4:D

Extract C: 1:A, 2:B, 3:C, 4:C.

1. A subtitle is captions displayed at the bottom of a film or television screen. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dubbing in this context means adding new dialogue and/or sounds to a film or television production. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Paragravity is a term used in science fiction to mean artificial gravity. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The greenhouse effect is when atmospheric gases traps heat. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Entryism here means another group that isn’t sympathetic to a political party infiltrating that party with the intention of changing it, for example a large group joining a party with the explicit purpose of removing a senior figure or changing a policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Tory means a member or support of the Conservative Party. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. UKIP is the UK Independence Party. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. SNP is the Scottish National Party. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ideology means a system of beliefs or ideals which form the basis of political policies. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)