

Changes to CPE in 2013 – a teflgeek guide.

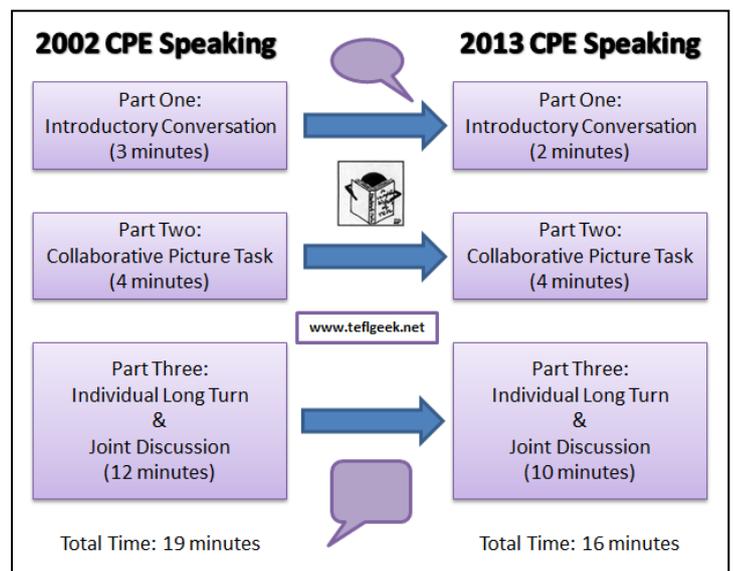
The big news is that the Use of English paper is disappearing. Sort of. But not really. What's actually happening is that aspects of the Use of English paper are being subsumed into some of the other papers. But we'll get to that a little later on! This is all part of a drive to make the process of actually taking the exam a little less stressful and less time consuming - overall the exam is being reduced from 6 hours (technically I think it currently adds up to 5 hours and 59 minutes) to 4 hours (again, technically it's 3 hours 56 minutes).

Changes to the Speaking Paper:

The speaking paper is basically the same as before - it's just been tweaked slightly. You'll notice the timings are shorter in Parts one and three.

This is because in Part one, the broader general discussion questions have been dropped - the focus of part one is now only on the candidate, their lives and general interests.

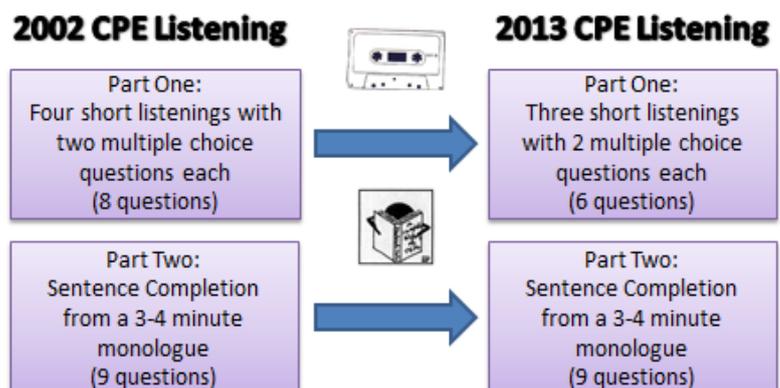
Also, in Part three, the immediate follow up question to the long turn (e.g. What do you think?) has been dropped, whilst the broader topic related question has been retained. So, for example, where Candidate A has been giving their opinion on sports on TV, Candidate B will be (briefly) asked if sports people are paid too much.



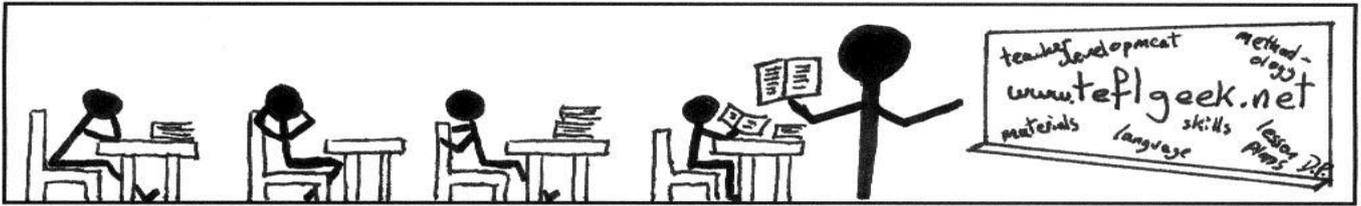
Changes to the Listening Paper:

Overall, the timing for the listening paper remains the same, but the number of questions changes from 28 to 30.

