CAEL 204: Writing, Reading, and Listening

📖 🎧 Reading and Listening Question Types

The table below describes the types of questions you will encounter in CAEL Reading and Listening tasks. Each question is one of these three types. Below the table are strategies for identifying and approaching each question type.

1. **General meaning**	General meaning questions focus on **broad ideas**, not a single detail. Choosing the correct answer requires putting together information from multiple sentences, multiple sections, or the full passage.	
2. **Specific information**	Specific information questions require listening for **one key detail** provided in one specific place in the passage.	
3. **Inference**	Inference questions require you to **draw a conclusion** about something based on information provided in the passage. The answer is not provided directly in the passage, but there is information that points toward which answer choice is best.	

General Meaning Questions

These questions often (though not always) refer to the entire text or audio clip; for example, *What is the main topic of the lecture?* Words and phrases such as *main idea*, *topic*, and *purpose* tend to signal general meaning questions, as they usually refer to the whole passage or a large section of it. A suggested strategy for approaching these questions is:

- Identify the topic the question is about. (If the question is asking about the entire passage, skip this step and the one after it. Instead, listen or read for main ideas and important details and put them together to point you to the correct answer.)
- Listen or read for key words and paraphrased ideas from the question to identify the section of the audio or text that includes words, phrases, and ideas related to that topic.
- Pay careful attention to the section(s) related to the question topic, taking note of relevant details.
- Eliminate incorrect answers, then select the best answer choice.

Specific Information Questions

These questions may ask for a number, a name, a term, a fact, or any other detail that is provided in one specific place in the passage. The answer can often be expressed in a single word or short phrase. A suggested strategy for approaching these questions is:

- Determine what kind of information you need to locate.
- Listen or skim for key words and paraphrased ideas from the question to identify the section where your information should be.
- Listen or scan carefully for the phrase with the specific detail you need.
- Use that information to select the best answer choice.

Inference Questions

These questions usually include a word or phrase that signals something probable or hypothetical; for example, *likely*, *probably*, or *would*. A suggested strategy for approaching these questions is:

- Look for clues in the question that signal the need for an inference.
- Use key words and paraphrased ideas from the question to identify the audio or text section with content related to the question topic.
- Consider what the source says about the topic and how it relates to the question.
- Draw a logical conclusion based on what you know and what you are being asked.
- Eliminate incorrect answers, then select the best answer.

Note that it is not always possible to determine a question's type from its wording, and choosing the right answer does not depend on identifying the question type. However, it is helpful to be aware that these are the three kinds of questions you will encounter on the test, and that it is sometimes possible to identify a question's type from its wording or content and find the answer using the strategy indicated above.

📖 Long Reading Strategies

- **Preview the text.** Take about 20 seconds to note the title, format, and length of the text, and the timing for the task. Then quickly skim the text to get a sense of its structure and main ideas. Main ideas typically appear in the first sentence of each paragraph.

- **Preview the questions and identify key words.** Read the questions and note the words and phrases that will help you to determine what kind of information to look for and where to find it in the text. It can also be helpful to try to identify question types (general meaning, specific information, or inference). Remember that the questions are as chronological as possible: the questions are listed in roughly the same order that the answers appear in the text.

- **Avoid attempting to read the whole text from start to finish.** Instead, focus on answering questions, using your skimming and scanning skills to locate the text sections that are likely to include the information you are looking for.

- **Skim for gist.** Skimming a text is looking through the entire passage quickly to get an overall idea of what it is about. This is a strategy for gaining general understanding of the structure and

topic of the text, the main ideas of paragraphs, and other big-picture elements. Skimming can be a useful skill to use for general meaning questions.

- **Scan for details.** Scanning is searching through a particular section of text quickly to locate one or more relevant specific details. Scanning can be a useful skill to use for specific information questions.

- **Derive meaning from context.** You will almost certainly encounter unfamiliar words in Reading passages. The ability to extract clues about it, such as its part of speech (e.g., noun, verb, adjective), connotation (positive, negative, or neutral), and possible meaning is a useful skill to build before your test day and use during Reading tasks.

- **Answer every question!** Ensure that you are not leaving any questions blank. Guess if you have to! For Reading tasks with multiple question pages, check that each of the tabs at the top of the screen is green, which signals that all questions are answered.

🎧 Long Listening Strategies

- **Preview the questions.** Read the questions and answer choices to get a sense of the order that information will be presented and the topic of the upcoming audio clip.

- **Identify key words and question types.** Take note of words and phrases in the questions that you can listen for to help you identify answers or key information in the audio passage. It can also be helpful to try to identify question types (general meaning, specific information, or inference). Remember that the questions are as chronological as possible: the questions are listed in roughly the same order that the answers will be heard in the audio.

