Internal

LANGUAGECERT®
by PeopleCert

Survive, Thrive and Flourish

English language testing for academic success

Cathy Jones

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A qualification is like a door

Access without readiness is not opportunity

- **Academic impact |**

underperformance, misinterpretation of tasks, inability to demonstrate ability

- **Human impact |**

isolation, anxiety, loss of confidence, unrealised potential

- **Institutional impact |**

increased staff burden, reduced outcomes

The radical kindness lens: *caring for the souls of one another in our practice*

- Recognising learners for who they rather than what they 'lack'
- Valuing authentic voice, agency and meaningful participation
- Fostering confidence, ‘belonging’ and academic identity
- Recognising international students as active contributors to academic communities
- Designing assessment grounded in dignity and respect

It is about creating fair and meaningful opportunities for learners to demonstrate what they know and can do.

Designing for participation

“The primary aim of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring.”

Nel Noddings (1929–2022), a leading philosopher of education and Professor Emerita at Stanford University.

Rigour and care are **not** competing principles

LANGUAGECERT® Academic

Written component

Listening
40 mins
4 parts
Spoken English in academic and academic-related presentations and conversations

Reading
50 mins
4 parts
Academic texts, arguments and viewpoints, lexico grammatical awareness

Writing
50 mins
2 tasks
Report/article based on graphical visual stimulus and discursive writing

Spoken component

Speaking
14 mins
4 parts
Live, one-to-one interaction with a trained interlocutor – interview, roleplay, readaloud and presentation

Two components | Four skills | CEFR B1 to C2 | Online

LANGUAGECERT Academic

- **Academic relevance** across all four skills
- Tests **communicative** language ability
- Underpinned by ongoing **research and validation**
- Meaningful **results for decision-making**
- **Secure**, reliable and flexible delivery
- Evidence to support **fair admissions decisions** and **student opportunity**

What we all want

The testing abstraction

Continuous programme of research and validation, and stakeholder engagement

Expertise and research

Research and validation

- Continuous internal and external research
- Statistical analysis of test and test-taker performance
- Validation, calibration and benchmarking
- Concordance and framework alignment studies

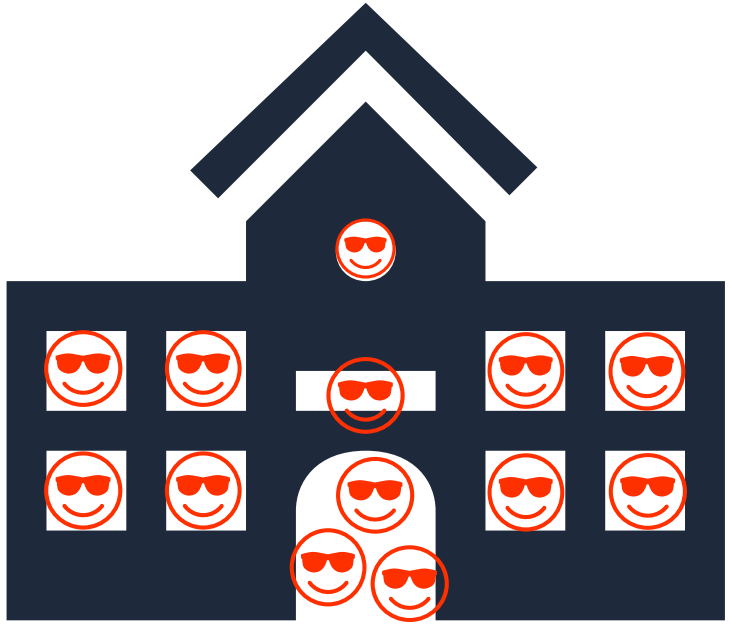
Assessment expertise

- Expert teams in assessment development, validation and psychometrics
- Collaboration with external researchers and academic advisors

Stakeholder engagement

- Continuous engagement with universities, educators and students
- Academic panels, HE summits and student networks

