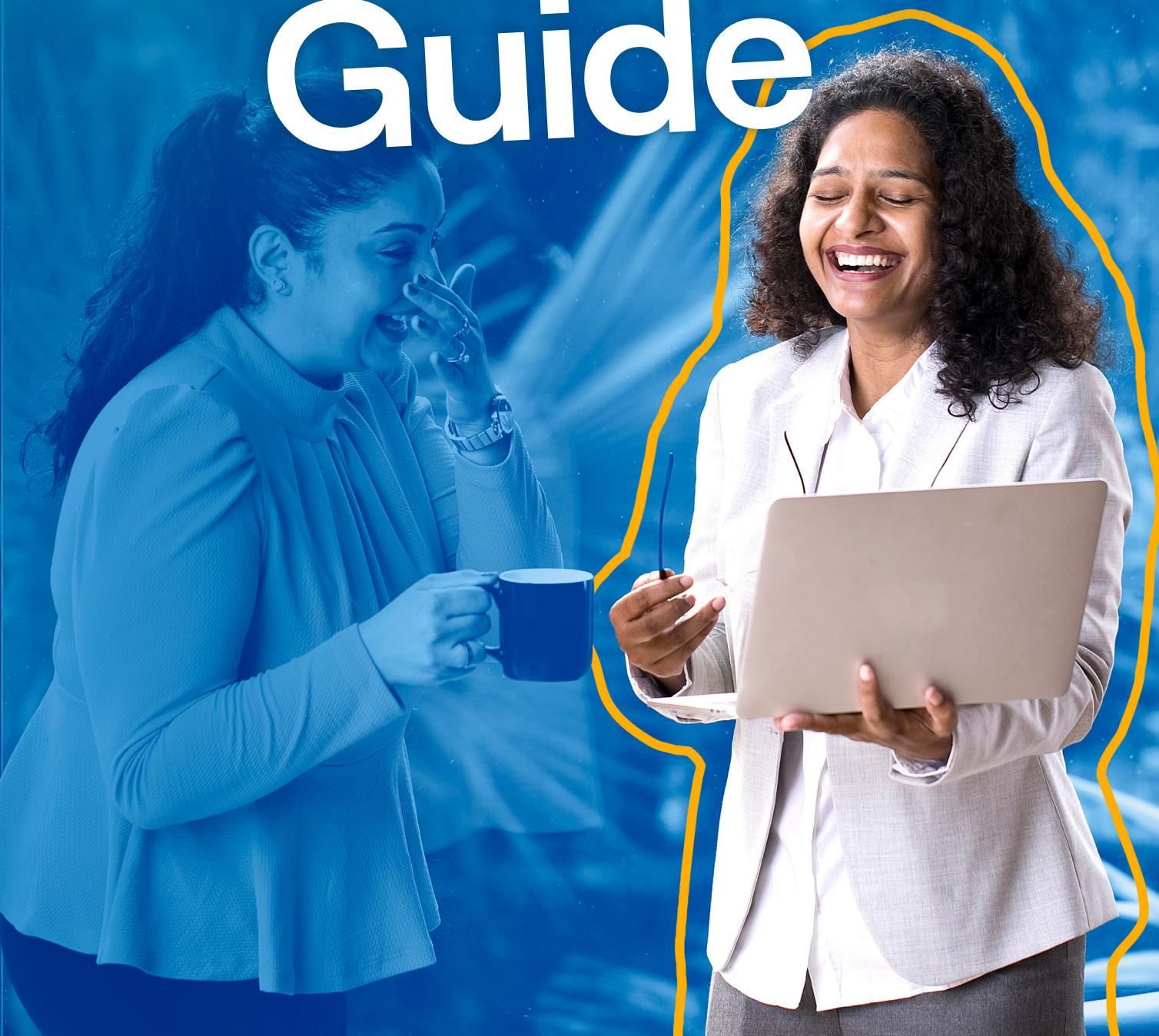


Getting started with PTE Core Teacher Guide



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Overview of PTE Core

1

Introduction

Preparing learners for the PTE Core test can be a highly fulfilling experience, as PTE Core teachers play a crucial role in helping learners achieve their goals, such as securing permanent residency or citizenship in Canada. To set learners up for success in the test, it is vital for teachers to understand the test's structure and content. This section offers an overview of the PTE Core format, highlighting key differences from two other major high-stakes language tests and the Pearson PTE Academic test. It will also cover what learners can expect to encounter when booking their test, test day procedures, and what happens during and after their test. Familiarity with these aspects is essential for effectively addressing learner queries. Teachers may also find the information valuable for integrating into their preparation courses.

 **Understanding PTE Core's structure helps teachers guide learners with confidence, identify effective approaches for skill-building, and empower learners to navigate the test successfully.** 

Director/CEO, Pakistan

What is PTE Core?

PTE Core is a computer-based test aimed at general English language proficiency assessment for the workplace and everyday communication. It assesses learners' general speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills in a single test through Pearson's unique combination of AI and human scoring, and it is suitable for learners seeking to certify their overall English proficiency for all migration and citizenship applications in Canada. For more information, visit the [Pearson PTE Core website](#). Teachers are encouraged to use the website for reliable resources, and updates about the test.



Accepted by the IRCC for migration and citizenship applications



Get results in typically 2 days



Assesses your everyday English



Unique combination of automated, AI, and human scoring



Fully computer-based test, taken at a test centre



A single 2-hour test

PTE Core versus PTE Academic

Learners frequently ask teachers whether they should opt for PTE Core or PTE Academic, especially during screening interviews, placement tests, or Day 1 orientations. Understanding the key differences between these tests helps learners make informed decisions about which option aligns best with their goals. By clarifying these distinctions, learners can select the most suitable test and approach their studies with greater confidence. Details on the similarities and differences in format between PTE Core and PTE Academic are provided below to help guide this choice.

	PTE Core	PTE Academic
Purpose		
Study		✓
Migration/PGWP	✓	
Citizenship	✓	
Length and format		
Duration	Single test of approximately 2 hours	
Delivery	100% computer-based	
Content	All content focused on English used in everyday work and life scenarios	Content includes English used in academic settings
Test sections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaking & Writing (46–67 mins) Reading (27–38 mins) Listening (30–37 mins) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaking & Writing (54–67 mins) Reading (29–30 mins) Listening (30–43 mins)
Question types		
Speaking	PTE Core: Respond to a situation Read aloud, Repeat sentence, Describe image, Answer short question	PTE Academic: Re-tell lecture
Writing	PTE Core: Write email Summarize written text	PTE Academic: Write essay
Reading	Reading and writing: Fill in the blanks, Multiple choice, multiple answers, Reorder paragraphs, Fill in the blanks, Multiple choice, single answer	
Listening	PTE Core: Fill in the blanks Summarize spoken text, Multiple choice, multiple answers, Multiple choice, single answer, Select missing word, Highlight incorrect words, Write from dictation	PTE Academic: Fill in the blanks listening & writing EXTRA QUESTION TYPE Highlight correct summary
Results		
Scored by	State-of-the art automated, AI, and human scoring	
Typical score turnaround	2 days	
Secure online score sharing	Share with unlimited institutions for free	
Scoring scale	Granular scoring scales from 10–90, with accurate and consistent results	
Scores valid for	2 years	

General English tests for Canada

Another common question for general English learners is how PTE Core compares to other general English tests recognized in Canada. Different tests have their own characteristics that teachers should be mindful of when advising learners on which test to choose. The table below outlines the key distinctions between PTE Core and IELTS General Training and CELPIP General, helping teachers guide learners toward the most appropriate test based on their specific goals, circumstances, strengths, and weaknesses.

