

# *International GCSE* **CORE English as a Second Language**

(9285) Specification



**For teaching** from September 2025 onwards

**For exams** May/June 2026 onwards

**For teaching and examination** outside  
the United Kingdom



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## Are you using the latest version of this specification?

- You will always find the most up-to-date version of this specification on our website at **[oxfordaqa.com/9285](https://oxfordaqa.com/9285)**
- We will write to you if there are significant changes to the specification.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Why choose OxfordAQA International GCSEs?

Our international qualifications enable schools that follow a British curriculum to benefit from the best education expertise in the United Kingdom (UK).

Our International GCSEs offer the same rigour and high quality as GCSEs taken in the UK and have been designed to be relevant and appealing to students worldwide. They reflect a deep understanding of the needs of teachers and schools around the globe and are brought to you by Oxford University Press and AQA, the UK's leading awarding body.

Providing valid and reliable assessments, these qualifications are based on over 100 years of experience, academic research, and international best practice. They have been independently validated as being to the same standard as the qualifications accredited by the UK examinations regulator, Ofqual. They reflect the latest changes to the British system, enabling students to progress to higher education with up-to-date qualifications.

You can find out about OxfordAQA at [oxfordaqa.com](https://oxfordaqa.com)

## 1.2 Why choose our International GCSE CORE English as a Second Language?

This qualification is designed for students whose first language is not English but may use it for study.

Our assessments have been designed to inspire and motivate students, providing appropriate stretch and challenge whilst ensuring, as far as possible, that the assessments and texts are accessible to the full range of students.

The specification will enable students of all abilities to develop the skills they need to read, understand and analyse a variety of texts, styles and topics covering a wide range of subjects, including factual and literary texts. It will also give students the ability to be able to write and communicate clearly, coherently and accurately using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures.

The assessment comprises two papers:

- a Writing paper
- a Listening and Reading paper

Each paper has a distinct identity to better support high quality provision and engaging teaching and learning.

You can find out all about our International GCSE CORE English as a Second Language qualification at [oxfordaqa.com/9285](https://oxfordaqa.com/9285)

## 1.3 Recognition

OxfordAQA meet the needs of international students. They are an international alternative and comparable in standard to the Ofqual regulated qualifications offered in the UK. Our qualifications have been independently benchmarked by UK ENIC, the UK national agency for providing expert opinion on qualifications worldwide. They have confirmed they can be considered 'comparable to the overall GCE A-level and GCSE standard offered in the UK'.

To read their report and see the latest list of universities who have stated they accept these international qualifications, visit [oxfordaqa.com/recognition](https://oxfordaqa.com/recognition)

## 1.4 The Oxford International Programme learner attributes

In order to equip students with the skills they need for success both now and in the future, we have worked with Oxford University Press to create the Oxford International Programme. This combines the Oxford International Curriculum with OxfordAQA qualifications, creating an integrated offer for international schools, from Early Years to A-level.

At its core we have introduced the Oxford International Programme learner attributes – the skills and competencies that enable our students to thrive academically, socially and personally.

The learner attributes, alongside our focus on demonstrating higher order critical thinking skills, ensure that students are equipped to get the grades that will take them places, and build the skills they need to be successful when they get there.



## 1.5 Support and resources to help you teach

We know that support and resources are vital for your teaching and that you have limited time to find or develop good quality materials. So we've worked with experienced teachers to provide you with a range of resources that will help you confidently plan, teach and prepare for exams.

### Teaching resources

You will have access to:

- sample schemes of work to help you plan your course with confidence
- teacher guidance notes to give you the essential information you need to deliver the specification
- training courses to help you deliver our qualifications
- engaging work sheets and activities developed by teachers, for teachers.

### Preparing for exams

You will have access to the support you need to prepare for our exams, including:

- specimen papers and mark schemes
- exemplar student answers with examiner commentaries.

### Analyse your students' results with Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA)

After the first examination series, you will be able to find out which questions were the most challenging, how the results compare to previous years and where your students need to improve. ERA, our free online results analysis tool, will help you see where to focus your teaching.

Information about results, including maintaining standards over time, grade boundaries and our post-results services, will be available on our website in preparation for the first examination series.

