

What is BULATS?

BULATS stands for the Business Language Testing Service.

It is a multilingual assessment test, covering English, Spanish, French and German. It was developed by the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (now Cambridge English Language Assessment), the Universidad de Salamanca, the Alliance Française, and the Goethe Institut.

BULATS is designed to test candidates' ability to work and communicate in an international business environment. The test is now used by companies, schools, universities, and immigration services worldwide to assess language ability. This may be for benchmarking language competence, recruitment, on-going professional development, or entry to business-related training and study programmes.

For companies, BULATS can provide an excellent snapshot of the Business English skills and level of their workforce. BULATS has been used by the United Nations, Tesco, Hitachi, and GlaxoSmithKline among many others.

A candidate's BULATS result is valid forever. However, as an individual's English level may improve or decline over time, employers and institutions may require an up-to-date score.

Learners can re-take the BULATS after one month of their test, if they did not achieve the score they required. However, a minimum of 3 months is recommended, in order to allow sufficient enough time to further prepare.

BULATS Test Format

There are 2 types of test: online and paper-based. The online test is increasingly popular.

The Online BULATS Test

The online test can be taken at any computer at any time in a registered centre, under exam conditions.

There are 3 parts – Reading & Listening, Speaking, and Writing. They can be taken together, or individually, allowing the test to reflect the organisation's or test-taker's needs. The Reading & Listening parts of the BULATS tests are available in all 4 languages, while Speaking and Writing are currently available in English only. They will be available in the other languages in the future.

The online BULATS tests are 'adaptive', so the level of difficulty will reflect the candidate's answers. If s/he is doing well, the questions become more complex and vice versa.

Reading & Listening (60 minutes approx.): Test takers are exposed to a variety of tasks and topics which are all set in real-life work contexts.

The results of this part are immediately available after the test.



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Speaking (15 minutes): there are 5 parts to the test. An interview about the candidate’s personal experiences and interests, a text to read aloud, a 1-minute presentation on a work-related topic, a 1-minute presentation using graphic information, and giving an opinion on 5 questions on a work-related theme.

Answers are recorded online and then assessed by external examiners.

Writing (45 minutes): there are 2 writing tasks. In the first, candidates write a short email or message of 50-60 words. In the second, they write a report or letter of 180-200 words.

Responses are submitted online, where they are marked by an examiner.

The Paper-based BULATS test

The paper-based test can be taken until January 2017, when it will be stopped and the exam will be online only. As with the online BULATS test, there are 3 papers: Reading & Listening, Speaking, and Writing. They can be taken together or individually. The language is based on common working situations in an international environment. All parts can be taken in English, Spanish, French, and German.

Listening & Reading: the Listening test takes 50 minutes, the Reading test 60 minutes. The Reading test also includes a Language Knowledge test which looks at grammar as well as vocabulary.

Speaking (12 minutes): this is taken face-to-face with an examiner, and consists of 3 parts – an interview on the candidate’s life, work and studies; a 1-minute presentation from a choice of 3 subjects; and a simulated discussion, where the test-taker participates in a role play with the examiner, and then answers some questions on a related theme.

Writing (45 minutes): as with the online BULATS test, candidates write 2 texts – a short email or message, and a longer report or letter.

BULATS Scores

BULATS tests are score on a scale of 1-100. This is then mapped to the common European Framework of Reference for language competence as follows.

BULATS score	Level description	CEFR level
90–100	Upper advanced	C2
75–89	Advanced	C1
60–74	Upper intermediate	B2
40–59	Intermediate	B1
20–39	Elementary	A2
0–19	Beginner	A1

BULATS test-takers are also given ‘+’, ‘-’, or ‘=’ For Speaking and Writing, to show whether they are high, middle, or low within the band.

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Recent Changes

Since August 2014, BULATS has no longer been accepted by the UK for visa purposes.

In January 2017, Cambridge English Language Assessment will no longer offer the French, Spanish or German BULATS tests. The other partners are also reviewing whether they will continue offering the non-English tests at the same time.

BULATS Preparation with Specialist Language Courses

SLC designs and arranges BULATS Preparation courses so learners can achieve the score they need. Courses can be:

- ✓ Bespoke, organisation-specific programmes delivered in-country, in-company or online
- ✓ In-country, immersion IELTS courses in the UK
- ✓ Online One-to-One or Closed Group Tuition BULATS courses

Contact us for full details.

About the Author

Chris Moore is Managing Director of [Specialist Language Courses](#) (SLC), an international business and technical language training consultancy. SLC works with companies around the world to improve their language capabilities. BULATS is now used by international companies to assess workforce Business English language skills.

Chris worked with Tesco on their English for International Managers programme, where he integrated BULATS into the syllabus and ran train the trainer courses for local BULATS Preparation courses in Poland.

Please contact Chris on chris@specialistlanguagecourses.com or on +44 1273 900213 to discuss how you can best prepare your workforce for the BULATS test.



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