	PTE Core	IELTS General Training	CELPPIP General
Booking a test			
Registration & booking	Online or by phone up to 24 hours in advance	Online or in person	Online or by mail up to 24 hours in advance
Locations	Multiple locations worldwide in over 100 countries	Multiple locations worldwide in over 100 countries	Test currently available in around 30 countries
The test			
Duration	2 hours	2 hours 45 mins	3 hours
Delivery	100% computer-based	Paper-based or computer-based (Speaking section is always with a human)	100% computer-based
Structure	3 parts in 1 test session: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Speaking & WritingReadingListening	4 parts in 2 test sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">ListeningReadingWritingSpeaking (face-to-face)	4 parts in 1 test session: <ul style="list-style-type: none">ListeningReadingWritingSpeaking
Content	Content based on everyday life situations and authentic sources	Reading and Writing uses general English content, Speaking and Listening same as IELTS Academic	Content taken from everyday life situations
Accent	Advanced speech recognition software recognizing native and non-native accents	Range of accents	Single North American accent throughout
Results			
Score turnaround	Typically 2 days	Computer-based: 3-5 days Paper-based: 13 days	4-5 business days
Sharing results	Shared directly with an unlimited number of institutions for free	Shared directly with up to 5 institutions for free	Shared directly with up to 5 organizations for free
Scoring scale	Scores from 10-90 (CLB conversion available)	Scores from 1-9 (CLB conversion available)	Scores from 0-12 (CLB conversion available)
Score validity	2 years	2 years	2 years

*A late booking fee applies for tests booked within 48 hours of the test session

Learners should follow a general English course, using a reputable coursebook, supplemented with targeted test preparation strategies and question type practice. This approach not only strengthens overall language skills, but also helps learners become familiar with the specific demands of the test. PTE Core, with its wide range of question types, offers a great opportunity to bring variety and engagement into lessons. Incorporating these tasks into PTE Core preparation classes can keep learners motivated and reinforce their language skills in real-world contexts.

PTE test-taker journey

It is equally important for teachers to be fully aware of the end-to-end PTE Core test-taker journey, including booking the test, test day procedures, and what happens during and after the test, as understanding each step can help them better support their learners. Teachers should introduce this process at the start of the course, and review it ahead of the test, to ensure learners are well-prepared and know what to expect. Additionally, teachers may benefit from booking and taking the test themselves and using that first-hand experience to better guide learners through the preparation process. The [PTE Core Handbook](#) is a valuable resource for further details on the PTE Core test-taker journey.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the key aspects of successfully preparing and delivering a PTE Core preparation course is test familiarity. Teachers must have an awareness of the test structure and content as well as the test-taker journey to guide their learners effectively. Familiarity with the process can help alleviate anxiety. Test takers who understand what to expect at each stage are more likely to feel confident and composed, leading to better performance.

Reflection

1. How can understanding the PTE Core test structure and content help you create more effective PTE Core lesson plans?
2. How will you incorporate the test-taker journey into your course to ensure learners are fully aware of the test process?

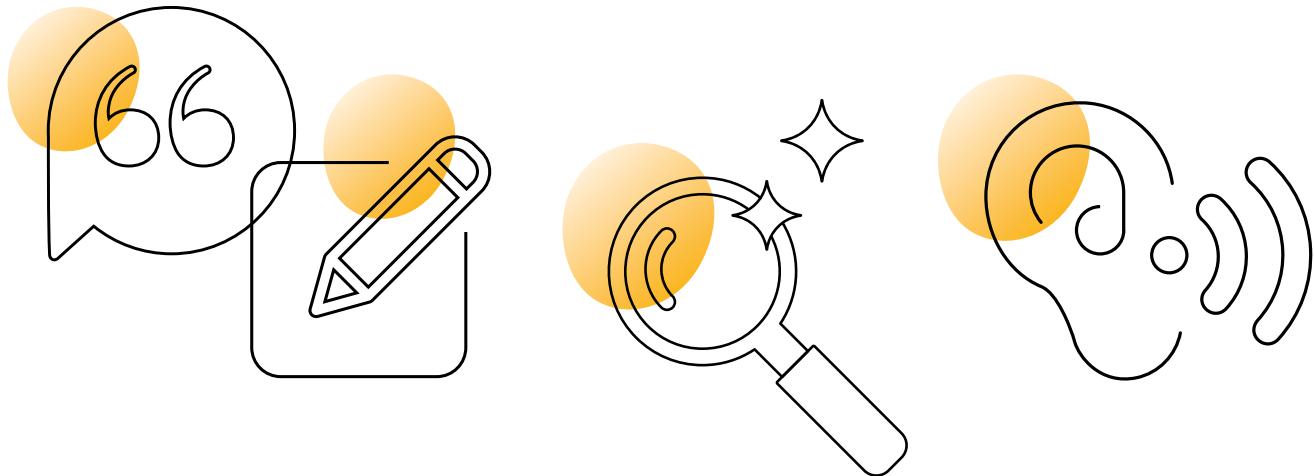
Discovery activity

Take the PTE Core Guided Practice Test: All Skills. Find out how to access this by clicking [here](#). Or, book the PTE Core test to gain an awareness of the test format, timing, and demands.

2

PTE Core question types & strategies





Introduction

PTE Core assesses the four key communicative skills of speaking, writing, reading, and listening, organized into three sections: Speaking & Writing, Reading, and Listening. Each section contains a variety of question types, with some assessing more than one skill simultaneously. These are known as integrated skills, reflecting how communication naturally occurs in real-life situations and in the classroom. This section offers a breakdown of each question type, along with strategies for teaching them effectively. It also provides insights into specific techniques for navigating computer-based testing, equipping teachers with the tools needed to help learners succeed in the PTE Core test.

Question types

PTE Core features a total of nineteen distinct question types, designed to comprehensively assess all four skills, both individually and through integrated tasks. Learners may excel in some question types while finding others more challenging. This is why administering a diagnostic test at the start of any course is a valuable step. It helps identify which question types learners are more comfortable with and which require additional practice and targeted strategy instruction. By pinpointing these areas early on, teachers can tailor their lessons to focus on improving weaker skills and refining test strategies, ensuring a more effective and personalized learning experience. To familiarize yourself with each question type, we recommend taking the [PTE Core Guided Practice Test: All Skills](#), or exploring the short videos linked in the table on the next page.



Understanding fundamental question types in the PTE Core test helps learners develop effective strategies, enabling them to approach each question with confidence and ease. 

Academic Director, India

Click on the links to learn about each of the question types.

Question type	Number of questions	Time permitted
Speaking & Writing		
Personal introduction	25 seconds <i>(this is for familiarization purposes only and does not contribute to the test score)</i>	
<u>Read aloud</u>	6-7	
<u>Repeat sentence</u>	10-12	
<u>Describe image</u>	3-4	
<u>Respond to a situation</u>	2-4	46-67 minutes
<u>Answer short question</u>	5-6	
<u>Summarize written text</u>	1-2	
<u>Write email</u>	2-3	
Reading		
<u>Reading and writing: Fill in the blanks</u>	5-6	
<u>Multiple choice, multiple answers</u>	1-2	
<u>Reorder paragraph</u>	2-3	27-38 minutes
<u>Fill in the blanks</u>	4-5	
<u>Multiple choice, single answer</u>	1-2	
Listening		
<u>Summarize spoken text</u>	1-2	
<u>Multiple choice, multiple answers</u>	1-2	
<u>Fill in the blanks</u>	2-3	
<u>Multiple choice, single answer</u>	1-2	30-37 minutes
<u>Select missing word</u>	1-2	
<u>Highlight incorrect words</u>	1-2	
<u>Write from dictation</u>	3-4	

How to teach test-taking strategies

PTE Core teachers should not only provide strong language instruction but also help learners develop essential test-taking strategies. These strategies are cognitive skills that enable learners to navigate any testing situation, including PTE Core, independently of their knowledge of the test content.