### Help and support

Visit our website for information, guidance, support and resources at [oxfordaqa.com/9285](https://oxfordaqa.com/9285)

You can contact the subject team directly at [info@oxfordaqa.com](mailto:info@oxfordaqa.com) or call us on +44 (0)161 696 5995 (option 1 and then 1 again).

**Please note: We aim to respond to all email enquiries within two working days.**

**Our UK office hours are Monday to Friday, 8am – 5pm.**

## 2 Specification at a glance

The title of the qualification is:

- OxfordAQA International GCSE CORE English as a Second Language.

This qualification is linear. Linear means that students will sit all their exams at the end of the course.

Exams will be available in May/June.

The guided learning hours (GLH) for this qualification are 60. This figure is for guidance only and may vary according to local practice and the learner's prior experience of the subject.

### 2.1 Subject content

Students study all of the following themes on which the assessments are based:

- **Theme one:** Identity and culture (page 10)
- **Theme two:** Local, national and international areas of interest (page 10)
- **Theme three:** Current and future study (page 10)

## 2.2 Assessments

Students must take both assessments. All assessments must be taken in the same series.

Paper 1: Writing	+	Paper 2: Listening and Reading
<b>What's assessed</b>  Communicating effectively in writing for a variety of purposes.		<b>What's assessed</b>  Understanding and responding to different types of spoken and written language.
<b>How it's assessed</b>  Written exam: 1 hour  42 marks  35% of international GCSE CORE assessment		<b>How it's assessed</b>  Written exam:  1 hour 45 minutes  78 marks  65% of international GCSE CORE assessment
<b>Questions</b>  There are three tasks which test a range of writing skills. The tasks increase in level of challenge, as do the marks awarded. Each task will be based on one of the themes named in the Subject content – 42 marks.		<b>Questions</b>  <b>Listening Section:</b>  Students will be asked to listen to and answer questions on a range of spoken texts – 36 marks.  (Each exam includes 5 minutes reading time of the question paper before the listening stimulus is played.)  <b>Reading Section:</b>  Short answer questions and multiple-choice questions in response to written questions - 42 marks



## 3 Subject content

### 3.1 Themes

The specification covers three distinct themes. These themes apply to all examination papers.

Students are expected to understand and provide information, ideas and opinions about these themes relating to their own experiences and those of other people, including people in countries/communities where English is spoken.

#### 3.1.1 Theme one: Identity and culture

Theme one covers the following two topics with related sub-topics shown as bullet points:

**Topic 1: Me, my family, friends and people I know**

- Relationships with family
- Relationships with friends and people I know

**Topic 2: Free-time activities**

- Music
- Cinema and TV
- Sport
- Customs and festivals

#### 3.1.2 Theme two: Local, national and international areas of interest

Theme two covers the following three topics with related sub-topics shown as bullet points, where applicable:

**Topic 1: Home, town, neighbourhood and region**

**Topic 2: Social issues**

- Charity/voluntary work
- Healthy/unhealthy living

**Topic 3: Travel and tourism**

#### 3.1.3 Theme three: Current and future study

Theme three covers the following three topics:

**Topic 1: My studies**

**Topic 2: Life at school/college**

**Topic 3: Education post-16**

### 3.2 Skills

### 3.2.1 Reading: Understand and respond to written language

In order to meet the requirements of AO1, students are expected to:

- read, understand and respond to a range of written texts varying in type, style, purpose and degree of complexity
- develop skills in scanning and skimming texts to identify specific and general points and identify overall message
- understand the significance of tense and recognise the relationship between past, present and future
- examine writers' purpose through close consideration of content and use of language
- explore what is implied but not actually stated and make appropriate inference and deduction.

### 3.2.2 Writing: Communicate in writing

In order to meet the requirements of AO2, students are expected to:

- communicate effectively in writing for a variety of purposes across a range of specified contexts
- write short texts, using simple sentences and familiar language accurately to convey meaning and exchange information
- produce clear and coherent text of extended length to present facts and express ideas and opinions appropriately for different purposes and in different settings
- make accurate use of a variety of vocabulary and grammatical structures, including some more complex forms, to describe and narrate with reference to past, present and future events
- manipulate the language, using and adapting a variety of structures and vocabulary with increasing accuracy and fluency for new purposes, including using appropriate style and register
- make independent, creative and more complex use of the language to explain, inform, describe, argue or persuade.

