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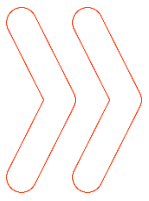


Survive, Thrive and Flourish

developing an English language test
to foster success

Cathy Jones

LANGUAGECERT Higher Education Summit, October 2025



**A qualification is
like a door**



Issues for international students with inadequate English skills

- › Academic struggles / underperformance
- › Social isolation
- › Frustration, stress, anxiety
- › Extra work and stress for academic and university staff
- › Can be addressed through support programs and proactive efforts by universities, but these require time and resources

» Radical kindness: *caring for the souls of one another* in our practice

- › Not a deficit position – nurturing what language learners already have, acknowledging the linguistic knowledge and transferable skills language learners bring
- › Not critiquing international students
- › All voices must be valued equally – fostering confidence and pride in authentic voices, regardless of linguistic background
- › The value of international students is reciprocal – education is about empathy, not about being ‘othered’
- › This is about respecting one another’s humanity – being seen and treated as human

» LANGUAGECERT Academic

- › Multi-level, certificating at CEFR levels **B1 to C2**
- › **Academic focus** for all four skills
- › Focus on **communicative language ability**
- › Built on a bed of **underpinning research** and **validation**
- › Meaningful and **user-friendly results** reporting
- › **Secure, reliable** and **accessible test delivery**
- › **Preparation materials**