Examples for Reading and writing: Fill in the blanks could include:

- Read the entire text before answering questions
- Look for clues around the gaps
- Practise elimination and educated guessing

While these skills can be mastered with relative ease, learners need regular practice to fully develop them. Directly, these strategies can boost test scores by optimizing time, effort, and test conditions. Indirectly, they can reduce test anxiety and foster a more positive attitude toward testing.

Each PTE lesson should include a dedicated test-taking strategy stage, where teachers can introduce or review specific approaches learners can apply during the test. [PTE Core Test Tips](#) for test takers provides useful test-taking strategies for each individual question type. Below are more generic test-taking strategies, arranged according to the three PTE Core test sections.

Speaking & Writing

- Teach learners how to best use their preparation time to organize their thoughts
- Provide plenty of opportunities for PTE speaking practise with feedback
- Guide learners to carefully analyze the question, plan their response, and organize their ideas
- Emphasize the importance of proofreading and adhering to the word count

Reading

- Teach learners to grasp the overall meaning of a text before selecting answers
- Instruct learners to read the instructions and questions thoroughly to avoid misunderstandings
- Encourage learners to attempt every question, as unanswered questions do not earn points
- Introduce skimming for general meaning and scanning techniques to quickly find key information

Listening

- Teach learners to consider the context of the listening material and anticipate what information to listen for
- Instruct learners to read questions before listening to focus their attention on relevant details
- Encourage the development of note-taking techniques to capture key information effectively
- Train learners to recognize and understand a variety of accents and speech patterns for better comprehension

Computer-based testing

The computer-delivered PTE Core requires test takers to sit the Speaking & Writing, Reading, and Listening sections in front of a computer, with the questions presented on-screen in over 420 official PTE test centres around the world. The test takers then submit their answers with the use of a keyboard and a mouse. Computer-based tests are widespread, and many learners will have had experience of taking a computer-based test to demonstrate their knowledge of driving, their professional ability, etc. It is helpful to draw this parallel to put learners at ease.

Preparing learners for computer-based testing

In today's digital age, many learners are accustomed to using computers. However, taking a computer-based test like PTE Core requires more than just basic digital literacy. It involves specific skills that learners need to master in the context of an English test. Whether a learner has prior experience with digital assessments or not, it's crucial to help them develop the key competencies required for success in technology-based tests. So, how can teachers effectively prepare learners for computer-based assessments like PTE Core?

Develop digital skills in English

Even if learners are comfortable using computers, they may not have experience doing so in English. This can create additional challenges. To build their confidence, teachers should integrate tasks that allow them to practise typing, reading, and listening in English using a computer. If learners do not have access to a computer lab during class time, activities such as typing exercises or digital listening activities in English can be set as homework.

Practise with sample tests

As learners become more comfortable with the test's content, the next step is to expose them to full-length sample tests. Online Pearson preparation resources, such as the [PTE Core Guided Practice Test: All Skills](#). The guided practice test provides learners with a realistic experience, mirroring the format and question types they will face on test day. Learners who take the test more than once benefit from hands-on experience with the digital interface, allowing them to navigate sections more efficiently and practise responding under timed conditions.

Time management

Efficient time management is a critical skill for computer-based testing. It is important to teach learners to begin answering questions promptly, without hesitation. For example, in the speaking section of PTE Core, learners should start speaking as soon as the status box indicates "recording." Once a question is completed, they should move swiftly to the next, rather than waiting for the countdown timer to expire. This ensures that they maximize their test time and maintain momentum throughout the test.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the nineteen question types in PTE Core assess integrated skills across speaking, writing, reading, and listening, each requiring targeted strategies for success. Beyond test preparation, teaching these skills also promotes essential 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and effective communication. By tailoring strategies to individual learner needs, teachers equip learners with tools for both the test and the modern world. This holistic approach ensures learners not only approach the PTE test with confidence, but also develop skills vital for future academic and professional success.

Reflection

1. Which PTE question types do you feel most confident teaching, and why?
2. What challenges do you anticipate your learners facing with certain question types, and how can you address these in your teaching?

Discovery activity

Choose one question type from the Speaking & Writing section, one from Reading, and one from Listening. For each, brainstorm a list of strategies that would be most effective to teach your learners, considering their needs and challenges.



3 PTE Core scoring

3

Introduction

To run successful preparation courses for the PTE Core test, teachers should understand how the test is scored. This knowledge allows teachers to focus on the specific skills or traits learners need to improve to achieve higher scores. During the course, learners may have questions about scores, grading criteria, and how to access and share their results. Therefore, teachers who are well-informed will be better prepared to provide accurate responses as well as more targeted feedback on learner response to PTE Core tasks. Familiarity with the score report structure also helps teachers guide learners in interpreting their results and setting realistic goals. This understanding ensures that teaching strategies are aligned with the assessment framework, leading to more targeted and effective instruction.



Learners often find scoring complex, as do new PTE Core teachers, so it's essential to take the time to thoroughly understand the scoring criteria. This provides teachers with a clear direction for guiding learners more effectively.

Director, Canada

PTE Core scoring overview

All PTE tests, including PTE Core, are scored by a computer using state-of-the-art scoring technology. This means that test takers get a fair and accurate score every time. PTE Core has nineteen question types. There is a Personal introduction task at the start of the test. This is for familiarization purposes only and does not count toward a test-taker's score. Some of the question types are scored based on whether a test-taker's answer is right or wrong, such as for multiple-choice questions. Other question types are scored on additional features (or traits), such as the quality of a test-taker's response and whether they have met the required word count. For example, the Write email task is rated on these traits:

- Content
- Email conventions
- Form
- Organization
- Vocabulary
- Grammar

The detailed scoring criteria for all PTE Core question types can be found in the downloadable [PTE Core Test Taker Score Guide](#). This is a useful must-read guide for teachers to set the assessment criteria for open-ended tasks and to refer to when providing learners with feedback on their responses.

Feedback on open-ended tasks

Teachers can effectively use the PTE Score Guide to mark speaking and writing responses by aligning their evaluation with the scoring criteria provided by Pearson. The PTE Score Guide breaks down specific aspects of performance into key areas, which helps teachers assess responses with objectivity and accuracy.

Step-by-step process

1. Familiarize yourself with the criteria
2. Evaluate the learner's work
3. Use specific examples
4. Provide targeted feedback

Consider creating a checklist template with a list of traits to annotate strengths, areas for improvement, and examples to provide structured, targeted feedback. This approach ensures that feedback is specific and tied directly to the PTE Core criteria. Here's how a checklist could look:

Checklist for Write email			
	Strengths	Areas for improvement	Examples from response
Content	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Form	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The email is less than 49 words. Try for over 50, and ideally 80, next time.
Email conventions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Organization	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Vocabulary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Grammar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	There is only simple sentence in your email. Try to use at least two complex sentences in your next attempt.
Spelling	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	There are some inconsistencies with spelling varieties (e.g., "analyse" and "analyze"). Make sure you proofread your work.

Read the test-takers' emails and the human markers' comments in the [PTE Core Test Taker Score Guide](#) on pages 21–23 to see the practical application of the scoring rubric.



Using a checklist and structured feedback to help learners create strong, well-developed answers in open-ended tasks, like email writing.

