


AMOREY GETHIN

HOW to SUCCEED

in
Cambridge
Certificate
of Proficiency
in English



How to Succeed in Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English

Amorey Gethin

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I would have found it very difficult to manage without the help of several friends and colleagues. Ivor Pemberton's great experience, second to none, has been of tremendous value to me, as always, and I want to thank him and Christopher Feeney for the affectionate and expert care, thoroughness and insight with which they went through the text of this book for me. Without their gentle but apt and perceptive judgements it would have had many more faults; I suspect any that remain are where I did not take their advice.

My special thanks are due to Mrs Caroline Edge, Mr Matthew Grant, Dr Rachel O'Higgins, and Mrs Pauline Skyrme-Jones for their help in testing the Paper 1 material for this edition. Without their prompt and friendly co-operation it could not have been done.

I am very grateful to Dr M. F. Wakelin, who took a great deal of trouble at very short notice to judge the sample compositions (Paper 2) for me. I could not have done without his help.

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Introduction

It is important to make clear who this book is written for.

The examination authority, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, gives candidates one of five grades at the Proficiency examination: A for a very good pass, B for a good pass, C for a pass, D for a narrow fail, and E for a bad fail.

The advice I give here is not for those who, without much difficulty, will get a grade A "very good" pass. They have little or no need of it. All I think such lucky people need to do is study three of the Examinations Syndicate's publications. They are *Cambridge Examinations in English: Changes of Syllabus in 1975*, *First Certificate and Certificate of Proficiency in English: Report on the Work of Candidates in the Examinations of June and December 1975* and *Cambridge Examinations in English: Changes of Syllabus in 1984*. These tell students, in outline, what is expected from them and what they should aim for. (More detailed reports on particular papers are published as well from time to time.)

But most candidates are in a very different situation. They know they will not get the highest marks. The important question for them is simply, "Can I pass?"

There are a number of simple practical things these candidates can do to get many more marks than they might otherwise get.

Moreover, in those parts of the examination where there is some sort of composition work (Paper 2, and Paper 3 Section B – see the examination summaries below) it is foolish for most candidates to try to write perfectly in every way the examiners ask for; they will probably meet with catastrophe if they do. It is much better for them if they can be realistic and use practical methods to write good English and give good answers, even if that English and those answers are not up to the ideal standard the Examinations Syndicate is asking for at the level of an A.

There is a truth about language examinations that one should never forget: one must show the examiner **only what one knows**, never what one does not know.

It is to help students to be practical in these various ways that I have written this guide. If you can follow my suggestions you will probably not get an A; but you will have a very good chance of getting a C, or even a B.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book **begins** with general guidance on preparing yourself for the examination. Following that, each paper is discussed in turn. At the beginning of **each** discussion you will find an example of the paper, which is like the one you will get in the real examination. The Reading Comprehension questions of Paper 1 have been tested to make sure they are of the same **standard** of difficulty as the Syndicate sets for that paper. The sample **compositions** of Paper 2 have been judged by examiners with long experience of **marking** such compositions for the Syndicate. My questions for the **Use of English** Paper 3 are based on a careful study of the Syndicate's **papers** over the last eight and a half years. The oral part of the examination, Papers 4 and 5, is the part that has been changed most for the new **form** of the examination (1984). My material for these papers is based on **the** specimen material published by the Syndicate in 1982. Even in **this part**, however, the basic principles of both examining and preparing for the examination are the same as they have been for many years.

The **techniques** for dealing with the different papers are explained, and **model answers** are suggested for them all. For Papers 1 and 3 I have added **detailed notes** to the answers to show candidates how to work on each **individual point**. I have also given a number of standard expressions that should **be** useful in the composition and oral parts of the examination (Papers 2 and 5). At the end of the book is a list of Classic Difficulties that **worry** many students of English.

