

Medical English Tests: OET

The Occupational English Test (OET) is used in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore to assess the Medical English skills of a wide range of international healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses and AHPs.

Background

The OET was established in the late 1980s, and developed under contract to the Australian Government. It was designed by Professor Tim McNamara at the University of Melbourne – one of the original developers of IELTS.

Since then it has undergone continuous assessment and review, led by the Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC) at the University of Melbourne, in order to ensure it is fit for purpose today. LTRC is an international leader in research and development in language assessment.

The test is now owned by Cambridge Boxhill Language Assessment, a joint venture between Cambridge English Language Assessment (who co-own IELTS) and Box Hill Institute, a leading vocational and higher education provider

Objectives

The OET is designed specifically to assess the English language skills of international healthcare professionals wanting to work in an English-speaking environment and reflects over 30 years of research and practice.

It consists of 4 papers: Listening and Reading cover a broad range of generally applicable healthcare topics, while Speaking and Writing target the specific areas required by 12 professions within healthcare.

These are

- Dentistry
- Dietetics
- Medicine
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Optometry
- Pharmacy
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Radiography
- Speech Pathology
- Veterinary Science

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Test Format

There are 4 skills-based papers: Listening, Reading, Writing, Speaking.

The Listening and Reading papers are designed to assess a candidate's ability to understand spoken and written English, based on health-related topics and tasks common to all professions.

The Writing and Speaking papers are specific to the 12 individual healthcare professions – designed to reflect common tasks performed in the workplace.

Sub-test (duration)	Content	Shows candidates can:
Listening (50 minutes)	2 tasks Common to all 12 professions	follow and understand a range of health-related spoken materials such as patient consultations and lectures.
Reading (60 minutes)	2 tasks Common to all 12 professions	read and understand different types of text on health-related subjects.
Writing (45 minutes)	1 task Specific to each profession	write a letter in a clear and accurate way which is relevant for the reader.
Reading time: 5 minutes Writing time: 40 minutes		
Speaking (20 minutes)	2 tasks Specific to each profession	effectively communicate in a real-life context through the use of role plays.

OET Scores

OET grade	Description of ability
A	Very high level of performance
B	High level of performance, i.e. able to use English with fluency and accuracy adequate for professional needs
C	Good level of performance; however, not acceptable to a range of health and medical councils
D	Moderate level of performance: requires improvement
E	Low level of performance: requires considerable improvement



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International candidates need to score a minimum of B in all 4 papers in order to achieve the standard required by those regulatory bodies that recognise the OET's validity.

Test Fees

In 2015, the test fees are AUD \$587

OET Recognition

The [OET is recognised by over 20 regulatory healthcare bodies and councils](#) in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. These include The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), the Nursing and Midwifery Councils of New Zealand, and the Singapore Medical Council. OET is also recognised by the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection and many Australian universities and healthcare education bodies, including the Australian College of Nursing.

See for more details visit: <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/>

OET Preparation with Specialist Language Courses

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

- ✓ Bespoke, organisation-specific programmes delivered in-country, in-company or online
- ✓ Online course - [English for Nurses: Getting the Essentials Right](#)

[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. OET is now widely used across Australia, New Zealand and Singapore to assess whether international nurses have sufficient English to work in those countries.

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



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