Sample Paper: Foundation Year Admissions Assessment (2022 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 The assessment for 2022 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 1 hour and 50 minutes to 2 hours and 20 minutes to complete the entire assessment (25% extra if you typically receive 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 take each section in order.

- Section 1: Reading and Listening Comprehension
  This section is formed of Section 1A: Reading Comprehension and Section 1B: Listening Comprehension. In each, you will be asked questions based on material provided for you. Applicants should complete both, reading
the instructions carefully as there are some options to choose from. This section is time-limited and you will have 25 minutes for Section 1A and Section 1B (i.e. 50 minutes in total).

- **Section 2: Academic Writing and Argument**
  This section contains a selection of essay titles which should form the basis of one written response of around 800-1,000 words. Again, read all instructions carefully as there are options. We expect this will take around 1 hour to 1 hour 30 in total, although it is not time-limited.

**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 this in one sitting, 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 speakers so you can listen to a video clip.

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

☐ Yes

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**Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct**

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
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.

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 assistant or plagiarism will result in my automatic deselection from the admissions process; (6)

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If you have any questions regarding the above statements, please do let us know ahead of starting the assessment. [email: foundation.year@admin.cam.ac.uk]
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).

Email address*

This should be the same email address you have given in your UCAS application.
Section 1: Reading Comprehension Task

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;

Section 1A: Reading Comprehension Task

Below are 3 short extracts from different texts. 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. You may then skip to the full extract and view the five multiple-choice questions which you will have 25 minutes to answer. 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 questions, look out for keywords and read each of the options carefully to understand if it applies.
Select one Extract

☐ Extract A: ‘Five things people get wrong about standard English’ [pages 8 - 10]
☐ Extract B: ‘The weird and wonderful history of man-made borders’ [pages 11 - 14]
☐ Extract C: ‘Sixty Years of Prime Minister’s Questions’ [pages 15 - 18]
Extract A: ‘Five things people get wrong about standard English’

Standard English should not be presented in the national curriculum as the only correct form, but as what it is, which is the socially most prestigious form. Saying it is the only correct way to speak puts those children who don’t speak that way from birth at a disadvantage.

How so? Well, if your teacher tells you that “I was going to the shops” is the only correct way to say it, and if that’s how you’ve always said it, you’re going to have an easier time than another child who, at home, has always said, “I were going to the shops”, and has to change the way they speak when they get to school.

[…]

English is a global language. And precisely because of this worldwide spread, there are several, different standard forms, including standard Scottish, Australian and American English.

A New Yorker, for example, who moves to London may well say “gotten” instead of the English Standard English “got”. The notion that there is a single, monolithic standard English – be that across the world, in the UK or in England – is a fiction.

Standard English is best characterised as the most prestigious dialect in those countries where it is spoken as a first language. It is highly codified in grammar books and dictionaries and used especially in formal writing.

Unlike regional dialects, it is not tied to a particular part of the country but rather to a segment – the upper segment – of the social scale. Much like other dialects, though, it continues to change.

[…]

Standard English is not about speaking in a posh accent. Linguists concur that anyone who speaks in the accent known as received pronunciation (RP) will also use the words and grammar that make up standard English. However, not all speakers of standard English have the same accent.

Of the UK population, only 3% speak in RP, whereas standard English is the home dialect of 12 to 15%. The expressions “I was” and “I were” do not represent variation in terms of accent but between standard and nonstandard English.

[…] Some critics defend standard English by stating, essentially, that its rules are crucial for people to understand each other. However, non-standard varieties of the English language also have grammatical rules. I have written about Lancashire speakers who say “I gave it him” rather than “I gave him it” or “I gave it to him”. For them, that’s a rule. Following it does not lead to a lack of clarity.

In fact, non-standard varieties can provide greater clarity. Take the word “you”. English used to differentiate between “thou”, to address one person, and “you”, for talking to two or more. Modern versions of numerous other languages, including French, Polish and Punjabi, still make this distinction. Standard English, by contrast,
only has “you”, which is ambiguous. Many non-standard varieties are clearer: they have plural forms such as "yous", "y'all" or "yins".