EXAMINATION SUMMARY**Summary of the Certificate of Proficiency in English examination**

<i>Name and length of paper</i>	<i>Section</i>	<i>Contents of paper</i>	<i>Approximate marks for each part of paper</i>	<i>Total marks for each paper</i>
<i>Paper 1</i>	A	25 sentences with multiple-choice blanks	18	40
<i>Reading Comprehension</i>	B	3 or more comprehension passages with 15 multiple-choice questions	22	
<i>1 hour</i>				

Name and length of paper	Section	Contents of paper	Approximate marks for each part of paper	Total marks for each paper
Paper 2 Composition 2 hours		2 compositions (description, narrative, discussion or other type)	20 for each composition	40
Paper 3 Use of English 2 hours	A	1 A passage with blanks (single choice) 2 Re-forming sentences 3 Completing sentences 4 Re-forming sentences	24	40
	B	Comprehension passage with mainly analytical questions	16	
Paper 4 Listening Comprehension (approx. 30 minutes in groups of up to 30 candidates)		3 or more recordings on tape with various questions		20
Paper 5 Oral Interview (approx. 20 minutes)	(i)	Photograph: description and discussion questions		40
	(ii)	Reading aloud a short passage		
	(iii)	Talking in a practical situation, or discussion		
Total possible marks in the examination				180

You should aim to get a total of about 108 to pass the whole examination.

MARKING

The Examinations Syndicate does not announce a fixed mark that a candidate must get in order to pass the examination. This is decided after each examination. I will try to explain why below.

As you will see from the examination summaries above there is a maximum of 40 marks for each written paper and for Paper 5, and 20 for Paper 4. Very broadly, you should pass if you get about 108 marks on all the papers together, which is 60 per cent.

But remember that it is the *total* marks of all the papers together that decide whether you pass or not. So don't get too depressed if, when you do a paper for practice, you get less than 60 per cent for that one paper; you may get higher marks on other papers, so your total may be enough. On the other hand, don't get too pleased with yourself if you do well on just one paper in your practice. You might not do so well on the other papers.

In order to be fair, the Examinations Syndicate uses different marking systems for different sorts of paper.

Paper 1 (Reading Comprehension) is what is called an "objective" test; there are definite right or wrong answers to each question, which are marked by computer; there is no personal judgement by an examiner. The level of marks that candidates are getting on Paper 1 is then compared with the marks each individual examiner is giving on Papers 2 or 3 (Composition or Use of English). The marks given by an examiner who is marking lower than the average marks candidates are getting on Paper 1 may be raised by a suitable amount; if an examiner's marking is higher than the Paper 1 marks, that examiner's marks may be lowered.

This method also of course helps the Syndicate deal with any problems of a whole examination or one particular paper being easier or more difficult than another examination or paper. It is obviously impossible to make sure that all questions are exactly equal in difficulty. Some set in June 1985, for example, may be either easier or more difficult than those in December 1984.

Furthermore, to overcome this second problem, the various papers are discussed carefully with the marking examiners, who are asked to say if they think a paper is especially hard, or if they find more candidates than usual are getting high marks on a certain paper, and so on. In this way the Syndicate can form a judgement about each paper; it can then decide what the pass mark (and the mark for the different grades) for the *whole* examination is to be.

As an example, let us imagine that for the December 1985 exam the total "pass mark" for grade C is 102, but that, when they come to June 1986, the examiners judge that Paper 2 is a good deal easier than the

Paper 2 of December 1985, and that therefore a candidate ought to get more marks on that paper than she or he would have got in December 1985. The Syndicate might then decide that for June 1986 the pass mark for the whole examination will be 106 (compared to the 102 of December 1985).

This purely imaginary example is of course a simple one. The reality is more complicated. But it shows the principle, and I hope you can understand why the Syndicate cannot announce a fixed pass mark, or a fixed mark for the various grades.

General Guidance

To pass the examinations you need:

- 1 the right preparation before the examination
- 2 the right technique during the examination itself

There are many candidates with a good enough knowledge of English to pass who have failed because they have not prepared in the right way and because they have used the wrong technique, or no technique at all, in the examination itself. But there are also many students with less knowledge of English who have passed, through good preparation and good examination technique.

You may feel that what I am saying is that the best way to pass is by using tricks. But that is not really true. What I am saying is that you can do best by being systematic and self-disciplined. And I also believe that most of the things you should do to prepare for the examination and that you should do in the examination itself are the same things people should do in any case to learn a language well, even if they are not interested in examinations at all.

