Interpreting CEPA Scores: FAQ

What do the scores mean?

As with many popular commercial exams, CEPA multiple choice (MCQ) scores are not simple percentages, but rather a scaled score. Two students may get the same number of questions right, but have different CEPA scores because one student's answers were based on random guessing of multiple-choice questions (MCQs). Essays are banded, using a rubric, from 0-6, including half bands. They correlate highly with the MCQ portion of the exam. CEPA scores have been shown to be a very good predictor of student success at UAE institutions of higher education.

CEPA Range	Average Writing	CEPA Descriptors	CEFR Range
90 - 139	0.62	Random	≤A1
140 – 149	1.48	Extremely low English ability (Beginner)	A1
150 – 159	2.38	Low, At-risk	A1-A2
160 -169	3.11	Emerging Proficiency	A2-B1
170 - 179	3.73	Intermediate	B1-B2
180 - 210	4.48	May be ready for direct entry to English-medium tertiary study	B2-C1+

How do institutions use CEPA Scores?

Institutions of higher education in the UAE have complete autonomy in how they use the CEPA scores. Cut scores used by UAE University, Zayed University, the Higher Colleges of Technology, and Emirates College for Advanced Education are summarized below. Please contact the institutions for up-to-date cut scores. The scores below may not represent current policies.

UAEU	CEPA MCQ	ZU	CEPA MCQ	CEPA Writing	HCT	CEPA MCQ	CEPA Writing	ECAE	CEPA MCQ
ENGU 1301	150-164	ENG 010	150-156	≤2	Level 1	150-156	1	ECAE Test	<150
ENGU 1302	165-174	ENG 020	157-165	2.5-3.5	Level 2	157-163	2	Foundations	150
ENGU 1303	175-180	Level 5	166-171	3.5	Level 3	164-169	3	Direct Entry	175
Faculty Study	180+	Level 6	172-177	4	Level 4	170-179	4		
(with TOEFL and/or IELTS)		Level 7	178-184	4.5	Direct Entry	180+	5+		
		Level 8	185+	4.5					

How much can a student expect to improve in a semester?

Based on studies conducted at two of the institutions' foundation programs, it was found that the average student will gain around 4 points on a CEPA-English MCQ section, given around 20 contact hours per week. A very highly-motivated student may gain as many as 10 points.

How has the student population performed over the years?

The average CEPA-English MCQ score has increased steadily over the years. Note the jump between 2005 and 2007 when the stakes increased as the test was introduced as a cut score for admission into higher education.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
N	14015	14225	14160	14900	15906	14528	14761	15808	16801	17,593	17,765	18,422
Overall	150	152	151	157	159	160	160	160	160	161	164	166
Females	152	155	154	159	160	162	162	162	162	163	166	168
Males	146	147	146	154	156	156	157	158	157	158	161	163

Is that because the test has gotten easier?

No. The CEPA MCQ section is scored using an IRT model. Each test is linked to those of previous years. A given student could take any other version of the test and would likely get within 2 points of his or her original score.

How has the student population performed on the CEPA writing test over the years?

The average writing score has changed little over the years.

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Overall	2.3	3	2.8	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.9	3.0	3.2
Females	2.6	3.3	3	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3	3.1	3.3	3.5
Males	1.9	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.3	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.7

How do CEPA-English scores compare to scores on other exams?

These tests are not the same, and it is difficult to make an exact equivalency. Tests discriminate differently at different levels. However, an empirical study involving 1280 UAE-based students found the following relationship:

CEPA	TOEFL PBT	TOEFL iBT	TOEFL CBT	IELTS
165	380	26-27	83	4
170	415	35	105	4.5
175	440	42	123	5
180	470	52	150	5.5
185	500	61	173	6
190	540	76	207	6.5
195	570	88	230	7