PTE Writing Teacher, Canada

Benefits of automated scoring

Pearson pioneered machine scoring in English tests, using sophisticated algorithms based on hundreds of thousands of real test responses. During the PTE Core test, there is no interaction with a human examiner. Instead, test-takers' answers are compared against past responses and the combined knowledge of hundreds of examiners. This ensures an accurate, objective, and consistent score.

This system also allows Pearson to mark tests faster and more fairly than other providers, as well as the ability to easily and quickly share results. The computer-based format also simplifies the process, as candidates only need to attend a single two-hour session instead of multiple test appointments.

Watch [this video](#) to learn how Pearson uses AI to mark the PTE.



What score do my learners need?

Before taking the PTE Core, test takers should first determine the score requirements of the institution or program they are applying to. For those applying to emigrate to Canada, a Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) score is typically required. Test takers can check the specific CLB score they need and the corresponding PTE Core score on the [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada \(IRCC\)](#) website. Teachers can refer to the table provided below to guide learners in understanding score conversion and help them identify the target scores necessary for their migration applications.

CLB	PTE Core			
	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
10	89–90	88–90	89–90	90
9	82–88	78–87	84–88	88–89
8	71–81	69–77	76–83	79–87
7	60–70	60–68	68–75	69–78
6	50–59	51–59	59–67	60–68
5	39–49	42–50	51–58	51–59
4	28–38	33–41	42–50	41–50
3	18–27	24–32	34–41	32–40

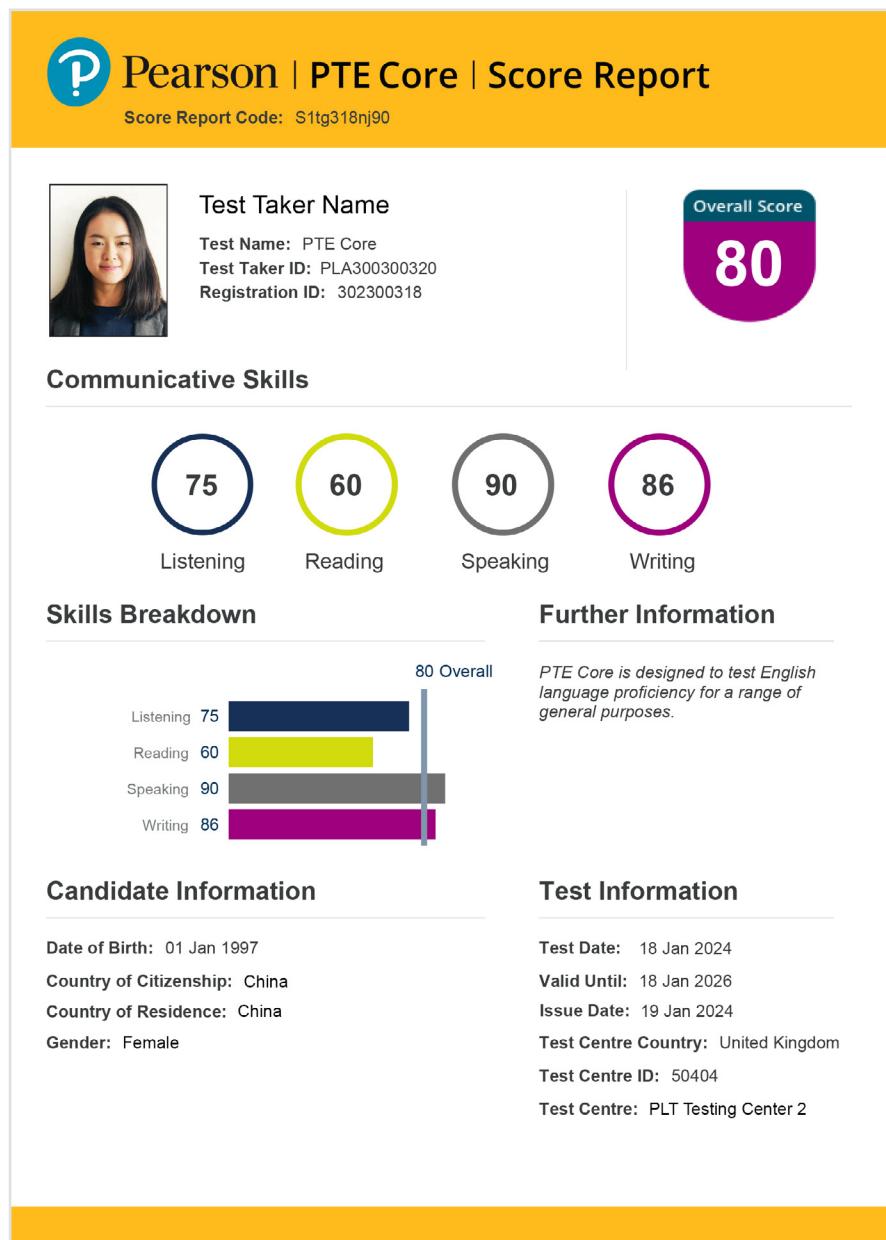


Remember, scoring isn't just about understanding the traits; it's also about teaching learners effectively and giving feedback that shows learners where to improve and how to strengthen their skills. PTE Core Teacher, China

PTE Core Score Report and Skills Profile

Once test takers complete their test, they will receive both a Score Report and a Skills Profile.

The PTE Core Score Report consists of an overall score and four communicative skills scores (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) as shown below.

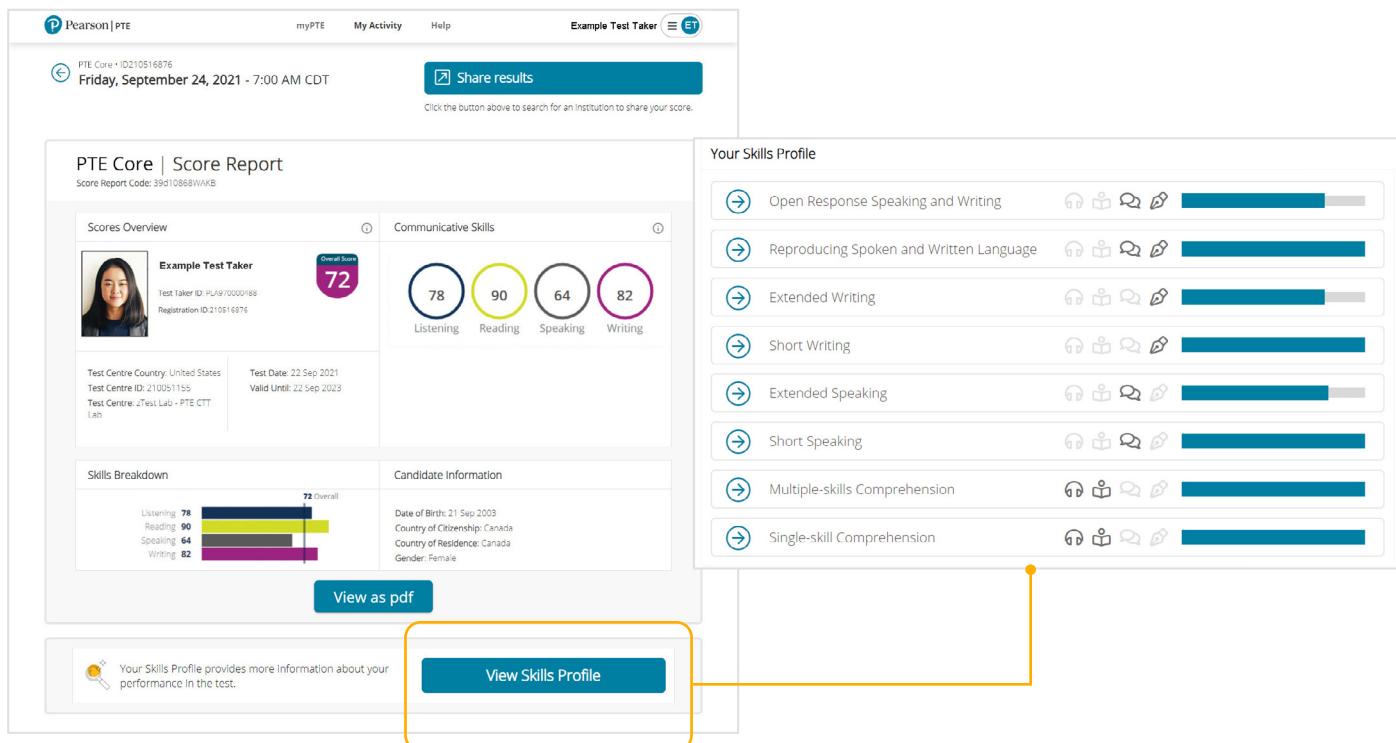


Test takers will also see their personal details, including the PTE test-taker ID number and the unique Score Report Code, which they can provide to institutions to verify their results.