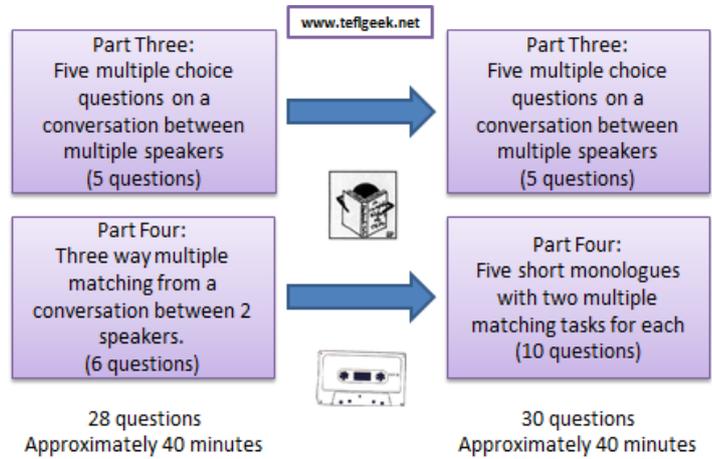
In Part one, the number of listening texts is reduced by one and the number of questions by two.



Parts two and three remain unchanged.



Part four however is a completely different task. Gone is the conversation where learners decide if Frank, Mary or Both hate football. In comes the task known and beloved to all CAE candidates, where learners have to try and do two things at the same time. Five short conversations with two separate (but linked) multiple matching tasks. It seems exactly the same as the CAE task in terms of design, though presumably the language and speed of speech will be at CPE level!

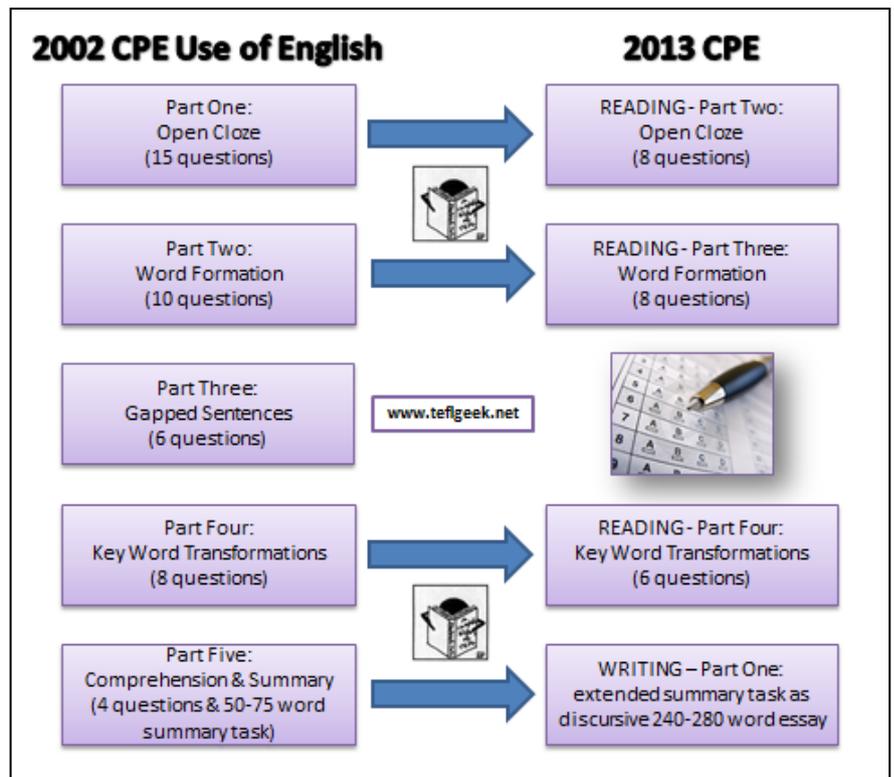


Changes to the Use of English Paper:

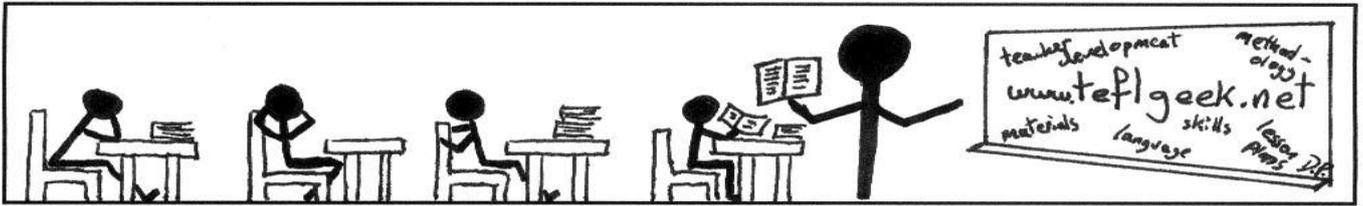
This is where the big changes come! Basically the Use of English paper is no more!