1. What does the author describe ‘standard English’ as?
   - (a) The only correct form of English  (b) The way the majority of the population actually speak
   - (c) The socially most prestigious form of English  (d) A global language

2. What do ‘thou’ and ‘y'all’ have in common?
   - (a) They are both very old terms  (b) They are used by the speakers from the same demographic
   - (c) They are both incorrect forms of English  (d) They are both forms of ‘you’

3. What is ‘Received Pronunciation’?
   - (a) An accent often considered ‘posh’  (b) An accent only found in a specific region
   - (c) A form of grammar  (d) Something spoken by the majority of people in England
4. What is the author’s key argument in this extract?

- a. That standard English should be presented as the only correct form
- b. That standard English is the only variety of the language with rules
- c. That standard English is a variety that is no more correct than any other form of English
- d. That where you come from shapes your accent

5. What does ‘I gave it him’ demonstrate for the author?

- a. An accent used in Lancashire: the same as Received Pronunciation elsewhere
- b. A form of language rules as used in Lancashire: the same as ‘gotten’ might be used by a New Yorker
- c. A way in which people in Lancashire speak incorrectly: like how saying ‘I were going to the shops’ is wrong
- d. A prestigious form of dialect from Lancashire: for example used by those on the upper end of the social scale

If you have completed this section, please skip to page 18 to continue with the assessment.
Extract B: ‘The weird and wonderful history of man-made borders’

‘[A] farmer in the Belgian town of Erquelinnes caused an international ruckus when he moved a stone standing in his tractor’s path.

This stone marked the boundary between Belgium and France. By moving it 2.29 metres, he expanded Belgium’s territory.

We must assume he had driven around it before — the stone was placed on this site in 1819, as part of the proceedings that established the Franco-Belgian border in 1820 after Napoleon’s defeat […] For the governments of France and Belgium, it was an active international border.

This story suggests a fragility to borders that contradicts their apparent solidity in an atlas or on Google Maps. Human history is, however, full of arguments about where the edges of property lie. […]

Nations establish their borders through treaties. Rivers are sometimes relied on to set boundaries, but even here tensions rise when there are disputes about interpretation. Is the boundary on the river banks, the deepest part of the river, or the very centre of the flow?

The fact these measurements can even be calculated is remarkable. Expecting high levels of accuracy in a map is a recent development.

The first attempts at consistent accuracy were in 19th century military maps, such as Britain’s Ordnance Survey.

Later development saw the topographical charts used by bushwalkers and mountain climbers. But only with the arrival of digital mapping did it became normal to pin-point our location on a map in everyday situations.

The precise location of boundaries was usually part of local knowledge, kept and maintained by members of the community. For centuries a practice known as “beating the bounds” was followed in parts of Great Britain, Hungary, Germany and the United States.

Members of the parish or community would walk around the edge of their lands every few years, perhaps singing or performing specific actions to help the route stick in the participants’ minds. By including new generations each time, the knowledge was passed through the community and remained active.

Beating the bounds was a tradition of spatial knowledge that carried weight — it was accepted as evidence in cases of disputed boundaries. It was also part of a larger tradition maintaining borders through physical symbolism, whether for good or bad.

Britain has a long history of using enclosure (the fencing or hedging of land) as a means to excluding the poor from accessing common resources. In contrast, in colonial Australia, the first fences were built to protect essential garden crops from scavenging livestock.
Sometimes the importance of the border was demonstrated with an elaborate marker. The Franco-Belgian stone was carved with a date and compass points, representing not only a boundary but also the end of Napoleon’s destructive wars. […]

Formality was not always required. At a local level in the Australian colonies, boundaries were often marked by painting, slashing or burning a mark into a tree. These were easy to ignore, and frustrated landholders placed public notices in the newspapers cautioning against trespassing. People constantly took timber from private properties, or grazed their livestock without hesitation […]

European settlers quickly learned how to manipulate [rivers] to suit their own needs. By quietly blocking a section of river with trees and other rubbish, they could divert its route to suit their own wishes. By the time the surveyor came to verify or reassess boundaries, the landholder had been using their stolen acres for several years.


1. What does the author say caused ‘an international ruckus’?
   - a. Napoleon was defeated in 1820
   - b. Maps are now too accurate
   - c. The Belgium government deliberately annexed France
   - d. A farmer moved a stone that marked an international boundary

2. What is “beating the bounds”?
   - a. Placing a boundary in the middle of a river
   - b. Walking the edge of lands and performing specific actions
   - c. Fighting over a boundary with sticks
   - d. Using a hedge or fence to keep animals out
3. What is the author’s key argument in this extract?