The Skills Profile, available through a myPTE account provides additional insights that test takers can share with teachers. It shows exactly how they performed in the PTE Core test and gives a deeper dive into strengths and weaknesses across the four language skills. Moreover, it contains personalized recommendations and activities to help learners continue to improve their English. The Skills Profile can be referred to when test takers do not reach their required score and they need to work further before their second test attempt.

To recap, both documents can help teachers to:

- **Identify strengths and weaknesses:** Teachers can pinpoint areas where the learner excels and where improvement is needed
- **Personalize recommendations:** Teachers can use the recommendations to design targeted lessons that focus on the learner's specific areas of weakness
- **Tailor a study plan:** Teachers can create a customized study plan, ensuring that practice and preparation align with the learner's needs and PTE Core requirements
- **Track progress:** Teachers can monitor the learner's progress over time, adjusting teaching strategies and setting realistic goals for improvement before the next test attempt
- **Plan a test retake strategy:** Teachers can use the profile to develop a focused strategy for preparing for a second attempt, concentrating on areas that need the most attention



PTE Core | Score Report
Score Report Code: 39d10868WAKB

Example Test Taker
Overall Score: 72

Communicative Skills

Skill	Score
Listening	78
Reading	90
Speaking	64
Writing	82

Skills Breakdown

Skill	Score
Listening	78
Reading	90
Speaking	64
Writing	82

Candidate Information

- Date of Birth: 21 Sep 2003
- Country of Citizenship: Canada
- Country of Residence: Canada
- Gender: Female

Your Skills Profile

Skill	Icon	Description	Progress Bar
Open Response Speaking and Writing	Microphone, person, speech bubble		Progress bar
Reproducing Spoken and Written Language	Microphone, person, speech bubble		Progress bar
Extended Writing	Microphone, person, speech bubble		Progress bar
Short Writing	Microphone, person, speech bubble		Progress bar
Extended Speaking	Microphone, person, speech bubble		Progress bar
Short Speaking	Microphone, person, speech bubble		Progress bar
Multiple-skills Comprehension	Microphone, person, speech bubble		Progress bar
Single-skill Comprehension	Microphone, person, speech bubble		Progress bar

View as pdf

View Skills Profile

Your Skills Profile provides more information about your performance in the test.

Sharing PTE Core scores

With an Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) office

Test takers need to enter the Score Report Code from their Score Report onto their application form and an IRCC office will be able to verify their results directly.

With another institution

Test takers can choose between two convenient, secure methods to share their scores with any other person or institution: sharing their score directly through their myPTE account or sharing the unique Score Report Code found on their Score Report. The recipient will then retrieve their results via Pearson's electronic score verification system.

Conclusion

In short, a solid understanding of the PTE Core scoring criteria, the interplay between automated, AI and human scoring, and the Score Report and Skills Profile will boost teachers' confidence in providing feedback on performance. This confidence will strengthen the trust between teachers and learners, creating a supportive environment that encourages continuous improvement. As a result, learners will feel more assured in the guidance they receive, leading to greater progress and success in their test preparation.

Reflection

1. How do the scoring traits in PTE Core differ from the criteria you currently use to assess learners in class?
2. How can understanding the specific scoring criteria for speaking and writing tasks help you tailor your feedback to address individual learner needs more effectively?

Discovery activity

Collect a speaking or writing sample from one of your learners and use the [PTE Core Test Taker Score Guide](#) to assess it. Compare your evaluation to the guide's descriptors and reflect on how closely your assessment aligns with PTE standards.



4

Creating a PTE Core syllabus

Introduction

PTE Core offers a flexible approach to preparation, allowing teachers the freedom to design their courses without being tied to a fixed syllabus. Instead, teachers are encouraged to use one or more Pearson English Language Learning coursebooks as the foundation for both language development and practice of the nineteen PTE question types. This section provides teachers with the essential elements of a PTE Core syllabus as well as practical strategies to combine language learning and test preparation, ensuring learners receive a well-rounded course that builds the skills and confidence they need for success.

Approach to PTE Core syllabus design

There are two primary approaches to designing a PTE Core syllabus, and these are based on whether teachers want to approach instruction by skill or by task..

A skills-focused syllabus

Description

This approach emphasizes the development of general language proficiency and the core language skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. The primary goal is to build learners' overall fluency, accuracy, and communication abilities. Test-specific question types are introduced gradually and integrated into the lessons as supplementary practice rather than being the main focus.

When it is suitable

This approach is ideal when learners need to strengthen their overall language skills first, especially in long-term courses where learners have time to develop their fluency before focusing on test strategies. It is also beneficial for learners who are not only preparing for the PTE Core test but also looking to improve their English for broader, real-world applications.

Key benefits

- Learners build a strong foundation in language proficiency
- More balanced progression, with language skills as the primary focus
- Test practice is gradually introduced in a less overwhelming way, making it easier for learners to transition into test preparation

A task-focused syllabus

Description

In this approach, the syllabus is organized around the nineteen specific question types found in the PTE Core test. Each lesson is dedicated to practising and mastering one question type, with language development being taught as part of the context of these tasks. The focus is on ensuring that learners are familiar with all task types and strategies, with language and skills development supporting test preparation.

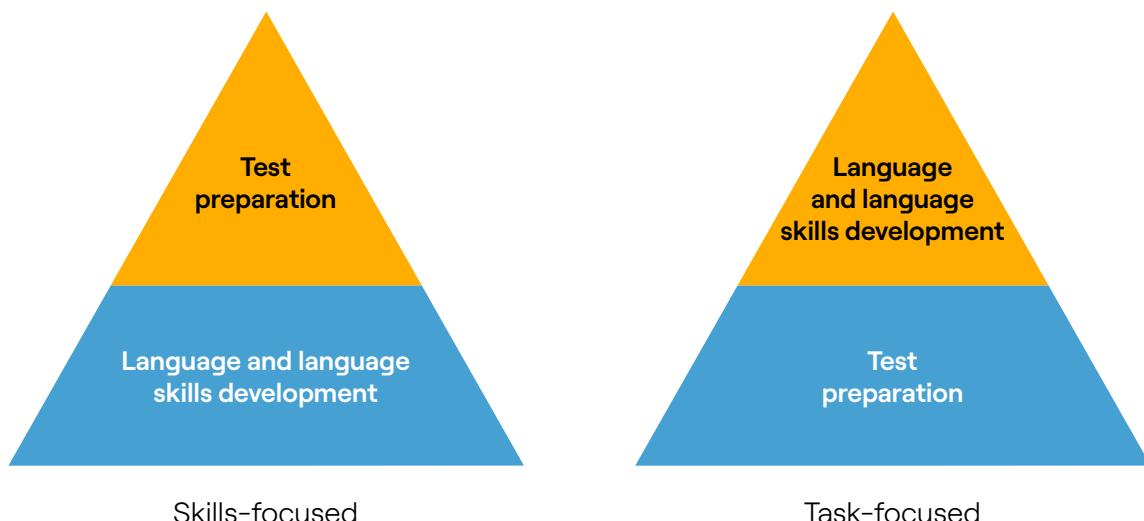
When it is suitable

This approach is most effective for short-term courses or intensive test-preparation programs where the primary goal is test readiness. It works well when learners already have the desired command of English, or are close to achieving their desired score, and need focused practice on the question types to optimize their test performance.