What we all want



SURVIVE

THRIVE

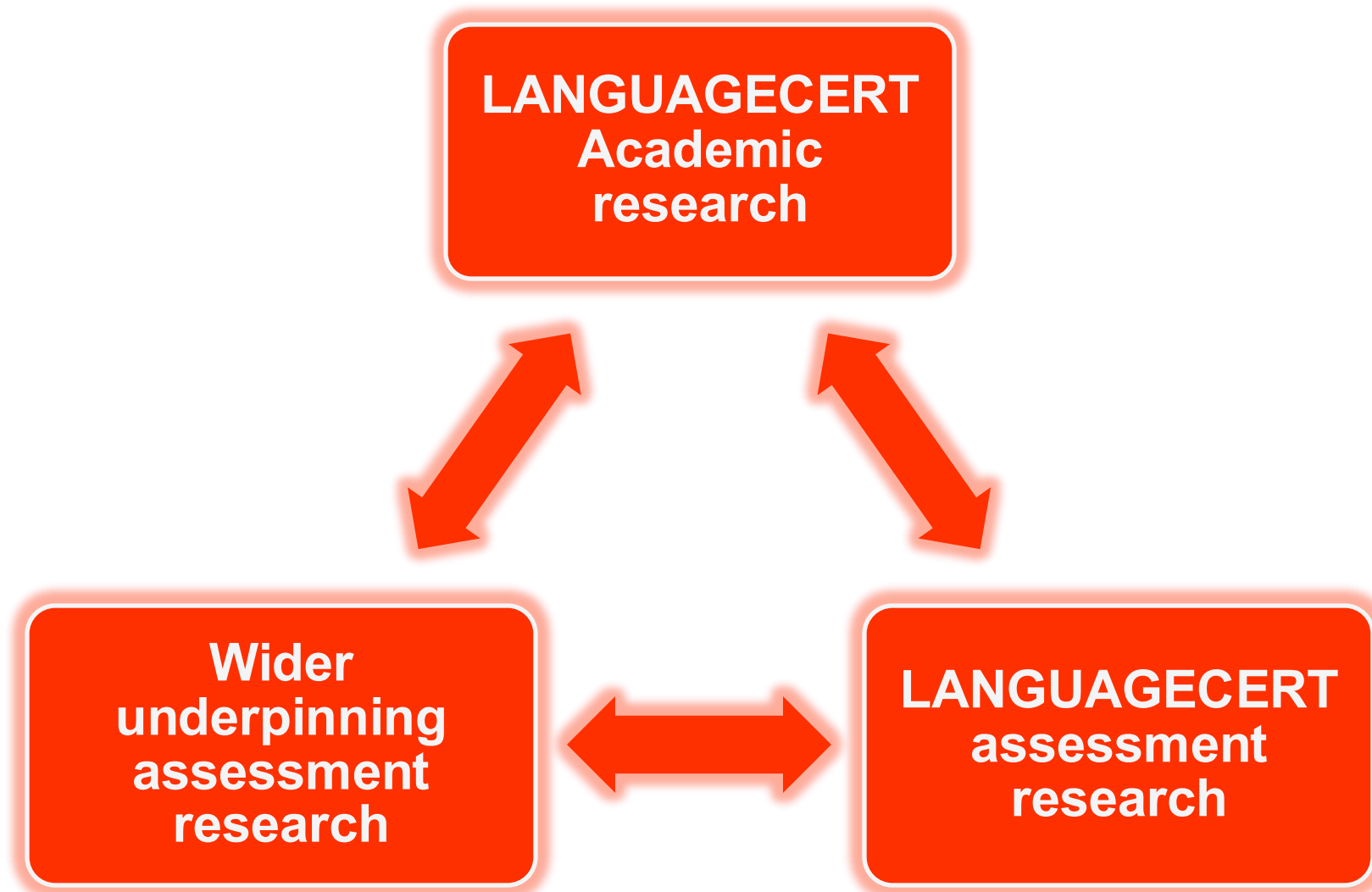
FLOURISH

>> The LANGUAGECERT definition



continuous programme of research and validation,
and stakeholder engagement

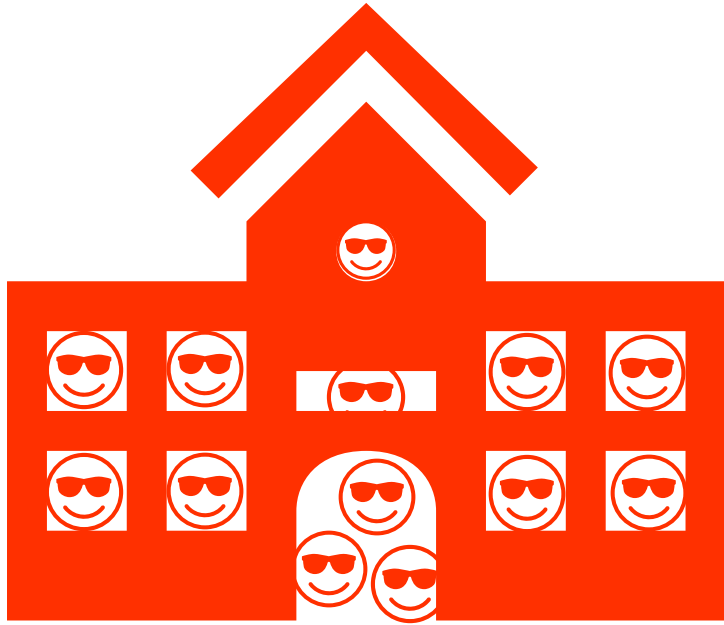
» Expertise and Research



» Expertise and Research

- › Ongoing program of **internal and external academic research**
 - Statistical analyses of test and test-taker performance
 - Validation, calibration, and performance analysis of test materials
 - External concordance study (CRELLA), framework mapping/benchmarking (UK Ecctis, CLBs etc)
- › **Expert team** of experienced consultants
- › Continuous **stakeholder engagement** (Academic Panel, HE Summits, Student Network)