### 3.2.3 Listening: Understand and respond to spoken language

In order to meet the requirements of AO3, students are expected to:

- demonstrate general and specific understanding of different types of spoken language
- follow and understand clear standard speech using familiar language across a range of specified contexts
- identify the overall message, key points, details and opinions in a variety of short and longer spoken passages, involving some more complex language, recognising the relationship between past, present and future events
- deduce meaning from a variety of short and longer spoken texts, involving some complex language and more abstract material, including short narratives and authentic material addressing a wide range of contemporary and cultural themes
- recognise and respond to key information, important themes and ideas in more extended spoken text, including authentic sources, adapted and abridged, as appropriate, by being able to answer questions, extract information, evaluate and draw conclusions.

## 4 Scheme of assessment

Find mark schemes, and specimen papers for new courses, on our website at [oxfordaqa.com/9285](https://oxfordaqa.com/9285)

This is a linear qualification. In order to achieve the award, students must complete all assessments at the end of the course and in the same series.

Our International GCSE CORE exams and certification for this specification are available for the first time in May/June 2026 and then every May/June for the life of the specification.

All materials are available in English only.

Our International GCSE CORE exams in English as a Second Language include questions that allow students to demonstrate their ability to:

- draw together their knowledge, skills and understanding from across the full course of study for this qualification
- provide extended responses.

### 4.1 Aims and learning outcomes

The study of English will broaden students horizons and encourage them to step beyond familiar cultural boundaries and develop new ways of seeing the world.

Courses based on this specification will enable students to:

- develop their ability to communicate confidently, coherently and appropriately with native speakers in writing
- listen to and understand clearly articulated, standard speech at near normal speed
- deepen their knowledge about how language works and enrich their vocabulary to increase their independent use and understanding of English in a range of written and spoken contexts
- express and develop thoughts and ideas fluently
- acquire new knowledge, skills and ways of thinking through the ability to understand and respond to authentic spoken and written material
- develop language learning skills for immediate use and to prepare them for further language study in school, higher education or employment.

## 4.2 Assessment Objectives

The exams will measure how students have achieved the following assessment objectives.

### **AO1 Reading: understand and respond to written language**

R1: Identify and select relevant detail, key points and ideas.

R2: Show understanding of vocabulary, ideas and purpose.

R3: Collate, organise and present relevant detail.

R4: Draw inferences, make deductions, and recognise implicit meaning.

### **AO2 Writing: communicate in writing**

W1: Write short texts to convey meaning and exchange information.

W2: Produce clear and coherent text of extended length to present key points, details and ideas.

W3: Make accurate use of vocabulary and grammatical structures; spell and punctuate accurately.

W4: Manipulate the language with increasing fluency and creativity for a variety of purposes.

### **AO3 Listening: understand and respond to spoken language**

L1: Identify key details from a range of short and longer texts.

L2: Identify the overall message and key points in a variety of short and longer spoken texts, involving some more complex language.

L3: Understand and collate information from a variety of short and longer spoken texts, involving some complex language and more abstract material.

L4: Recognise purpose, implied meaning, attitudes and feelings in extended texts.

## 4.2.1 Assessment Objective weightings for International GCSE CORE

Assessment Objectives	Paper 1: Writing	Paper 2: Listening and Reading
AO1		35%
AO2	35%	
AO3		30%
Overall weighting of component (%)	35%	65%

## 4.3 Assessment weightings

Component	Maximum raw mark	Scaling factor	Maximum scaled mark
Paper 1: Writing	42	1	42
Paper 2: Listening and Reading	78	1	78
Total scaled mark:			120

## 4.4 Content

### Paper 1: Writing

There are three questions on the paper. The questions reflect an increasing level of challenge, enabling students to demonstrate a wide range of writing skills. The structure will be consistent with the targeted assessment objectives and the specified length of response for each question will remain the same for each paper. All questions will link with themes specified in the Subject content.

#### Question 1

W1, W3 (spelling and punctuation only)

Students are given a photograph and asked to write a short description of what they see in it (30–50 words). They are assessed on their ability to convey meaning and information (6 marks) and on the accuracy of their spelling and punctuation (3 marks).

#### Question 2

W2, W3, W4

Students are given three or four compulsory bullet points to refer to in a more extended piece of writing (70–90 words). The specified form of the writing may vary, eg a blog entry, report, article, letter. Students are assessed on their ability to communicate details clearly (6 marks) and on the technical accuracy and fluency of their writing (9 marks).