CPE is switching to a four paper format - which probably accounts for most of the two hour time reduction - and aspects of the Use of English paper are being incorporated into the Reading and Writing papers. The Open Cloze, Word Formation and Key Word Transformation tasks are all being reduced in size slightly, and move over to the Reading paper.

The gapped sentences disappear off into examination limbo - gone but not forgotten, but of no more use to us for now.



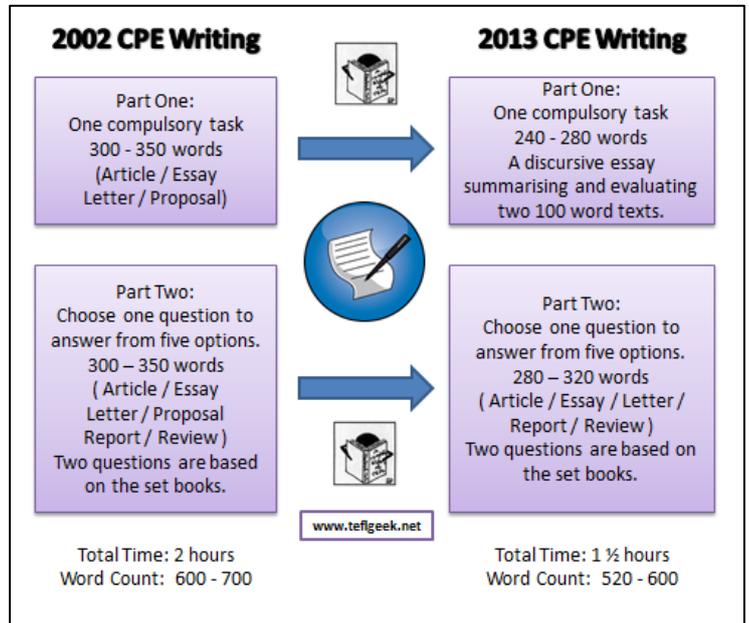
The comprehension questions likewise disappear, but the summary task is reborn in a new extended format in the writing paper - becoming the compulsory first question: a discursive essay which summarises and evaluates the ideas in two 100-word texts and adds the writer's opinion on the topic. All within a 240-280 word limit.



Changes to the Writing Paper:

As just mentioned above, the writing paper has changed with the use of an adapted summary task for the first (compulsory) question. Candidates now need to access two 100 word texts and distill the main ideas (as they relate to the essay question), evaluate those ideas and provide their own opinions on the topic. The good news is that the word count has gone down - to 240-280 words.

In the Part two question, little has changed in terms of format and task type, although the proposal genre seems to have been dropped from the list of possible text types. The word count here has also been reduced to 280-320 words.



The changes to the word counts mean a reduction from 600-700 to the revised 520-600 for the entire paper - but this also reflects the reduction in the total time for the revised paper: candidates now only have an hour and a half to complete it all.

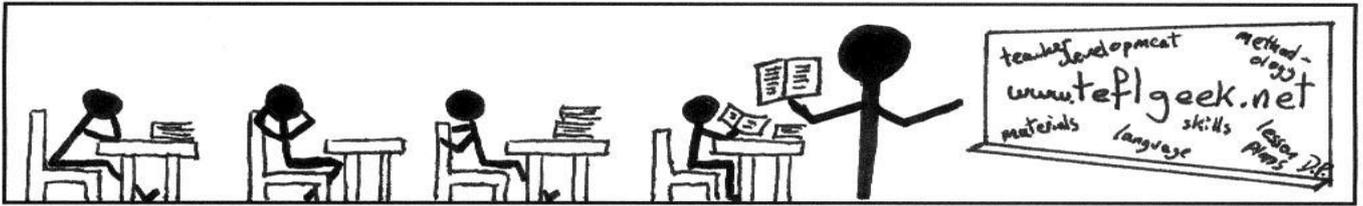
Changes to the Reading Paper:

As you'll see from the graphic below, the changes to the reading paper are perhaps the greatest.