Key benefits

- Learners gain detailed knowledge of each question type and develop effective strategies to tackle them
- More targeted preparation for the test, helping learners feel confident and ready for test day
- Some explicit integrated language and language skills practice exists

Below is a representation of both approaches, with the blue representing more time spent in the lesson on the focus area.



Course length

The length of the course will depend on the approach chosen by teachers. A skills-focused syllabus is typically longer. [How long does it take to learn a language? Insights from research on language learning](#) can assist in estimating the expected learning time for a learner to make progress. In contrast, the task-focused syllabus is usually shorter. It needs to efficiently cover all the question types and the other key components of a preparation course listed on page 29. For one-to-one classes, teachers may want to solely focus on specific question types that learners find more challenging, so the course may well be shorter still.

Coursebook mapping

When preparing learners for PTE Core, teachers may choose to use one coursebook or several. Regardless, it is essential to take time to critically evaluate the course materials, as no single coursebook will cover all PTE Core question types comprehensively. To ensure the best use of resources, teachers can apply the SAND framework, a practical method for assessing coursebooks (or any other teaching material) to determine how effectively they support PTE Core preparation and how to maximize their use.

The SAND approach provides a structured way to make decisions about courseware.

- **S: Select** – Choose material that directly mirrors the PTE Core question types. The tasks and instructions can be used as they are, offering relevant and contextualized practice.
- **A: Adapt** – Consider adapting the task and instructions for material that seems a good starting point, for example a gist question that can be adapted to Multiple choice, single answer. This allows you to make some adjustments to ensure that tasks mimic PTE Core.
- **N: Not applicable** – If the tasks and instructions do not align with PTE Core preparation or cannot be adapted to fit the question types, teachers may choose to set them aside or design their own.
- **D: Design** – Where existing materials fall short, consider designing tasks and instructions from scratch that replicate the PTE Core question types using the coursebook material as the source.

The SAND approach enables teachers to tailor their materials thoughtfully, ensuring learners are well-prepared across all aspects of the PTE Core test. If learners require additional question type practice, a valuable resource for this is the [PTE Core Guided Practice Test: All Skills](#). They offer an option for learners to reinforce their skills in all PTE Core question types.

Suggested steps for coursebook mapping

After selecting the best approach to PTE Core syllabus design for the context the teacher is in, the next step is to conduct a mapping exercise. Below are the recommended steps for effective courseware mapping.

Skills-focused syllabus	Task-focused syllabus
Language and language skills development with some test preparation	Test preparation with some language and language skill development
Step 1 Review each coursebook unit systematically: Examine each unit of the coursebook, one by one, to assess its relevance and effectiveness for both language and language skills and question type practice	Review each PTE Core question type systematically: Work through all nineteen PTE Core question types individually, assessing which type is covered in the coursebook
Step 2 Apply SAND: Apply the SAND approach (Select, Adapt, Not Applicable, Design) to effectively tailor tasks and instructions to PTE Core. Teachers should critically evaluate which task and instructions are relevant, adapt them as needed, or design new practice tasks for specific question types where necessary	
Step 3 Supplement with extra practice: Enhance the syllabus by incorporating additional practice for specific PTE Core question types using the PTE Core Guided Practice Test: All Skills to give learners extra practice	

Example of a skills-focused syllabus

The sample syllabus on the next page, grounded in communicative-based teaching methodology, is drawn from the *StartUp* series at Level 6 (CLB 7/8). This example focuses on Unit 5, with resources available for download from the [Pearson website](#). In the shaded 'Question type practice' column, the SAND approach is applied. 'Not applicable' indicates tasks or instructions in the book that do not align with PTE Core question type practice. However, in a skills-focused syllabus, teachers may still wish to use these lessons to support learners' overall language development.

For a task-focused syllabus, a similar table could be used. However, instead of emphasizing language skills and language development, the focus would be on listing the PTE question types on the left, along with the corresponding tasks and instructions from each unit. Any content that is not fully aligned with the question types would be adapted accordingly, and any question types that do not appear can be incorporated.

Coursebook	Page(s)	Language skills development	Language development	Question type practice	Useful Pearson resources
Speaking	Unit 5 Lesson 1	55	Can give simple directions using a map or plan	Grammar: Past perfect continuous	Not applicable
	Unit 5 Lesson 2	57	Can express feelings (e.g., sympathy, surprise, interest) with confidence, using a range of expressions	Functional language: Expressions to reassure somebody	Select: Read aloud (Exercise 3A, page 57)
			Can clarify points they are trying to make in an academic discussion, using linguistically complex language	Grammar: Needs with gerunds and passive infinitives	Adapt: Respond to a situation (Exercise 5A, 5B, & 5C, page 57)
	Unit 5 Lesson 3 & Lesson 4	59,61	Can express their opinions in discussions on contemporary social issues and current affairs		
Writing	Unit 5 Put it together	64	Can orally summarize information from different spoken sources, reconstructing arguments to present the overall result	None	Not applicable
	Unit 5 Lesson 5	62, 63	Can write basic personal details for a website profile, business card, etc.		Not applicable
			Can support a line of argument in an academic text using direct quotation		Not applicable
			Can summarize in writing the author's viewpoints, attitudes, or opinions in a linguistically complex text	Vocabulary: "playback," "upgrade," and "compact"	Adapt: Summarize written text (Review: The GV500 360-Degree Video Camera, page 62)
			Can write a transcript of a linguistically complex interview		Not applicable

Coursebook	Page(s)	Language skills development	Language development	Question type practice	Useful Pearson resources
Reading	Unit 5 Lesson 4	60	Can make inferences or predictions about the content of newspaper and magazine articles from headings, titles, or headlines	Vocabulary: Hacking-related vocabulary	Adapt: Reading and writing: Fill in the blanks (Exercise 1A, page 60)
		61	Can distinguish supporting details from the main points in a text		Vocabulary: Identifying contrasts
			Can research a topic by reading simple academic texts		Not applicable
	Unit 5 Lesson 5	62	Can understand advice given in a linguistically complex text	Vocabulary: "playback," "upgrade," and "compact"	Create: Reorder paragraph (Review: The GV500 360-Degree Video Camera, page 62)
Listening	Unit 5 Lesson 1	55, 57	Can identify key information in linguistically complex conversations at natural speed	Grammar: Past perfect continuous Pronunciation: Consonants & consonant linking	Select: Fill in the blanks (Exercise 4C, page 57)
	Unit 5 Lesson 3	59	Can extract the main points from news items, etc., with opinions, arguments, and discussion	Grammar: + infinitives as subject complements Vocabulary: Technology solutions	Select: Multiple choice, single answer (Exercise 3A, page 59)



Using a General English coursebook as a foundation for PTE Core test preparation provides a solid base for language skills, and helps learners build the grammar, vocabulary, and functional language, they need to tackle the test with confidence.

PTE Core Teacher, Poland



A well-organized syllabus is like a roadmap, guiding learners through the labyrinth of language learning and helping them find the path to achieving their desired CLB band.

