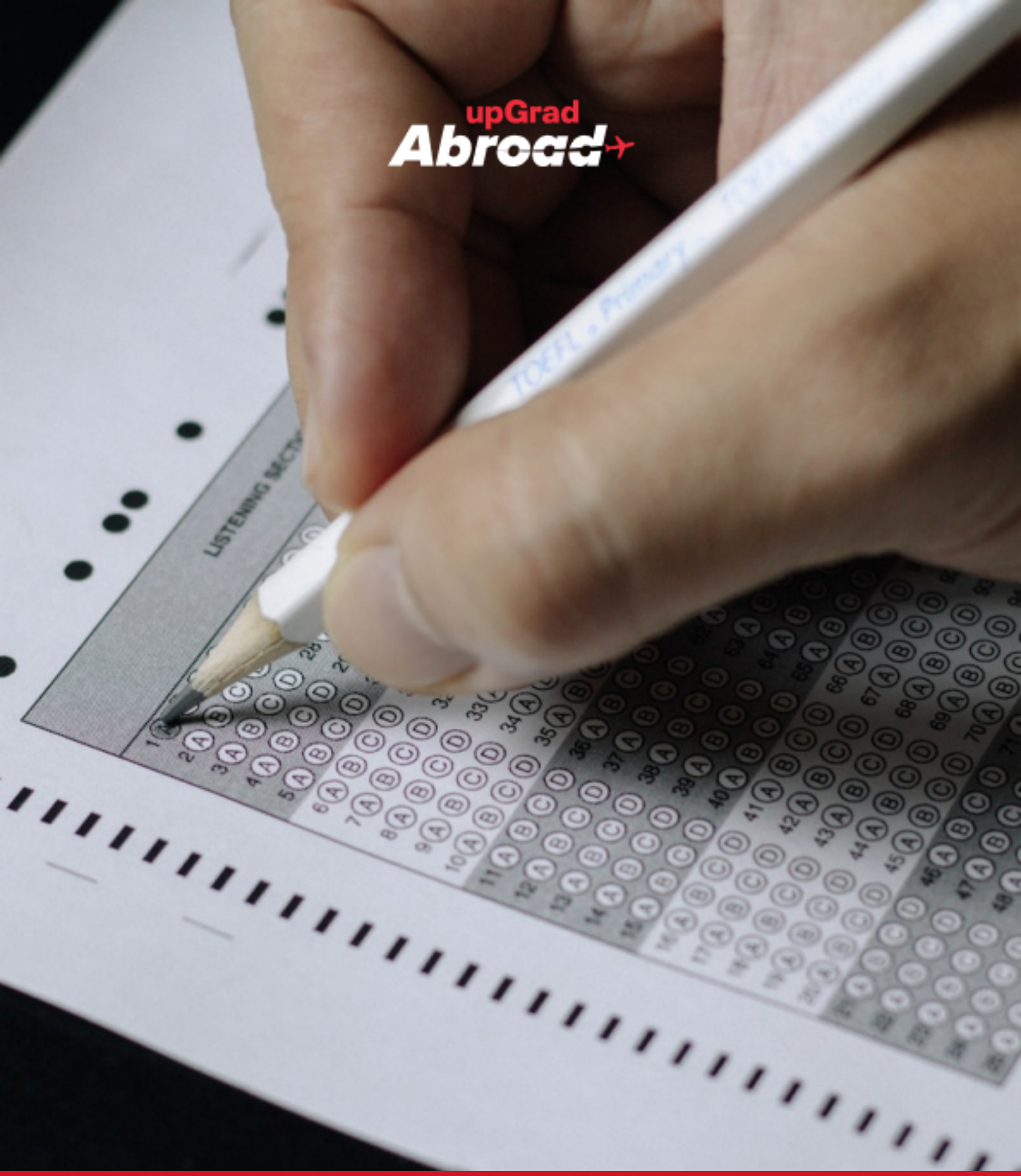


OET Syllabus and Exam Pattern 2026: Sub-Tests, Timings, Scoring and Nurse-Specific Tasks

The **Occupational English Test (OET) is an English language test for healthcare professionals** who need to meet the language requirement of a healthcare regulator or another recognising organisation, and it is offered for **12 healthcare professions**, including nursing and medicine.

The *OET syllabus*, which many candidates is divided into **4 sub-tests** (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking), and the OET exam pattern across them consists of **42 Listening questions, 42 Reading questions, 1 profession-specific letter and 2 role plays**, which together run for approximately **2 hours 45 minutes**.

In the sections below, we will explain each sub-test and its timing, the Writing and Speaking tasks for nurses and other professions, the grades regulators ask for, the available test modes and retake rules, how long preparation usually takes, and how to prepare.