- a. That people deliberately seek to ignore boundaries and borders for their own gain
- b. That older forms of mapping were inaccurate and that caused problems
- c. That borders are a fragile concept that relies on people’s interpretation of them
- d. That natural features such as rivers are the most reliable border or boundary

4. According to the article, how did land boundaries used to be marked in Australia?

- a. By painting, slashing or burning a mark into a tree
- b. By manipulating rivers to split land up
- c. By building fences to keep people out
- d. By using an elaborate marker such as a carved stone

5. Which terms describe your understanding of borders and boundaries after reading this extract?

- a. Historic and fixed
- b. Understood and agreed
- c. Solid and accurate
- d. Man-made and malleable

*If you have completed this section, please skip to page 18 to continue with the assessment.*
If Prime Minister’s Questions [PMQs] did not exist, would we invent it? It’s needlessly brash, makes rows of MPs sound like braying donkeys, and rarely gets useful answers from the government.

 [...] It technically began in 1961 – 60 years ago this month – when it became a regular feature of the parliamentary calendar, but it arguably only came into its own some years later.

As Ayesha Hazarika and Tom Hamilton put it in their Punch & Judy Politics, “In 1975, MPs started tabling open questions, enabling them to ask supplementary questions on whatever they wanted, introducing a new element of both surprise and topicality. In 1979, the new Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, announced that she would answer all the questions at PMQs herself, instead of transferring some questions on given issues to the Cabinet ministers responsible for those issues.”

The proceedings were first televised in 1989. In 1993, Labour leader John Smith committed to asking the six questions to the prime minister allocated to him every single week, creating the format that still exists today. Four years later, his successor Tony Blair turned the two weekly PMQs sessions into one half-hour Wednesday slot, and thus the contemporary PMQs was born.

By deciding to handle all the questions herself, Thatcher sucked the power out of Whitehall and concentrated it in Number 106. Because she was suddenly expected to have a handle on what every department was doing, Downing Street could go to each Cabinet minister once a week and demand to know exactly what they were up to. If someone had messed up somewhere, they had to own up to it; if there was a crisis, they could hide it from Number 10 at their own peril.

As she wrote in her memoirs: “It was a good test of the alertness and efficiency of the cabinet minister in charge of the department whether information arrived late – or arrived at all; whether it was accurate, wrong, comprehensible or riddled with jargon.”

 [...] Though often criticised by all sides, the weekly event remains one of the pillars of the parliamentary calendar, and is unlikely to disappear anytime soon.

But it is worth wondering whether social media is ruining it, slowly but surely. “I think the art of debate is getting lost in PMQs,” says Hazarika. “There isn’t that much listening to what the other person has said, thinking on your feet, and coming back to them. It basically feels like 12 pre-prepared lines.”

She has a point; though prime ministers and opposition leaders alike have kept an eye on what would play well on the six o’clock news since the exchanges started being televised, the internet feels like more of a threat. The ability to post snappy clips on Facebook and Twitter puts the power squarely into politicians’ own hands. Why pay attention to the person in front of you when you know your real audience is the one that will watch you online in hours and days to come?

Still, they should be careful what they wish for; it may have its downsides, but PMQs can be where party leaders make their careers – or disappear into the ether.
As Thatcher once wrote, “No head of government anywhere in the world has to face this sort of regular pressure and many go to great lengths to avoid it; no head of government, as I would sometimes remind those at summits, is as accountable as the British Prime Minister.”


1. When did Prime Minister’s Questions technically begin?
   - a. 1979  
   - b. 1989  
   - c. 1961  
   - d. 1993

2. What is the contemporary format for Prime Minister’s Questions?
   - a. One televised half-hour Wednesday slot first used by Tony Blair  
   - b. Two weekly televised sessions first used by John Smith  
   - c. A press conference from Downing Street first used by Boris Johnson  
   - d. A weekly two hour debate on a Wednesday first used by Margaret Thatcher

3. According to the article, what was the effect of Margaret Thatcher’s starting to take all the questions herself?
a. She made it more combative so it looked better on the news  
b. She concentrated the power over all areas in her own role as Prime Minister  
c. Her Cabinet Ministers became incompetent because they were not answering themselves  
d. It ruined her career because she tried to avoid doing it