Incorporating aspects of both the 2002 Reading & Use of English Papers, the revised reading paper weighs in at a hefty seven sections and 53 questions - though the 90-minute time limit stays the same.

The initial lexical cloze task remains - in abbreviated form, reducing from three texts to one, and from 18 questions to eight.

The next three sections are refugees from the now defunct Use of English paper: open cloze, word formation and key word transformations all make their new homes here, though again in slightly reduced circumstances: only eight open cloze questions (formerly 15), eight word formation questions (formerly 10) and six key word transformation questions (formerly 8). There doesn't seem to be any change in the structure of these tasks - though a close reading of the rubrics suggests a slight shift in emphasis away from vocabulary and more towards grammar in the open cloze, and

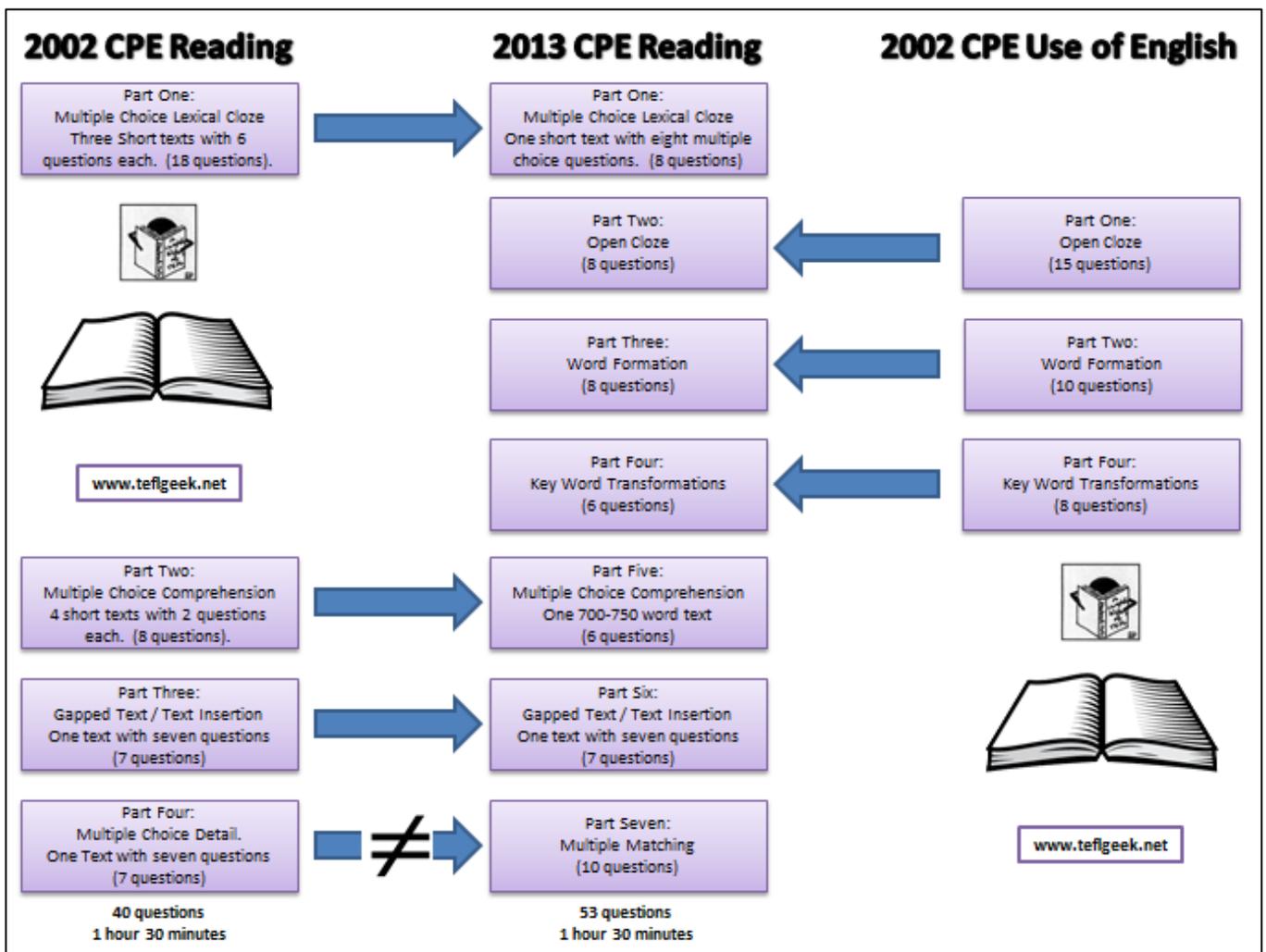


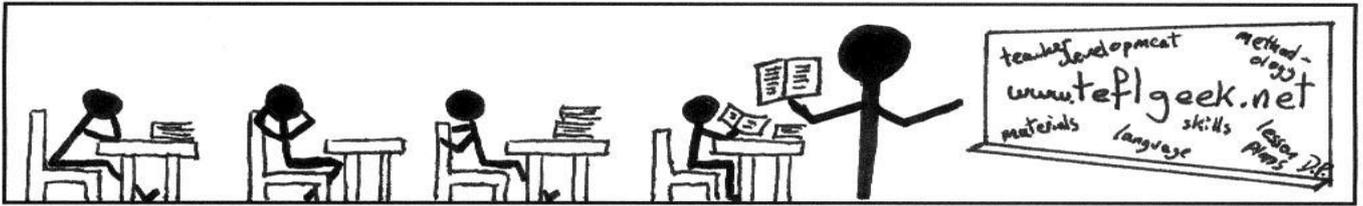
the inclusion of "collocation" in the key word transformation rubric also suggests teachers and learners might want to spend a bit more time on this area.

Part Five of the 2013 Reading is essentially the same as Part 2 of the 2002 Reading. The task changes slightly though, as it's no longer two questions each for four separate texts, but simply eight questions based on one longer (700 - 750 word) text.

The gapped text task (part three in the 2002 paper, part six in the 2013) is unchanged.

What was the final part (Part 4) of the 2002 paper - the seven question multiple choice task - is no longer in use. Replacing it for Part seven of the 2013 paper is a ten question multiple matching task. This will either be one longer text divided up into shorter sections, or a series of connected shorter texts (for example different people or authors responding to a single topic). The ten questions will precede the text and candidates match the questions to the relevant sections of the reading text. This is essentially the same task type as occurs in part four of the CAE and part three of the FCE reading papers.





What does it all mean?

The question I've already been asked by learners is: "Is it easier?", though thinking in these terms is probably not very helpful. The process of taking the exam has been made smoother, more efficient, less time consuming and in my view, less stressful (with the possible exception of the reading paper!). The standard required to achieve a passing score has not altered and candidates will require the same levels of language ability and the same skill sets as they did before.