Director, Canada

Key components of any PTE Core syllabus

Regardless of the approach, the following fundamental components should feature to ensure a well-rounded PTE preparation course.

Language skills development: Teachers should prioritize comprehensive language practice of the four skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Strengthening these areas ensures that learners have the linguistic competence required to handle test tasks naturally and confidently, while also improving their overall communication skills.

Language development: Teachers should prioritize comprehensive language practice of grammar, vocabulary, and functional language. This is important because a solid foundation in these areas enables learners to effectively understand and produce English in a wide range of real-world contexts, including both the test environment and everyday communication.

Test format: Introducing the format of the PTE Core test early on helps learners understand the types of questions they will encounter, the timing for each section, and the overall flow of the test. This knowledge reduces anxiety and allows learners to focus on demonstrating their language skills, rather than worrying about the unknown.

Question type practice: Each section of the PTE Core contains specific question types, such as multiple choice, fill in the blanks, or email writing. Regular practice with these question formats allows learners to become comfortable with the variety of tasks they will face. Familiarity breeds efficiency. Learners who practise regularly will be better prepared to complete the tasks within the allotted time, increasing their chances of success.

Test tips and strategies: Getting learners to practise such techniques in the classroom ensures that they approach each task with a clear strategy, which can lead to more accurate and quicker responses.

Test practice: Practice tests allow learners to experience the pressure of time limits, assess their progress, and identify areas that need improvement. By incorporating test practice into the course, teachers help learners build endurance, refine their strategies, and feel more confident in their ability to perform under real test conditions.

Test practice	
Teacher benefits	Learner benefits
Identify strengths and areas for improvement	Boost familiarity with the test structure
Offer constructive feedback	Strengthen time management
Customize learning interventions	Practice fundamental language skills
Refine learners' test-taking strategies	Reinforce test strategies
Drive continuous improvement	Build confidence and reduce test surprises

Conclusion

In summary, designing a PTE Core syllabus involves the integration of a coursebook with targeted practice of PTE Core question types. The first step is to determine whether the primary goal is to emphasize language and skills development or test preparation, as this decision will guide the coursebook mapping process. Whether a skills-focused or a task-focused syllabus is chosen, the SAND framework offers a practical tool for critically evaluating course content, identifying which tasks align with PTE question types and what requires adaptation or new task creation.

Reflection

1. In which situations would it be more effective to design a task-focused syllabus rather than a skills-focused syllabus?
2. Which PTE Core question types are frequently practised in your current course materials?

Discovery activity

Decide whether you want to follow the skills-focused syllabus or the task-focused syllabus. Select a unit from your coursebook or a specific PTE Core question type, and draft a sample syllabus using a table format similar to the one on pages 27 and 28.



Planning PTE Core lessons

5

Introduction

Planning a PTE Core lesson requires a thoughtful approach that balances language development with test preparation. This section helps teachers design effective lessons by focusing on key elements essential to learner success. It explores how to select an appropriate lesson topic, define clear and measurable learning objectives, and choose relevant materials that support both language skills and PTE Core preparation. As a result, teachers can create lessons that are engaging, effective, and aligned with learners' test goals, as well as target areas for development.

Lesson topics

Incorporating a wide variety of topics in lessons is essential for PTE Core, as the test assesses a learner's ability to understand and respond to a range of real-world scenarios. Offering learners exposure to diverse themes such as travel, food, health, and entertainment not only mirrors the topics they will encounter on the test but also broadens their language. Engaging with various subjects ensures that learners develop a well-rounded vocabulary and context understanding, which enhances their ability to tackle different question types confidently.

Learning objectives

Learning objectives are clear, specific statements that define the language and/or language skills learners practise in a lesson. They focus on measurable and achievable outcomes, helping both teachers and learners track progress.

In a skills-focused syllabus, teachers can define main and subsidiary aims as follows:

Main aim: This is the primary goal of the lesson, typically centered around a general English skill or language item taught within a specific context. It represents the core focus of what learners are expected to learn or practise by the end of the lesson.

Subsidiary aims: These are secondary objectives that support the main aim. In PTE preparation, subsidiary aims often involve practising specific PTE question types and/or strategies, naturally aligning with the lesson's focus. If time permits, then a second subsidiary aim may target an additional language skill or language item to reinforce broader language development.

Examples

Topic – Friendship Skills	<p>Main aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will have practiced reading for gist and specific information within the context of online friendships</p> <p>Subsidiary aim: Learners will also be better able to recognize collocations in the Reading and Writing: Fill in the blanks question type</p>
Topic – Environment	<p>Main aim: By the end of the lessons, learners will be able to distinguish between defining and non-defining relative clauses in the context of the environment</p> <p>Subsidiary aim: Learners will also practice writing in the Write email question type</p>

By clearly defining both the main and subsidiary aims, teachers can ensure their lessons address both broader language development and specific PTE Core test preparation.



A successful PTE Core lesson is one that empowers learners to not only grasp the structure of the test, but to build confidence in their language skills. Effective lessons focus on language instruction, skills development, question type practice, and feedback.

Pearson PTE Core Teacher, UK

Lesson approach/framework

Each PTE Core lesson should follow a structured approach or framework, such as PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production), task-based learning, or text-based presentation. These approaches provide a clear sequence of stages to guide the lesson, ensuring learners are progressing. Different lesson types require different approaches, and these may need to be adapted to include additional test preparation elements. For example, an effective framework for teaching reading and listening skills with test preparation is shown on the next page.

1	Lead-in	Introduce the topic and engage learners in a short communicative task in pairs or groups to activate prior knowledge and spark interest
2	Pre-teach vocabulary	Present key vocabulary that is important for understanding the listening or reading text. Focus on words that learners may find challenging
3	Listening or reading for gist	Provide practice in listening or reading for general understanding to help learners grasp the main idea
4	Listening or reading for specific information and/or detail	Provide practice in listening or reading for specific information or detail to help learners get a deeper understanding of the text
5	Follow-up	Get learners to respond to the text, personalize it, and practise their production skills
6	Question type practice from the text	Practise a specific question type e.g., Fill in the blanks, using the reading or listening text as the source
7	Test strategies	Raise learners' awareness of useful test strategies for that same question type
8	Practice of the PTE Core question	Give learners the opportunity to practise a similar PTE Core question type from a different source, followed by constructive feedback on their performance. Find out how to access PTE Core resources here
9	Plenary/Review	Encourage learners to work together to review and consolidate what they have learned during the lesson



In each lesson plan, I try to provide general, and specific question type, strategies to my learners to help boost their performance on the test.

 Pearson PTE Core Teacher, UK

Materials

We recommend Pearson English language learning coursebooks such as *StartUp* or *Roadmap* as the source of *Future*, and *Speakout*. *Roadmap*, or *Business Partner* as the source for your PTE Core preparation classes. These books cover topics that align with those in the PTE Core test, making them a valuable resource for both teachers and learners. Many of the question types featured in the test are directly represented in these materials, which makes question type practice easy to integrate into your lessons. For some less common question types, teachers might need to supplement, adapt, and/or create activities for stages three, four and six on the Receptive Skills framework of the previous page, as exemplified below.