4. What is the main argument about the impact of social media on Prime Minister's Questions?

a. The politicians are too focused on an external audience and give pre-prepared lines that look good on social media  
b. The politicians would rather debate on social media than in Parliament  
c. The potential size of the audience on social media creates too much pressure on Ministers  
d. The answers are often not pre-prepared so they lack authority or research

5. What do you understand the main point of Prime Minister's Questions to be, as summarised by the author?

a. To make politicians look engaged with the public's concerns  
b. To enable snappy debate and discussion that will impact decisions made by policy-makers  
c. To test the alertness and
efficiency of those in the Cabinet  d. To allow elected representatives to hold the Prime Minister accountable for the actions of their government

If you have completed this section, please skip to page 18 to continue with the assessment.
Section 1B: Listening Comprehension

This section includes short videos featuring academics talking about some key concepts. The videos cover different topics, but prior knowledge is not required. Applicants are asked to write answers to questions based on what they have heard in the videos. Applicants will only answer on one video in this section so they can select the video they focus on. You will then be shown the video in a player and the questions to respond to and you will have 25 minutes to answer.

When you select your video and click the forward allow, the timer will immediately begin.

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.
- You can choose any of the videos as the questions are the same.
- Once you have chosen, take the time to listen carefully.
- You could make notes as you listen that you can refer back to.
- You can listen several times, perhaps pausing and rewinding.
- If you have trouble hearing the audio, enable the closed captions for the video by clicking 'CC' on the player.

Select one video

☐ Video One: Understanding Ancient Farming in Tivland, Nigeria [pages 19–20]

☐ Video Two: Global Spread of Multilingualism [pages 21-22]

☐ Video Three: Socks & Jabs & Rock & Roll [pages 23 – 24]
Video 1: Understanding Ancient Farming in Tivland, Nigeria

1. Summarise three key points the speaker made in this video (max 200 words)

2. What examples or evidence did the speaker use in their comments? (max 200 words)
3. If you wanted to find more information on this topic, what key words or search terms would you use and what would you be considering in your research? (max 100 words)
Video 2: Colonisation
1. Summarise three key points the speaker made in this video (max 200 words)

2. What examples or evidence did the speaker use in their comments? (max 200 words)
3. If you wanted to find more information on this topic, what key words or search terms would you use and what would you be considering in your research? (max 100 words)
If you have completed this section, please skip to page 26 to continue with the assessment.
Video 3: Socks & Jabs & Rock & Roll

1. Summarise three key points the speaker made in this video (max 200 words)

2. What examples or evidence did the speaker use in their comments? (max 200 words)
3. If you wanted to find more information on this topic, what key words or search terms would you use and what would you be considering in your research? (max 100 words)

If you have completed this section, please skip to page 26 to continue with the assessment.
Section 2: Academic Writing and Argument

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 your ability to share your own ideas in an appropriate format.

- 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;

Applicants should write 800-1,000 words on one of the following essay prompts. For each, some supporting reference material is provided which you may wish to refer to in formulating your answer. Further research to support your answer is not expected or required.

This section is not time-limited, but we expect it should take between 1 hour and 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Tips for Completion

- 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.
Select one essay title

☐ 1. What can an object tell us about people? [page 28]
☐ 2. Who should be accountable for losses caused by climate change? [page 30]
☐ 3. Is capitalism an effective model for society? [page 32]
What can an object tell us about people?

Recommended reading

A Vodou drum at the British Museum, British Museum: https://blog.britishmuseum.org/a-vodou-drum-at-thebritish-museum/


Please write your essay response here:
You can continue on a blank sheet of paper.
If you have completed this section, please skip to page 34 to continue with the assessment.
Who should be accountable for losses caused by climate change?

Recommended reading


Climate change: focusing on how individuals can help is very convenient for corporations, The Conversation: https://theconversation.com/climate-change-focusing-on-how-individuals-can-help-is-veryconvenient-for-corporations-108546

Please write your essay response here
You can continue on a blank sheet of paper.

If you have completed this section, please skip to page 34 to continue with the assessment.
Is capitalism an effective model for society?

Recommended reading


Capitalism isn’t broken. It’s working all too well. The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/12/capitalism-isnt-broken-its-working-all-toowell-and-were-the-worse-for-it

Please write your essay response here
You can continue on a blank sheet of paper.
If you have completed this section, please skip to page 34 to continue with the assessment.
You have now completed the Foundation Year Admissions Assessment Sample Paper.

You may check your answers to Section 1A with the answers on page 35.
Answers for Section 1A