OET Syllabus at a Glance

The OET syllabus is built around four sub-tests, **Listening**, **Reading**, **Writing** and **Speaking**, and each one measures a single language skill through tasks set in a healthcare workplace, which is why the number of questions, the timing and the task format change from one sub-test to the next.

The table below sets out the **OET exam time duration and exam pattern** for every sub-test, and the sections that follow explain each sub-test in detail:

Sub-test	Format	Time
Listening	***42 question items across three parts:*** • Part A: two health professional and patient consultations of about 5 minutes each (24 items) • Part B: six workplace extracts of about 45 seconds each (6 items) • Part C: two presentations or interviews of about 5 minutes each (12 items)	About 40 minutes
Reading	***42 question items across three parts:*** • Part A: four short texts on one healthcare topic (20 items) • Part B: six workplace extracts (6 items) • Part C: two longer articles (16 items)	60 minutes • Part A: 15 minutes • Parts B and C together: 45 minutes
Writing	Formal letter on a profession-specific matter using case notes	45 minutes:

		• 5 minutes of reading time • 40 minutes of writing time
Speaking	Two profession-specific role plays (5 minutes each) with 3 minutes to read each role-play card	About 20 minutes

Listening and Reading use general healthcare topics that are accessible to candidates from every profession, so these two sub-tests are the same for everyone who sits the test.

Writing and Speaking are set separately for each of the **12 professions** that OET covers, which means a nurse writes a nursing letter and plays the nurse in the role plays, while a dentist receives dentistry materials.

> ***To keep this information with you while you study, download the OET syllabus PDF and use it as a revision reference for every sub-test***

Added together, the four sub-tests run for about 2 hours 45 minutes (40 + 60 + 45 + 20 minutes).

Source: *OET Test*

OET Listening Syllabus

The OET Listening syllabus has **42 questions** spread over three parts and takes approximately **40 minutes**.

It is common to all professions, so nurses, doctors, pharmacists, and every other candidate sit the same Listening sub-test, and the **topics are of general healthcare interest rather than specific to one field**.

This means the sub-test measures how well you follow spoken English in a healthcare setting, not how much medical knowledge you have in your own profession.

Part	What you hear	What you do
Part A (24 marks)	Two consultations between a health professional and a patient, about 5 minutes each	Complete the health professional's notes using the same word or short phrase you hear
Part B (6 marks)	• 6 short workplace extracts (~45 seconds each) • Example: team briefings, handovers or health professional- patient	Answer one 3-option multiple-choice question for each extract

	dialogues	
Part C (12 marks)	Two presentations or interviews, about 5 minutes each	Answer 6 3-option multiple-choice questions for each extract

Each recording plays once only. On the paper test, you get **2 minutes at the end to check all 3 parts**, while on OET on Computer and **OET@Home, a short pause follows each question**.

Please note that **Part A is double-marked by qualified assessors**, and **Parts B and C are scored by computer**. Spelling and grammar errors can cost marks, and the recordings use a range of accents, mainly Australian, British and American.

Source: *OET Listening Test*

> ***Check out:*** ***OET Results*** **|** ***OET Fees***

OET Reading Syllabus

The OET Reading syllabus has **42 question**s in **60 minutes across 3 parts**, and it is common to all professions, so candidates from every profession sit the same Reading sub-test.

The **topics are of general healthcare interest**, and the questions test skills such as skimming and scanning, identifying detail, gist and main point, explicit and implied meaning, and the attitude or opinion expressed in a text.

Part	What you read	What you answer
Part A (20 marks, 15 minutes)	Four short texts on one healthcare topic	20 matching, sentence completion and short answer questions
Part B (6 marks)	Six short workplace extracts	One 3-option multiple-choice question for each extract
Part C (16 marks)	Two longer healthcare articles	Eight multiple-choice questions for each article

Part A is strictly timed. The materials are collected after **15 minutes**, so you cannot return to it later, and **Parts B and C then share the remaining 45 minutes**.

Correct spelling is required in the Reading sub-test to earn the mark, which is stricter than Listening, and abbreviations are accepted only if they appear in the texts. There is no extra time at the end of the sub-test to check your answers.

Source: *OET Reading Test*

OET Writing Syllabus

The OET Writing syllabus consists of one task: **a formal letter on a profession-specific matter**, **written from a set of case notes** in **45 minutes**, made up of **5 minutes** to read the notes and **40 minutes** to write.

Unlike **Listening** and Reading, this sub-test is **set separately for each profession**, so a nurse writes a nursing letter and a dentist writes a dentistry letter. The letter is written to another healthcare professional, and your job is to select the case-note information that the reader needs to continue the patient's care.

The task has a word range of ***180 to 200 words***. There is **no automatic penalty for writing over or under it**, but each task is designed to be achievable within that range, and a letter that runs significantly longer usually contains irrelevant material or is poorly organised.