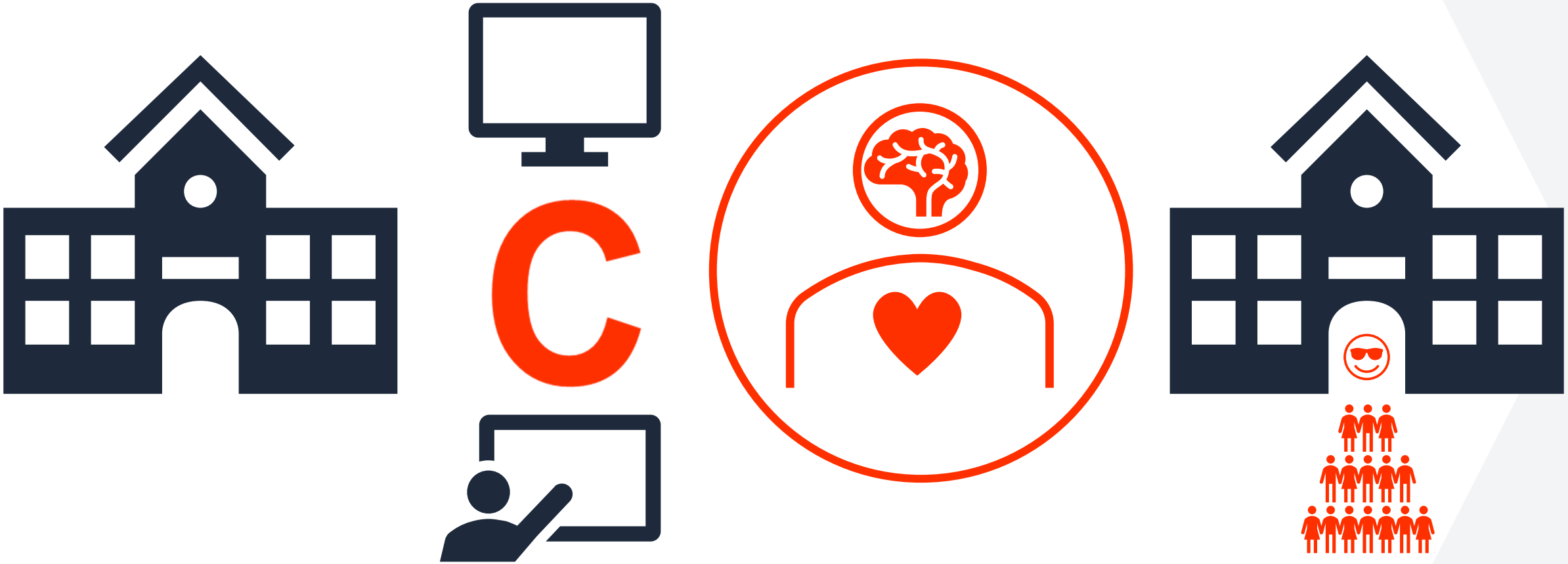
Constructing a model of academic readiness



Construct

continuous programme of research and validation,
and stakeholder engagement

From construct to practice



continuous programme of research and validation,
and stakeholder engagement

What do we mean by academic English?

"On future reports, use the term 'microscopic', rather than 'itsy-bitsy'."

What makes academic English different?

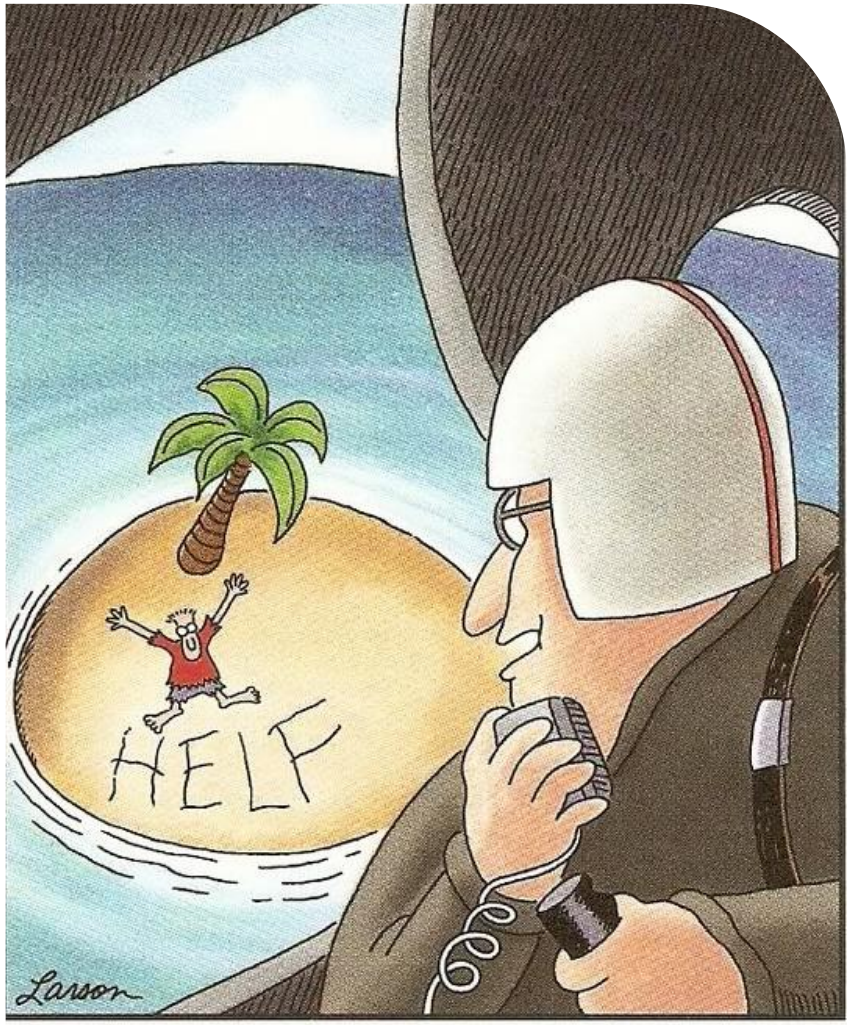
Everyday communication	Academic communication
Sharing opinions	Constructing arguments
Conversational fluency	Precision and clarity
Personal reaction	Critical evaluation
Informal interaction	Structured reasoning
Understanding information	Interpreting and synthesising ideas
Responding spontaneously	Supporting claims with evidence