» The LANGUAGECERT definition

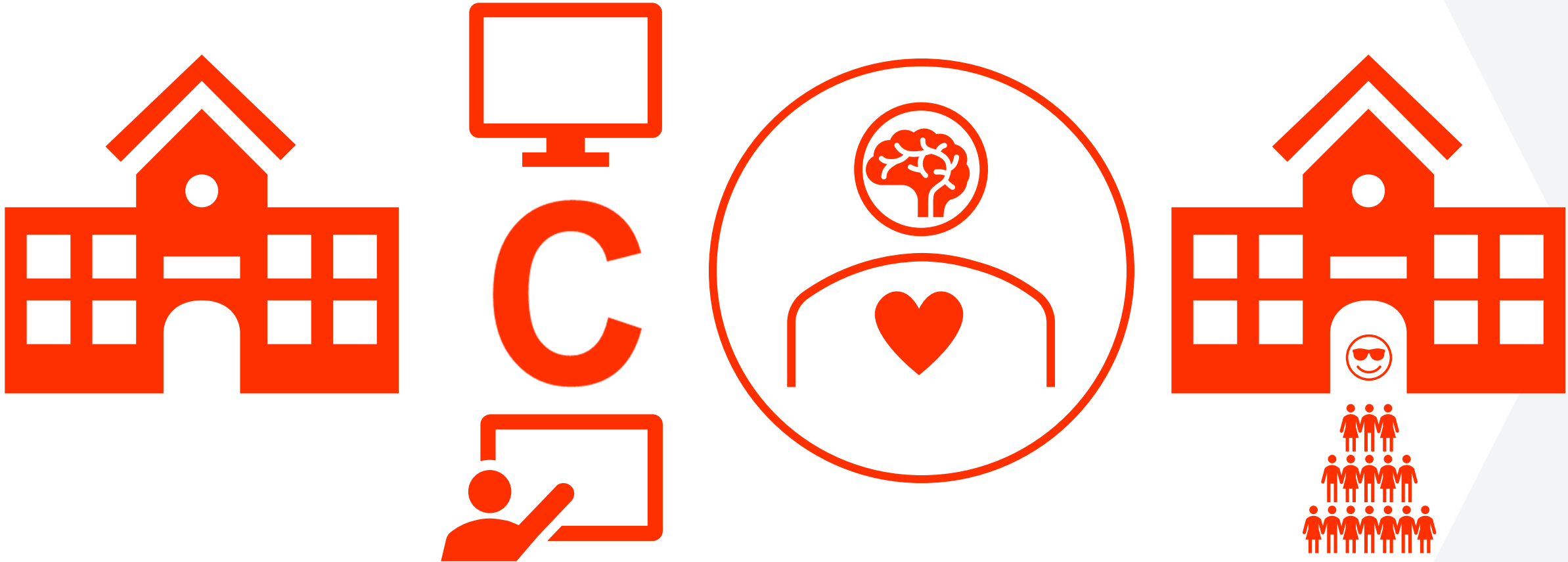


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continuous programme of research and validation,
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>> The LANGUAGECERT definition



continuous programme of research and validation,
and stakeholder engagement

What makes the test 'academic'?

Contexts

- **Academic or academic-related** (interactions or discussions with tutors, students, university officials, lectures and seminars)
- **Authentic source materials** (articles, journals, reports) crafted to provide reliable and valid assessment

Tasks

- Range carefully selected to **sample features of language and skills from the target language domain**, i.e. those required to succeed in an academic setting
- **Assessment criteria** written to evaluate domain-specific language and skills

Levels

- Span the **range of CEFR levels** that are critical in supporting receiving institutions decide whether a student will be able to cope with academic language requirements at university, i.e. **CEFR B1–C2**.

» What do we mean by academic English?



» What is academic English and how is it different?

- › The type of English you need for reading and understanding your study materials and writing about your subject.
The Open University, 2023
- › Producing the most appropriate style for your purpose and audience. It includes consistency, the right level of formality, expressing ideas precisely, being concise and objective.
Manchester University, 2023
- › Specifically, Academic English refers to words and practice that are not necessarily common or frequently encountered in informal conversation and circumstances.

Academic English UK

As an example, vocabulary

General English	General academic English	Discipline-specific academic English
The river is frozen solid !	There is no solid evidence to support the theory	The Earth's outer layer consists of solid rock forming the lithosphere
Discipline at the school was terrible	This is a relatively new discipline	Through the discipline of neurobiology, researchers investigate intricate neural pathways
Please underline your name on the form	The research underlines the value of case studies	In linguistics, morphological features are often underlined to highlight variations in language structures.

Listening and Reading



LISTENING

4 parts, 40 minutes

The Listening test assesses the ability to understand and contextualise academic vocabulary according to the academic discourse conventions of lectures, tutorials, and seminars.



READING

4 parts, 50 minutes

In Part 3, the test taker reads and answers questions about four separate texts on the same topic by four different authors. The test taker must combine rhetorical and contextual information, draw out implications, and compare the authors' positions and arguments.

Writing and Speaking



WRITING

2 parts, 50 minutes

In Part 2, the test taker reads two opposing viewpoints and is asked to write 250 words to analyse, discuss, and synthesise the two arguments in a structured, well-reasoned way.



SPEAKING

4 parts, 14 minutes

In Part 4, the test taker is shown a graph or infographic, given time to analyse it and then speaks for two minutes about their evaluation. The test taker must justify their arguments and reasoning.