The change that will perhaps have the most impact is the addition of the summary task to the first writing task. This has previously had a focus on discursive writing, frequently also in the context of an essay - now however, candidates will need to identify ideas from the texts and evaluate them, both for relevance to the overall question but also to decide whether or not they agree with the concepts. This strikes me as a move designed to make the CPE more relevant to the needs of academic institutions, for whom this is a key skill. Learners with a university background may benefit from this shift, learners without one (or where the undergraduate academic writing culture differs) may need some additional focus on developing this skill.

The other big change of course, will be the additional heft to the revised reading paper. This doesn't appear to provide much additional challenge in terms of language or skills ability - time management and exam technique may need some fine tuning though. Many CPE candidates have already undertaken FCE and CAE exams, so this might not be a big area, but I suspect that the seven section reading paper will be a daunting prospect to some!

Lastly - when do these changes take effect? George Floras at [Linguafranca](#) gives May 2013 - but the most recent [Cambridge ESOL bulletin](#) gives the first live test dates as March 2013. There's still an entire academic year to get through beforehand and I suspect we'll see a raft of revised CPE coursebooks hit the market at some point next year which may also help guide you and your learners!

Sources & Further Reading:

The handbook for the existing (2002) version of CPE is available to download from Cambridge ESOL here: https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/digitalAssets/109761_cpe_handbook.pdf

Cambridge ESOL has released three bulletins detailing the changes to the exam:

[Bulletin 01](#) [Bulletin 02](#) [Bulletin 03](#)

New Test Specifications and sample papers are available from Cambridge ESOL here: <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/assets/pdf/exams/cpe/cpe-spec-2013.pdf>.

As mentioned previously, George Floras at [Linguafranca.gr](#) examines [changes to CPE and the Michigan ECPE & ECCE](#).

Finally, [ELTNews.gr](#) looks at [the rationale behind the changes](#).