#### Question 3

W2, W3, W4

This question asks students to produce an extended piece of writing (100–150 words). The purpose of the task will differ from one series to the next, eg explain, inform, argue, persuade. It will enable students to draw freely on their own ideas, experiences and opinions. Students are given two bullet points. These are designed to prompt ideas and help students structure their writing. Students should assume an adult audience (such as their teacher or examiner). Students are assessed on their ability to communicate details and ideas clearly (8 marks) and on the technical accuracy, fluency and creativity of their use of language (10 marks).

### Paper 2 Section A: Listening

This paper contains five tasks and consists of a variety of short and longer spoken pieces of language. The texts and questions will increase in terms of demand during the paper, with some more complex language later in the test. The texts and tasks reflect an increasing level of challenge and will link with themes specified in the Subject content.

Students will be required to identify the overall message, key points, details and opinions from both straightforward texts (such as announcements, short conversations, instructions, news bulletins and telephone messages), and also more complex texts such as autobiography and travel writing. They will also be required to understand and collate information from a variety of short and longer spoken texts, involving some complex language and more abstract material and recognise purpose, implied meaning, attitudes and feelings.

### Task 1

L1

Students are asked to listen to a series of brief monologues on everyday topics broken into segments (30–50 words) and respond to a series of multiple choice questions. Students are assessed on their ability to identify key details and information from the texts (6 marks).

### Task 2

L1, L2, L3

Students are asked to listen to a dialogue, such as a radio interview, broken into segments (30–50 words) and respond to a series of open questions. Students are assessed on their ability to identify the overall message and key points of the text, and their understanding of information (6 marks).

### Task 3

L3

Students are asked to listen to a monologue, such as an autobiography, broken into segments (40–80 words) and complete a gap fill exercise. Students are assessed on their ability to understand and collate information (8 marks).

### Task 4

L1, L3

Students are asked to listen to a dialogue, such as a radio interview, broken into segments (50–100 words) and respond to a series of open questions and collation activities. Students are assessed on their ability to identify key details and information, and their ability to understand and collate information (8 marks).

### Task 5

L1, L2, L4

Students are asked to listen to a monologue, such as a travel podcast, broken into segments (50–100 words) and complete a series of multiple choice questions and open questions. Students are assessed on their ability to identify key details and information, the overall message and key points of the text. They are also assessed on their ability to recognise purpose, implied meaning, attitudes and feelings (8 marks).

Responses will be assessed according to a detailed mark scheme; the appropriate mark(s) will be awarded if the student has satisfactorily communicated his or her understanding, even though the response may contain some errors in the quality of language used. Each task is listened to twice, with specified time for students to write their answers.

## Paper 2 Section B: Reading

In this section, students' understanding of written language will be tested by a range of question types. The texts and tasks reflect an increasing level of challenge and will link with themes specified in the Subject content.

Students are required to identify and understand the overall message, key points, details and purposes from items such as emails, instructions, public notices and advertisements, together with some material which will be longer, such as extracts from brochures, guides, letters, newspapers, magazines, literary texts, email and websites. The final text on the paper will be literary non-fiction.

Students will also be required to collate relevant information across a text and draw inferences, make deductions, and recognise implicit meaning from a variety of written texts.

Access to dictionaries is not permitted at any time during the test.

### **Text 1**

R1, R2

Students are asked to read a short text (200–300 words), such as an email, and respond to a series of open and multiple choice questions. Students are assessed on their ability to select and identify relevant detail, key points and ideas, and show understanding of ideas and purposes (6 marks).

### **Text 2**

R1, R2, R3, R4

Students are asked to read a text (200–300 words), such as an advert or article, and respond to a series of open questions, multiple choice questions and collation tasks. Students are assessed on their ability to select and identify relevant detail, key points and ideas, and show understanding of ideas and purposes. They are also assessed on their ability to collate and recognise relevant detail (8 marks).

### **Text 3**

R1, R2, R3, R4

Students are asked to read a text (300–400 words), such as an opinion article, and respond to a series of open questions, multiple choice questions and collation tasks. Students are assessed on their ability to select and identify relevant detail, key points and ideas, and show understanding of ideas and purposes. They are also assessed on their ability to collate and recognise relevant detail, and their ability to draw inferences, make deductions, and recognise implicit meaning (12 marks).