Situation

- › Pandemic and the growth of take-home assessments
- › Large language model, generative artificial intelligence (AI)
- › Some students are using AI to complete take-home assessments
- › A universal problem, but it obviously varies from country to country, institution to institution and faculty to faculty

Issues

- › Pandemic and the growth of take-home assessments
- › It is time-consuming to detect
- › It is even more difficult, time-consuming and problematical to prove
- › Undermines trust
- › Undermines purpose
- › Missed opportunities for students

» More issues

- › Students must work out their chosen subject areas for themselves
- › Able to both write and verbalise their knowledge and understanding
- › AI can't do this for them
- › Undermines purpose
- › AI knows nothing, teaches nothing and gives students nothing of worth

»» What does AI offer?

- › Its developers claim it provides the answer to any question
- › This claim is very far from the truth
- › What AI gives is a response: *an* answer not *the* answer
- › AI has no knowledge or experience, cannot tell right from wrong or truth from fiction

»» An exercise in form – internet ‘slop’

- › AI responses are essential exercises in form not knowledge or creativity
- › Grammatically correct sentences that read naturally
- › AI builds sentences but does not construct meaning
- › Bullet points summarising concepts and themes – no arcs of coherence
- › Hyperbolic adjectives and superlative modifiers

» Searching for meaning

What can I help with?

"A trifle of stacked plates" meaning|

 Attach

 Search

 Reason



That's a lovely and evocative phrase! "A trifle of stacked plates" suggests a few different but related ideas:

- **Small Quantity:** The word "trifle" often implies a small amount or something of little significance. So, a "trifle of stacked plates" likely means a small number of plates piled on top of each other. It's not a huge, imposing stack.
- **Neatness and Order:** The act of "stacking" implies a degree of order and tidiness. The plates are not scattered haphazardly but placed carefully one on top of the other.
- **Delicacy or Lightness:** Just as a culinary trifle is often light and airy, this phrase can evoke a sense of lightness or fragility in the image of the stacked plates. It's not a heavy or cumbersome pile.
- **Simplicity:** The image is quite simple – just a few plates stacked. This can suggest a lack of fuss or complexity.

So, in essence, "a trifle of stacked plates" paints a picture of a small, neat, and perhaps delicate or simple pile of plates. The exact nuance would depend on the context in which the phrase is used. For example, it could describe a few plates left on a table after a light meal, or a small display in a shop.

» Searching for meaning, part 2

What can I help with?

"a remembered analogy of forgotten metaphors" meaning



Search



Reason



Deep research



Create image



That's a beautifully paradoxical and thought-provoking phrase! Let's break down "a remembered analogy of forgotten metaphors":

- **"Remembered analogy"**: An analogy is a comparison between two things to explain or clarify something. A "remembered analogy" implies that this comparison was once known or used and is now being recalled.
- **"of forgotten metaphors"**: A metaphor is a figure of speech where a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.
1 "Forgotten metaphors" suggests that these comparisons were once vivid and meaningful but have faded from common usage or individual memory. They might have become clichés, lost their original impact, or simply been forgotten over time.

» Critical thinking

Critical thinking is at the very centre of the nexus of communicative ability, academic writing and independent thinking. In essence, critical thinking is about 'the argument'. Identifying, analysing and evaluating the explicit or implicit message - and the supporting evidence - communicated in speech, writing or any form of media. The flip side of the critical thinking coin is the ability to come to one's own conclusions, express a structured and well-reasoned perspective, and present supporting evidence.



Embedded in LANGUAGECERT Academic

In the **Reading** test, Part 3, the test taker reads and answers questions about four separate texts on the same topic by four different authors. The texts demand careful analytical and synoptical reading and require the test taker to display higher-level reading skills, combine rhetorical and contextual information, infer meaning, draw out implications, and compare the authorial positions and arguments.



Embedded in LANGUAGECERT Academic

In the **Writing** test, Part 2, the test taker reads short statement containing two contrasting viewpoints. The test taker is asked to write 250 words to analyse, evaluate and discuss the two arguments in a structured, well-reasoned way. Then, the test taker must synthesise the arguments and present their position clearly and convincingly.



Embedded in LANGUAGECERT Academic

In the **Speaking** test, Part 4, the test taker is shown a graph or infographic, given time to prepare and then is asked to speak for two minutes about the conclusions they have drawn based on their analysis and evaluation. The test taker is asked follow-up questions to extend and defend their arguments, reasoning and conclusions.

»» The fourth “R” of education

‘articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication’

The Oracy Education Commission, UK

‘Parents want it, the economy demands it, democracy needs it, teachers welcome it and our children deserve it. The time for oracy for every child is now.’

Geoff Barton, Chair

» High-level shifts and megatrends



»» We all still want



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THRIVE

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