Language skill	PTE Core question type	Coursebook alignment	Suggested activity	Useful resources
Reading	Reading and writing: Fill in the blanks	Reading and writing: Fill in the blanks is not typically included in Pearson coursebooks	Choose several words from a reading text. For each word, using your knowledge of collocations and grammar (or a dictionary), brainstorm three distractors. E.g. for the word "replicate," distractors could be "paraphrase," "represent" and "rewrite."	PTE Core Guided Practice Test: Reading Access by clicking here
	Multiple choice, multiple answer	These question types are often found in Pearson coursebooks	Provide a short reading text. Write a multiple-choice question on the content or tone of the text. Make sure the answer is rooted in the text so that learners have to read to get the answer. Create five to seven options with some distractors.	Video Course for PTE Core: Reading Access by clicking here

Language skill	PTE Core question type	Coursebook alignment	Suggested activity	Useful resources
Reading (cont.)	Reorder paragraphs	These question types are more often found in Pearson coursebooks	Take a short reading that follows a logical and/or chronological order and includes discourse markers. Re-type each sentence separately and have learners reorder them either digitally or physically.	PTE Core Guided Practice Test: Reading Access by clicking here Video Course for PTE Core: Reading Access by clicking here
	Fill in the blanks		Provide a short reading text, removing three to five key content words (nouns, adjectives, or verbs). Add three distractors, and ask learners to place the correct words into the blanks.	
	Multiple choice, single answer		Provide a short reading text. Write a multiple-choice question on the content or tone of the text. Make sure the answer is rooted in the text so that learners have to read to get the answer. Create four options with three distractors.	

Language development

In the scenario where the main aim is a language aim, such as defining and non-defining relative clauses, teachers need to select the appropriate lesson framework or approach to introduce and practise the target language. Incorporating a language clarification stage to teach or review grammar, vocabulary, or functional language will ensure learners can recognize and use these language items, enhancing their performance in real-world contexts and in the test.

Discrete language support can also be provided through:

- Formative assessment

Focusing on learners' example sentences, paragraphs, or responses during practice activities. Providing error correction and feedback that highlight both accurate language use and areas where learners can improve, helping them refine their language skills in context.

- Emerging language

Anticipating tricky language items that may arise naturally during lessons, whether from texts or practice questions. Taking advantage of these moments to clarify and reinforce language items that learners may struggle with.

Conclusion

In conclusion, PTE Core lesson planning requires balancing language development with test preparation. Teachers should select relevant coursebooks, and adapt and supplement where necessary, and include targeted test preparation strategies and question type practice. By following this approach, teachers can create engaging, effective lessons that not only prepare learners for the test, but also boost their overall language confidence and skills, setting them up for success in both the test and real-world communication.

Reflection

1. How were you taught to plan a lesson? What is different about planning PTE Core lessons?
2. In what ways can you incorporate test strategies and question type practice into your lesson planning without compromising communicative language teaching principles?

Discovery activity

Identify one general English lesson from a coursebook that practises a PTE question type and one that does not. For the latter, incorporate question type practice into the procedure/stages of the lesson.



PTE Core resources and glossary

PTE Core resources for teachers

1. PTE Core overview, test format, and scoring

Pearson's website offers a comprehensive overview of PTE Core, including its format and scoring details. This is an essential resource for teachers seeking a clear, in-depth understanding of the test structure and evaluation criteria.

2. Free taster test

A short sample test with five listening and reading questions. Great for introducing learners to the test format in a low-stakes setting. Teachers can use this as a diagnostic tool to identify initial strengths and areas for improvement.

3. Video courses

A helpful teaching aid, especially for visual learners. Each question type has a video explaining the question, a practice task to reinforce learning and a follow-up video from an expert explaining how they would have approached the question. Sign up for [Smart Prep](#) to gain access.

4. Guided practice tests

These guided tests are ideal for targeted practice sessions in class or as homework assignments. Teachers can assign tests based on learners' needs or as practice before test day. Sign up for [Smart Prep](#) to gain access.

5. Test tip documents

Teachers can use these documents to teach test-taking strategies and provide learners with actionable tips that they can apply in practice. Sign up for [Smart Prep](#) to gain access.

6. Test format videos

Teachers can use these videos as a teaching tool to walk learners through the test format, ensuring they understand the flow of the test and the expectations for each section. Sign up for [Smart Prep](#) to gain access.

7. StartUp & Roadmap

These coursebooks are an excellent resource for teaching general English skills within real-world contexts, making them a strong foundation for PTE Core preparation. With their focus on practical language use, they help learners develop the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills they need for both everyday communication and test readiness.

Glossary of ELT terms

Accuracy: Using grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation correctly

Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB): These describe 12 levels of ability in each of the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing). The CLB are used in Canada to describe the language ability of people who are learning English

Collocation: Pairs or groups of words that commonly appear together, like “fast food” (not “quick food”)

Communicative Approach: A teaching style focused on learning through real communication rather than memorizing rules

Compounds: Terms made up of two or more words, such as “washing machine,” “mother-in-law,” or “passer-by”

Context:

1. The situation in which language is used in class
2. Words surrounding a term that help convey its meaning

Controlled practice: Practice where learners have limited choices in language use, emphasizing correct usage

Diagnostic test: A test that helps identify a learner’s language difficulties, aiding the teacher in planning future lessons

Fluency: Speaking naturally and smoothly without stopping or frequently repeating

Focus on form: Concentrating on identifying and practicing specific language structures

Focus on meaning: Emphasizing understanding the intended message or concept behind the language being used

Focus on use: Concentrating on how language is applied in real-life situations, ensuring that learners understand when and where to use specific language forms

Focus on pronunciation: Working on the correct sounds, stress, and intonation in spoken language to improve clarity

Function: The purpose behind communication, like giving directions or asking for permission

Functional exponent: A phrase that exemplifies a communicative function, such as “How about...”

Intonation: The pitch changes in speech that convey emotions, such as anger or happiness; intonation may rise, fall, or fluctuate

Language awareness: A strong understanding of language rules and how language functions

Lead-in: A warm-up activity at the start of a lesson to engage students

Freer practice: Practice where learners have more freedom to use language creatively and in various contexts

Lexical set: A collection of words related to the same theme or topic

Lexis: Words or word groups, such as “house,” “furniture,” or “table”

Listen/read for gist: Reading or listening for a general sense or main idea of the text

Listen/read for specific information: Quickly scanning or listening to a text to find particular details or facts, such as names, dates, or key points

Listen/read for detail: Engaging with a text to understand each word and meaning precisely

Personalisation: Helping learners relate new language to their own experiences and lives

Peer-assessment: When learners evaluate each other’s progress and understanding

Pre-teach (vocabulary): Introducing essential vocabulary from a text before reading or listening

Productive skills: Skills where learners actively use language, like speaking and writing

Receptive skills: Skills where learners receive language through reading or listening

Scoring criteria: The standards by which a test taker’s performance is evaluated

Self-assessment: When learners evaluate their own progress and understanding

Sentence stress: Emphasis placed on particular words within a sentence, often those carrying important meaning

Skill/Sub-skill: Language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) that can be broken down into specific techniques, like identifying main ideas

Student-centred: Activities that prioritize learner interaction, creativity, and independence

Target language: The specific language focus of a lesson, which may include grammar, vocabulary, or functional language

Task: A classroom activity with a clear goal or outcome for students to achieve

Traits: Items measured in PTE Core that contribute to overall scores. These include content; oral fluency; pronunciation; form; development, structure and coherence; grammar; general linguistic range; email conventions; and vocabulary

Word stress: The increased emphasis on a syllable in a word compared to others around it

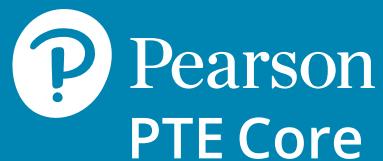


Helping learners succeed in PTE Core starts with building their confidence in each skill. As teachers, we're not only helping learners to prepare for a test, we're teaching them communication skills they'll use for life. 

Pearson Global PTE Teacher Training Manager, UK



Learn more about



pearsonpte.com