### **Text 4**

R2, R3, R4

Students are asked to read a literary non-fiction text (400–500 words) and respond to a series of open questions, multiple choice questions and collation tasks. Students are assessed on their ability to show understanding of ideas and purposes. They are also assessed on their ability to collate and recognise relevant detail, and their ability to draw inferences, make deductions, and recognise implicit meaning (16 marks).

**Responses will be assessed according to a detailed mark scheme; the appropriate mark(s) will be awarded if the student has satisfactorily communicated his or her understanding, even though the response may contain some errors in the quality of language used.**



## 5 General administration

We are committed to delivering assessments of the highest quality and have developed practices and procedures that support this aim. To ensure that all students have a fair experience, we have worked with other awarding bodies in England to develop best practice for maintaining the integrity of exams, which is published through the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). We will maintain those same high standards through their use for Oxford Exams.

More information on aspects of administration will shortly be available on [oxfordaqa.com/exams-administration](https://oxfordaqa.com/exams-administration)

For any immediate enquiries please contact [info@oxfordaqa.com](mailto:info@oxfordaqa.com)

**Please note: We aim to respond to all email enquiries within two working days.**

**Our UK office hours are Monday to Friday, 8am – 5pm local time.**

### 5.1 Entries and codes

You only need to make one entry for each qualification – this will cover all the question papers and certification.

Qualification title	OxfordAQA entry code
OxfordAQA International GCSE CORE English as a second language (short course)	9285

Please check the current version of the Entry Codes book and the latest information about making entries on [oxfordaqa.com/exams-administration](https://oxfordaqa.com/exams-administration)

Exams will be available in May/June.

### 5.2 Overlaps with other qualifications

This specification overlaps with OxfordAQA GCSE English as a second language (9280). Entry for this specification and OxfordAQA International GCSE English as a second language (9280) is not permitted in the same series.

### 5.3 Awarding grades and reporting results

In line with UK GCSEs, the qualification will be graded on a nine-point scale: 1 to 9 – where 9 is the best grade. Students who fail to reach the minimum standard for grade 1 will be recorded as U (unclassified) and will not receive a qualification certificate. Please go to [oxfordaqa.com/recognition](https://oxfordaqa.com/recognition) to find out more about the new grading system.

### 5.4 Resits and shelf life

Candidates can re-take the whole qualification as many times as they wish. This is a traditional linear specification and, as such, individual components may not be re-sat.

You only need to make one entry for each qualification – this will cover all the question papers and certification.

### 5.5 Previous learning and prerequisites

There are no previous learning requirements. Any requirements for entry to a course based on this specification are at the discretion of schools.

## 5.6 Access to assessment: equality and inclusion

Our general qualifications are designed to prepare students for a wide range of occupations and further study and assess a wide range of competences.

The subject criteria have been assessed to ensure that they test specific competences and the skills or knowledge required do not disadvantage particular groups of students.

For students with disabilities and special educational needs, exam access arrangements are available to allow these students to demonstrate their knowledge and ability. We comply with the *UK Equality Act 2010* to make reasonable adjustments to remove or lessen any disadvantage that affects a disabled student. Information about the access arrangements that are available will be issued to schools when they become Oxford International AQA Examination centres.

## 5.7 Working with OxfordAQA for the first time

You will need to apply to become an OxfordAQA centre to offer our specifications to your students. Find out how at [oxfordaqa.com/centreapprovals](https://oxfordaqa.com/centreapprovals)

## 5.8 Private candidates

Centres may accept private candidates for examined units/components only with the prior agreement of OxfordAQA. If you are an approved OxfordAQA centre and wish to accept private candidates, please contact OxfordAQA at: [info@oxfordaqa.com](mailto:info@oxfordaqa.com)

Private candidates may also enter for examined only units via the British Council; please contact your local British Council office for details.

## Fairness *first*

Thank you for choosing OxfordAQA,  
the international exam board that puts  
fairness first.

Benchmarked to UK standards, our  
exams only ever test subject ability, not  
language skills or cultural knowledge.

This gives every student the best  
possible chance to show what they can  
do and get the results they deserve.



## Get in touch

You can contact us at  
[oxfordaqa.com/contact-us](https://oxfordaqa.com/contact-us)

or email [info@oxfordaqa.com](mailto:info@oxfordaqa.com)