PREPARATION

Before anything else you must obviously know in outline what is going to be in each of the five papers in the examination, and I hope the examination summary above and the examples printed later in the book make this clear.

But this is only the beginning. It is essential to know too, in detail, exactly what sort of English the examiners will ask you to show you understand, what sort of subjects they will probably ask you to write about, and what sort of grammatical or vocabulary points they are likely to test you on. Later in this book you will find detailed studies of what has been tested in all the five different sorts of paper.

It is clear that you must be prepared for the sort of questions you will get, and clear that you must practise answering some of the same sort of questions. (You can do this with *Cambridge Proficiency: Examination Practice 1*, which is a set of tests, with a cassette, published by Cambridge University Press and the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate; students preparing for the examination on their own should buy the *Teacher's Book* as well.)

But please do not make the mistake that, unfortunately, so many

students make. Do not believe that doing hundreds, perhaps thousands, of test questions, and discovering the answers, is the right way to prepare. Do not believe that if you do 600 questions and answers you will be twice as well prepared, will have learnt twice as much, as if you do only 300. Very often this sort of preparation just means going through automatic, mechanical motions without thought: "Ah! So that's the answer, is it! Next question please!"

Ten thousand test questions will be useless to you unless you study the *method* needed to answer, and the *method* needed to prepare. If you doubt what I say, remind yourself of the fact that you will almost certainly never get exactly the same question again. You should spend the time studying how to be ready for questions you have never seen before. It is much better (for both student and teacher) to spend an hour thinking carefully about how to do five questions, than to spend an hour doing fifty questions and answers without thinking about them. I cannot emphasise too much that the question the candidate should constantly ask is "How?" In this way you can build up confidence that you can deal with almost any problem.

This point about dealing with problems leads on to what is probably the most important piece of advice I have to offer. It is important not only for people taking examinations; it is a basic principle for the learning of foreign languages.

PERSONAL WEAKNESSES

You must learn about yourself. You must discover what your own special needs are in English.

There is no need to "learn" the whole of English "equally", so to speak – spending equal time and effort on each part. This is a waste. You should pick out what makes English different from your own language and concentrate on those parts. And then, above all, you should pick out your own personal weaknesses in English, pick out your own special problems, find out what mistakes you most often make.

Make a list of them.

It will be best if, in your preparation, you can practise doing the various sorts of work you will be asked to do in the examination; in particular you should practise compositions. You should then make a careful note of any mistakes you make more than once. Count up how many times you make each mistake, and the mistake you make most often should be at the top of your list, the next most common in second place, and so on.

For instance, if your own language is Japanese or Persian, you may find that the problem of articles (**a, the**) comes at the top of your list. If

you speak German, you may find **if** is your **biggest** problem. If your mother-tongue is French you may find you are **always** having trouble with **since**. And if Spanish or Italian is your language, you may constantly forget to use **it** when you should.

But these are only examples of mistakes typical of certain languages. They may or may not be your particular personal mistakes. As I say, these *personal* ones are the most important of all to discover.

It is surprising that so few students organise their studies and their examination preparations in this way, for the logic of the method is so clear and so simple:

Find out your problems, and deal with them.

This is connected with another important truth, which can be expressed by a slogan:

The problem is not remembering the answer; the problem is remembering the problem.

An example of what I mean is given by the many thousands, perhaps millions, of German speaking students of English who repeatedly make the mistake of using **would** with **if**: "If I would do that . . ." etc. Most of them, if you asked them how one uses **if** in English, would give a correct answer, I think. They *know* how **if** should be used. But they constantly forget the *problem*, and so, unthinking, fall into the same trap again and again. You have probably had the experience where the teacher points at something you have written and says "What's wrong with that?" and you hit your head and say "Oh no! How terrible!", because you immediately recognise the mistake and *already know* it is wrong.

But even when they do not already know what is right, most students will find that if they constantly keep their particular problems in mind, they will very soon and very easily and naturally learn the "answer", learn the correct English, simply because they are so often in contact with the point.