What makes LCA an academic English test?

Academic readiness is embedded across content, task design and assessment criteria.

Contexts	Tasks	Levels
Academic and academic-related scenarios	Tasks designed around reasoning, synthesis and communication	CEFR B1–C2 coverage aligned to higher education needs
Interactions with faculty, students and university services	Authentic academic source materials	Supports institutional admissions decision-making
Lectures, seminars and academic discussions	Assessment criteria focused on domain-specific communication	Measures readiness across a range of academic contexts

Meaning requires more than decoding?



"Wait! Wait! Cancel that. … I guess it says 'helf.'"

Fluent language alone does not guarantee meaningful understanding.

Academic communication also requires:

- interpretation
- reasoning
- context
- judgement
- empathy

Meaning requires interpretation

Academic communication requires the ability to:

- interpret meaning and intention
- evaluate arguments and evidence
- recognise ambiguity and perspective
- distinguish representation from reality
- construct and defend a reasoned position

Critical thinking is central to meaningful communication.

Generated fluency ≠ understanding

Generative AI has blurred the distinction between:

- fluent language
  and
- meaningful understanding

This makes critical thinking and communicative ownership increasingly important in higher education, where students need to:

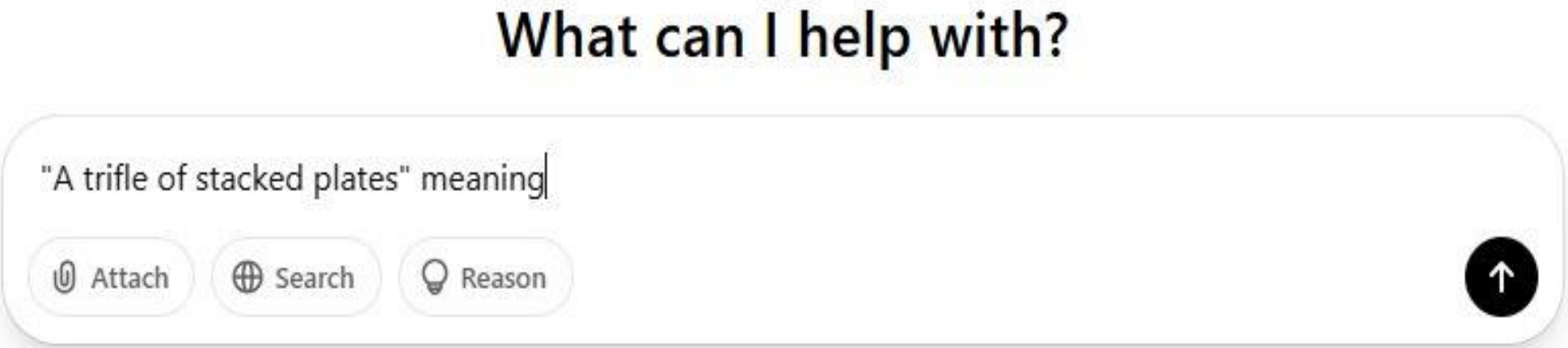
- evaluate evidence and arguments
- communicate independent reasoning
- defend and justify conclusions
- participate meaningfully in academic discussion

Academic readiness requires more than generated fluency.

An exercise in form –‘slop’ and ‘hallucinations’

- AI-generated language can appear coherent, confident and authoritative **BUT** surface fluency may obscure:
  - Weak reasoning
  - Shallow understanding
  - Unsupported claims
  - Lack of communicative ownership
- 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



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.

What does Generative AI offer?