- **Answer questions as you listen. Be cautious about note-taking.** Answer as many questions as you can while listening, and take notes only if you know you will be able to do so without losing focus on the audio. The review time after the passage finishes is not intended to be enough time to answer all of the questions.

- **Use the review time to check your answers.** Ensure that you have not left any questions unanswered and that you are satisfied with your answer choices.

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Long Writing Strategies

Prewriting (about 4-5 minutes)

- **Read the question carefully.** What is the topic? Is there more than one part to the question?
- **Brainstorm ideas.** What do you remember from the reading and lecture? Are there any relevant ideas you could use in your response?
- **Review the passage and lecture notes.** Skim the reading for sections that are especially related to the question topic. Read through the lecture notes and look for relevant points.
- **Create an outline.** Using point form, abbreviations, etc., list your main ideas and supporting details in the order you want to include them. You might also include the idea(s) you will use for your introductory statement and conclusion.

Writing (about 25-27 minutes)

- **Begin with an introductory statement.** Introduce the response topic with an interesting idea or fact. This can be one or two sentences.
- **State your opinion.** Write one sentence that includes the topic and clearly expresses your view on it. Optionally, you can also list the reasons for your position—the main ideas of the paragraphs to follow.
- **Include 2-3 body paragraphs.** Each body paragraph should focus on one main idea and include support from at least one source. Aim for about 4-5 sentences in each paragraph.
- **Use transitions to connect ideas.** Transitions signal connections within sentences, between sentences, and between paragraphs. Choose transitions that add meaning as precisely as possible.
- **Use information from both sources.** While it is not necessary to use exactly the same number of points from each source, it is important to maintain a rough balance and avoid overusing or underusing them.
- **Write in your own words.** Avoid quoting from the sources and don't copy from either source. Paraphrase ideas to demonstrate your understanding of the sources and ability to use language.
- **Maintain an appropriate tone.** Avoid casual and vague language (e.g., *really good*, *awesome*, *a big deal*, *kind of hard*, etc.).
- **End with a short conclusion.** There is no need to repeat any ideas, including your opinion statement. Instead, sum up the response with a thought or two that relate to the topic. These can be predictions, suggestions, or any ideas that connect to what you have discussed.
- **Write at least 250 words.** You can write more if you wish to and have time.

Review (about 4-5 minutes)

- **Read through the whole response carefully at least once.** It's even better if you can read through it more than once and focus on different elements of the response each time.

- **Fix mechanical and formatting errors.** Check grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Ensure that capital letters are used correctly and the response is formatted appropriately (paragraph breaks, spacing, etc.).

- **Make sure there is no unnecessary repetition of words or phrases.** Try to express ideas in different ways if they need to be repeated.

- **Ensure that language use is concise and sentence structures are strong.** For example, if you have written several consecutive short sentences, consider whether they could be combined. If there are words or phrases that don't add any meaning to the sentence, remove them (e.g., *in my ~~own personal~~ opinion; a ~~very~~ challenging ~~and difficult~~ situation*).

Long Writing Checklist: CAEL Part 4

Content	
1. Does the writer remain on topic?	Yes | Sometimes | No
2. Does the writer use specific details and examples to support ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
3. Is the writer's viewpoint clearly expressed?	Yes | Sometimes | No
4. Does the writer fully answer the question(s)?	Yes | No
5. Is the length sufficient to provide a fully developed response?	Yes | No
6. Does the writer avoid repeating ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
7. Does the writer use information from the Reading section to support and develop ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
8. Does the writer use information from the Listening section to support and develop ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
9. Does the writer use information from the Reading and Listening sections in a balanced way?	Yes | Sometimes | No
10. Is the writer able to restate ideas in his or her own words?	Yes | Sometimes | No
Organization	
11. Does the response have an introductory statement?	Yes | No
12. Are logical transitions (furthermore, in addition, etc.) used to link ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
13. Is the response well organized and easy to follow?	Yes | Sometimes | No
14. Does the response have appropriate paragraphing?	Yes | No
Language Use	
15. Do errors in spelling and usage impede comprehension?	Yes | Sometimes | No
16. Do grammatical structures (verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, etc.) support meaning?	Yes | Sometimes | No
17. Is a variety of sentence types used?	Yes | Sometimes | No
18. Does the writer avoid repetition by using a range of vocabulary?	Yes | Sometimes | No
19. Is vocabulary and tone suitable for an academic context?	Yes | Sometimes | No

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📝 Sample Response: Long Writing

Question

Should scientists go back and reanalyze established conclusions and facts? Should we spend time on new questions and new research instead? Explain your position, build an argument, and provide support.

Response (Writing Band 80)

As the reading passage mentions, "historical accounts are written by people who have their own standpoints on social, religious, and political issues, as well as personal bias." With this idea in mind I believe that scientists should go back and reanalyze established conclusions and facts. Often those creating the narrative are too closely connected to events to be able to accurately and truthfully tell the story.