Letter types by profession

For most professions, the letter is a referral, transfer or discharge letter, and each one is built on a real situation in which a healthcare professional passes patient information to a colleague.

A few professions get a different task, as the table shows:

Profession	Letter
Most professions, including nursing and medicine	Referral, transfer or discharge letter
Pharmacy and veterinary science	Information or advice letter to a patient, carer or group
Speech pathology and occupational therapy	The standard three letters, with an information or advice letter occasionally
Radiography	The standard three letters, with a response to a complaint letter possible

How is the Writing sub-test assessed?

Two OET assessors mark each letter against **6 criteria**. Purpose is scored from **0 to 3**, while Content, Conciseness and Clarity, Genre and Style, Organisation and Layout, and Language are each scored from **0 to 7**. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar are assessed under Language.

So, test-takers who secure Grade B (350) have achieved 2 out of 3 for Purpose and 5 out of 7 for each of the

other five criteria.

Source: *OET Writing Syllabus*

OET Speaking Syllabus

The OET Speaking syllabus consists of **2 profession-specific role plays** that take approximately **20 minutes** in total, so a nurse plays a nurse and a pharmacist plays a pharmacist.

The interlocutor plays a **patient**, a **client**, or a **patient's relative or carer** (the animal's owner or carer in Veterinary Science), and the test checks your English in a realistic workplace conversation, not your medical knowledge.

How is the Speaking sub-test assessed?

The Speaking sub-test is recorded, and **2 official OET assessors** score the audio using the **OET Linguistic** and **Clinical Communication Criteria**.

Because only the recording is assessed, the interviewer on test day plays no part in your score.

Criteria group	What is assessed	Score per criterion
Linguistic	• Intelligibility • Fluency • Appropriateness of language • Resources of grammar and expression	0 to 6
Clinical communication	• Relationship building • Understanding and incorporating the patient's perspective • Providing structure • Information gathering • Information giving	0 to 3

For **Grade B (350)**, OET says candidates predominantly score **5 out of 6** on each linguistic criterion and **2 out of 3** on each clinical communication criterion.

This is why preparation for Speaking works best when you practise full role plays and then check yourself against each criterion, rather than only improving your grammar.

Source: *OET Speaking Test, OET Speaking Guide PDF*

OET Syllabus for Nurses

The OET syllabus for nurses follows the same exam pattern as every other profession, with 4 sub-tests and the same timings, but only 2 of the 4 are written for nursing.

Listening and Reading are common to all 12 professions, so nurses sit the same papers as doctors and pharmacists. ***Whereas in Writing you produce a letter from nursing case notes, usually a referral, transfer or discharge letter, and in Speaking you act as the nurse in two role plays where the interlocutor plays a patient or a patient's relative or carer.*** The OET exam pattern for nurses is therefore different from other professions only in these two sub-tests.

Nurses can take OET on paper, on computer at a test venue, or at home with OET@Home, since OET on Computer and **OET@Home** are currently available for Nursing along with Medicine, Pharmacy and Physiotherapy. To see the real format, practise with the profession-specific sample tests on OET Ready, and for registration requirements and fees, read our guide on **OET for nurses**.

Profession-Specific OET Syllabus

OET is available for 12 healthcare professions: ***Dentistry, Dietetics, Medicine, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Radiography, Speech Pathology and Veterinary Science***. Each profession has its own Writing and Speaking task based on a workplace-specific situation, so a dentist receives a dentistry task and a nurse receives a nursing task, while Listening and Reading are the same for everyone.

Profession	Writing letter
Medicine, Nursing, Physiotherapy	Usually a referral, transfer or discharge letter
Pharmacy	May be asked to write an information or advice letter to a patient, carer or group
Dentistry, Dietetics, Optometry, Podiatry	Usually a referral, transfer or discharge letter
Speech Pathology, Occupational Therapy	Usually the standard letters, occasionally an information or advice letter
Radiography	Usually the standard letters, may be asked to respond to a complaint letter
Veterinary Science	May be asked to write an information or advice letter. In

	Speaking, the interlocutor plays the animal’s owner or carer

If your profession is not one of the 12, **you may choose the test for the profession closest to your own**. *OET gives two examples: sonography registrants have taken the Radiography test, and orthotics registrants have taken the Physiotherapy test.*

Source: *OET Test Regulations*

OET Scoring and Grade Requirements by Regulator

OET reports each sub-test separately on a scale from **0 to 500** and gives no overall score**, so a very high mark in one sub-test cannot compensate for a low mark in another**. Most regulators ask for **Grade B, which starts at 350**, but the requirement changes with the regulator, and several accept a lower grade in Writing.

Regulators also differ on whether you can combine two test sittings, which means using the scores from two separate OET attempts to meet the minimums when one sub-test falls short the first time. The NMC and AHPRA allow it within set limits; the GMC and ECFMG require all four scores from a single test, and in Canada, each provincial regulator decides.