- AI has no knowledge or experience, cannot tell right from wrong or truth from fiction
- Generative AI can produce fluent, persuasive language rapidly and at scale
- Its responses can appear confident, coherent and authoritative
- What AI gives is a response: *an* answer, not *the* answer
- Fluency does not necessarily reflect understanding, reasoning or communicative ownership
- Writing is a foundation of the thinking process
  - analysing ideas
  - synthesising information
  - constructing arguments
  - refining understanding

Generative AI is best understood as a tool, not a replacement for human thinking and communication

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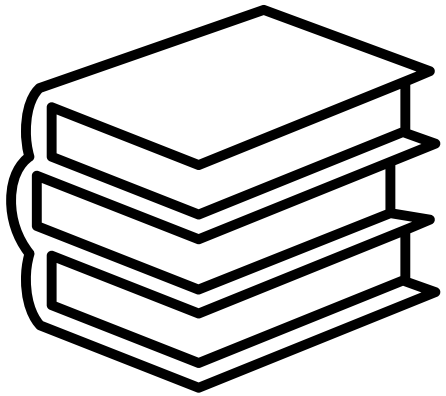
Reading | Part 3

Test takers engage with:

- four texts on the same topic
- different authors and perspectives
- rhetorical and contextual information



to:

- interpret meaning
- compare arguments and viewpoints
- Identify authorial voice
- infer implications
- evaluate evidence and reasoning

Academic reading involves interpretation, comparison and critical evaluation.

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Listening | Part 4

Test takers engage with:

- Three-speaker conversation
- different speakers and views

to:

- identify key arguments and viewpoints
- interpret implied meaning and attitude
- compare perspectives across speakers
- synthesise information from the discussion
- evaluate ideas and supporting evidence

Academic listening involves interpretation and critical evaluation.

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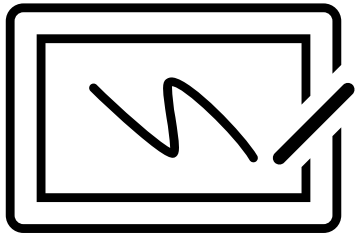
Writing | Part 2

Test takers engage with:

- contrasting viewpoints and perspectives
- argumentation and evaluation
- structured academic discussion



to:

- analyse and evaluate arguments
- synthesise ideas into a coherent position
- communicate reasoning clearly and convincingly
- justify conclusions with supporting evidence
- demonstrate independent thinking and judgement

Academic writing is not only a product of thinking, it is part of the thinking process itself.

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Speaking | Part 4

Test takers engage with:

- graphs, charts and visual information
- interpretation and evaluation of data
- a human marking interlocutor
- note-taking
- academic presentation

to:

- analyse and interpret information
- communicate conclusions clearly and confidently
- justify reasoning and perspectives
- respond spontaneously to follow-up questions
- defend arguments and conclusions verbally

Academic speaking involves interaction, reasoning and communicative ownership.

Campus English and student belonging

- The real student journey begins when learners arrive on campus
- Students need language for:
  - accommodation and healthcare
  - finances and everyday life
  - social interaction and belonging
  - communicating with faculty, staff and peers
- Confidence and participation are closely connected to wellbeing and academic success
- Role-play and interaction-based tasks can help prepare students for authentic campus experiences

Academic readiness is also social, emotional and communicative readiness.

Transferable skills | The ‘Magic Glue’

Cognitive Skills

having to do with “thinking” and include the ability to focus; problem-solve, make informed choices, and set plans and goals.

Social Skills

having to do with interaction with others including the ability to communicate, collaborate, resolve conflicts, and negotiate.

Emotional Skills

having to do with skills that relate to understanding and regulating one’s own emotion, cope with stress, understanding emotions of others, and the ability to empathize with others.

UNICEF, *Global Framework on Transferable Skills*, 2019

Transferable skills at a key intersection

- Cognitive flexibility and problem solving
- Personal growth and resilience
- Emotional intelligence and communication
- Cultural awareness and identity
- Curiosity and openness to new experiences

The learner journey

Academic readiness and workplace success

- Employers want graduates who can:
  - collaborate
  - problem solve
  - communicate effectively
  - influence and lead
- During higher education, students refine the communicative and critical thinking skills developed through academic English
- Skills developed through academic communication directly transfer to professional contexts:
  - synthesising evidence
  - analysing information from multiple sources
  - evaluating different perspectives
  - communicating reasoned decisions clearly
- The ability to argue a position in seminars and academic writing becomes the ability to:
  - persuade
  - influence
  - negotiate
  - lead in the workplace

‘Domain nomads’
Academic readiness beyond the classroom

- Flexible, mobile and versatile to move between different fields, sectors, disciplines and industries
- Agile, adaptive and lifelong learners equipped to navigate personal, academic and professional lives

Preparing students to flourish

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We are giving students the best possible start to university, giving them the skills for you to grow, develop and add to. So that together we help students build the brightest possible of futures.

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by PeopleCert

Cathy Jones

Assessment Development Specialist
catherine.jones@peoplecert.org