This is a much better and more pleasant method of learning than spending hours and hours trying to learn rules by heart. That nearly always fails. The student spends, let us say, a week learning some rules about the past tense. Six weeks later she (or he) has probably forgotten most of what she has learnt – because she has not reminded herself constantly that there is such a problem in English. But if you keep looking up a problem in your grammar book, or, even better, keep looking out for it in your reading material, you will very quickly learn how to say it right – without boring learning. You must of course understand. But learn rules by heart – no!

So the key is:

Find out and remember your problems!

At the end of the book you will find a list of about 280 words – Classic Difficulties. The words are many of those that are often used wrongly in some way. The idea is that these words should act like red warning lights in your mind. So it is a good plan, shortly before the examination, to try to fix in your mind as many of these words as possible: then you have them there as reminders of possible dangers.

READING

In practice, reading is probably what most people learn most from when they are learning a new language. You should do as much of it as you can. Reading and listening to a language – in other words, observing it – are in the end the only way you *can* learn it.

It is obviously sensible to prepare for the examinations by reading the sort of English you will find in the various papers and the sort of English you will need to use yourself in those papers.

At the Proficiency level there is no doubt at all that the best reading is newspapers and magazines. I do not mean that you should not read “literature”. If you are interested in English literature, of course you should read it. But you must understand that it will not prepare you so well for the tasks you will face in the Proficiency examination. There, the sort of subject and the sort of English the examiners will ask you to read and understand will be the sort you can find in the *Guardian*, *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times*, the *Observer* (also a Sunday paper); and in weekly magazines such as the *Listener* (published by the BBC, and very varied in content), the *Spectator*, *New Statesman*, *New Society*, *New Scientist*, and others of the same kind. Read as widely as you can in two or three of these publications; the more different topics you are interested in, the better.

At the same time you will find that these newspapers and magazines will provide you with the kind of “active” vocabulary that you will need far more in the examination than you will need the vocabulary of literature. The Examinations Syndicate has, very rightly I think, made literature optional and emphasised the practical and modern in the main test.

I must, however, give one very important warning. Do not try in your own writing to imitate in every way the language you find in the publications I have mentioned above. Remember the big gap that there nearly always is between “passive” and “active” knowledge of a language. Notice the grammar, the vocabulary, what words go with other words, but be very careful about copying the style; otherwise you may get into a

fearful mess. Consider, after all, that even in *your* language there are not very many people who can write successfully in the style of *your* good newspapers.

GRAMMAR BOOKS

As regards grammar (and many other things as well) you will find practically all you need for the Proficiency level in *A New Way to Proficiency in English* (Blackwell, 2nd ed., 1980). If you need a grammar that is more complete, in the sense that it covers all points, from elementary to advanced, often in greater detail (but without any exercises) I would recommend R. A. Close, *A Reference Grammar for Students of English* (Longman, 1981). As I have suggested above, you should not try to learn the material in either of these books by heart. That is the sure way to boredom and frustration without any real progress. You should read through the whole book as soon as you can. There is no more harmful idea in language learning than the idea that there is some fixed natural order in which grammatical points or constructions should be learnt; as if, for instance, the present tense “comes before” the past, or the other way round. Language expresses life, and in life all sorts of different things usually come together at more or less the same time. We can’t wait till Saturday (and certainly not till next March) before we need **can** or the **-ing** form.

So find out about all the main characteristics of the language as quickly as possible, and continually refer to them, again and again, noticing them in what you read, and looking them up in the grammar books if you need to. In this way you will make the grammar a part of yourself in a more natural way – always seeing it in a context – and you will spare yourself a lot of boredom.

The grammar books mentioned above will be most useful to you if you think of them as constantly *reminding* you of the special problems of English.

There is also a very immediate practical reason for reading the whole book without delay: this will show you what is in the book, and it is only when you know this that it will be as useful to you as it should be. In particular, notice and use the list of verb patterns. Once again, do not try to learn them by heart. It is horrible even to *think* of doing such a thing. But every time you are in the smallest doubt about how to use a verb, look it up in the list. If you really do that every time you are not absolutely sure, you will learn very fast indeed.