Now, let us understand the different regulators:

Regulator	Minimum score in each sub-test	Can you combine two sittings?
UK, NMC (nurses and midwives)	• Listening 350 (B) • Reading 350 (B) • Writing 300 (C+) • Speaking 350 (B)	**Yes.** Lowest score allowed in each sitting: • Listening, Reading, Speaking: 300 • Writing: 250
UK, GMC (doctors, OET Medicine only)	• Listening 350 (B) • Reading 350 (B) • Writing 350 (B) • Speaking 350	**No.** All four grades must come from the same test and from your most recent sitting

	(B)	
Australia, AHPRA (tests taken on or after 23 April 2026)	• Listening 350 • Reading 360 • Writing 350 • Speaking 360	Yes, if both sittings are within 12 months. Lowest score allowed in each sitting: • Listening 320 • Reading 340 • Writing 350 • Speaking 350
Canada, CNRC (nursing)	• Listening 350 (B) • Reading 330 (C+) • Writing 320 (C+) • Speaking 350 (B)	**Decided by each provincial regulator**
US, ECFMG (doctors, OET Medicine only)	• Listening 350 (B) • Reading 350 (B) • Writing 300 (C+) • Speaking 350 (B)	**No.** All four scores must come from one test administration

How does combining two sittings work?

- **The minimum score** is the target. For each sub-test, at least one of your two sittings must reach it. For the NMC, that means 350 in Listening, Reading, and Speaking and 300 in Writing.
- **The lowest score allowed** is a safety net. In both sittings, no sub-test may fall below this lower number, even if you reach the target in the other sitting.

Sources: *NMC, GMC, AHPRA, CNO, CCPNR, ECFMG, OET*

OET Exam Pattern: Test Modes

The OET exam pattern is the same in every mode, with four sub-tests and the same structure, content, length, and marking, so the mode you choose only changes where and how you sit the test.

OET is offered as **OET on Paper**, **OET on Computer** and **OET@Home**, and you should confirm that your regulator accepts your chosen mode before you book.

Mode	How you take it	Professions
OET on Paper	All four sub-tests at a test venue	• Medicine • Nursing • Dentistry • Pharmacy • Physiotherapy • Radiography • Veterinary Science
OET on Computer	• Listening, Reading and Writing on a computer at a test venue • Speaking online from home, up to 5 days before or after	All 12
OET@Home	• Listening, Reading and Writing on your own computer with a remote proctor • Speaking online from home	All 12

OET@Home is offered where a test venue is not available, or with OET's approval in exceptional circumstances, so the booking page shows only the modes you can choose.

*Regulators can also limit the modes they accept, and **AHPRA**, for example, accepts only paper or computer tests taken at a test centre. Booking deadlines differ by mode, and you can see the cost of each mode in our guide to OET fees.*

***Sources:** OET (Test on Paper, Test on Computer, Test at Home, Test regulations)*

How to Prepare for OET: Tips and Best Study Resources

The best way to prepare for OET is to start with the **official material**, since ***OET publishes free courses, sample tests, masterclasses, and assessment criteria for every sub-test***.

Your preparation time depends on your English level and the hours you can study each week, and OET recommends taking one sample test every **2 to 3 weeks** and working on your errors in between.

Sub-test	What to practise	Official resource
Listening	• Following each recording once, as it plays only once • Completing Part A notes with the exact words you hear	• Listening Masterclass • Official sample tests • OET blog guides to Parts A, B and C
Reading	• Finishing Part A within its strict 15 minutes • Using the remaining 45 minutes for Parts B and C	• Reading Masterclass • Official sample tests • OET blog guides on scanning and Part A
Writing	• Choosing the case note details your reader needs • Meeting the 6 assessment criteria	• Writing Masterclass • Official sample tests with sample letters • Writing criteria and Writing Guide
Speaking	• Playing your professional role for about five minutes per role play • Covering the language and clinical communication criteria	• Speaking Masterclass • Official sample role plays • Speaking criteria and glossary • Speaking Booster mini course

For wider practice, OET suggests reading the **British Medical Journal**, **Medical Journal of Australia**, **Journal of the American Medical Association**, **Medical News Today** and **Nursing Times**, and **listening to health podcasts such as ABC's Health Report**, **BBC's Inside Health** and the **TED Talks** health playlist.

If you want feedback, OET lists preparation providers who have completed its official teacher training programme, and our guide on **OET preparation** covers more detail.

Sources: *OET (Ready Study Guide, Get OET Ready, Sample tests, Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking sub-test pages)*

Now that you know the OET syllabus, read the OET eligibility page to check who can take the test and which professions and regulators it is accepted for.

If you need further help planning your study abroad journey, book a free 1:1 counselling session with upGrad's study abroad experts to discuss your options.

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