The lecture mentions several previously held theories on how animals became domesticated. If no one had re-examined the Oasis theory and Joel Cohen's theories on animal domestication, then a new, more accurate theory could not have been developed. By picking through specific aspects of each theory scientists could leave the incorrect parts out and build on the truthful aspects. For example, with the Oasis theory that as the climate became drier, people and animals would concentrate around oasis areas, modern science could debunk the theory because evidence has shown that domestication did not start in oases.

Scientists have to go back and re-examine evidence about the Persians as well because it was the Greeks who got the opportunity to tell the story of the Persians and they portrayed them in a negative light. Without a re-examination of this, the cultural significance of the Persians would have been lost. This issue also brings up the credibility of the Greeks and requires going back to consider what other civilizations they told the stories of and how accurate these accounts are.

In conclusion, I believe that it important that scientists look back on previously established conclusions and facts. The further away an event is, the more objective, and therefore more accurate one can be about said event.

(280 words)

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Short Writing Strategies

Prewriting (about 30 seconds – 1 minute)

- **Read the question carefully.** What is the topic? Which source should you use?
- **Review the source.** Skim the reading or lecture notes for sections that are especially related to the question topic.
- **Create a basic outline (optional).** Using point form, abbreviations, etc., list your details in the order you want to include them.

Writing (about 8-9 minutes)

- **Begin with an introductory sentence.** Introduce the response topic and the aspects you will discuss. Don't express an opinion (it won't be an opinion question) and don't include a "hook" or introductory statement that leads into the topic.
- **Summarize the source information in an organized way.** For example, if you are describing the characteristics of something, introduce them one at a time. If you are comparing two things, discuss one first and then the next, or compare first and then contrast.
- **Use transitions to connect ideas.** Transitions signal connections within and between sentences. Choose transitions that add meaning as precisely as possible.
- **Express ideas in your own words.** Avoid quoting or copying from the source. Paraphrase ideas to demonstrate your understanding of the source and ability to use language.
- **Maintain an appropriate tone.** Avoid casual and vague language (e.g., *really good*, *awesome*, *a big deal*, *kind of hard*, etc.).
- **Optionally, you can end with a concluding sentence.** However, this is not necessary.
- **Write at least 100 words.** You can write more if you wish to and have time. Most likely, your response will be one single paragraph.

Review (about 30 seconds – 1 minute)

- **Correct errors and tighten language** in the same ways that you do for the Long Writing.

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Short Writing Checklist: CAEL Part 5

Content	
1. Does the writer remain on topic?	Yes | Sometimes | No
2. Does the writer use specific details and examples to support ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
3. Does the writer fully answer the question(s)?	Yes | No
4. Is the passage an appropriate length required by the task?	Yes | No
5. Does the writer use information from the reading section or the listening section to support ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
6. Is the writer able to restate ideas in his or her own words?	Yes | Sometimes | No
Organization	
7. Does the passage have an opening statement?	Yes | No
8. Are appropriate transitions used to link ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
9. Is there a logical flow of ideas?	Yes | Sometimes | No
Language Use	
10. Do spelling mistakes impede comprehension?	Yes | Sometimes | No
11. Do grammatical structures (verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, etc.) support meaning?	Yes | Sometimes | No
12. Is a variety of sentence types used?	Yes | Sometimes | No
13. Does the writer avoid repetition by using a range of vocabulary?	Yes | Sometimes | No
14. Is vocabulary and tone suitable for an academic context?	Yes | Sometimes | No

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⌨ Sample Responses: Short Writing

Question

> Based on the Reading passage, what are some features and characteristics that distinguish different planets?

Response 1 (created for learning purposes; can't be scored)

Planets are differentiated according to a number of features, but scientists tend to focus primarily on their make-up, location, size, and number of satellites. In our solar system, planets can be divided into two categories: inner and outer planets. The four inner or terrestrial planets—Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars—are closest to the sun. These planets are made up primarily of rock and metal, have only a few satellites, and are noted for being small and solid. The four outer or Jovian planets—Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune—are farthest from the sun. These bigger planets, which are made predominantly of hydrogen and helium gas, spin at a faster rate and may feature rings and numerous satellites.

(118 words)

Response 2 (Writing Band 80)

All planets must be in orbit around the sun, be massive enough to have their own gravity, and have cleared the neighborhood around their orbit. Despite these similarities, there are still major differences and distinctions between planets. One of the major ones is composition. Planets that are closer to the sun are mostly composed of rock or metal. The outer planets are very different and are made of hydrogen and helium gas. Another difference is size as planets closer to the sun are smaller and those further away are gas giants. Smaller planets are also denser which allows humans to send probes or to potentially go visit them. Larger, gas giants have no solid surface.

(115 words)

Academic Writing Study Tips

- Improve your level of academic English by **reading small sections or chapters of academic texts** on **a variety of academic topics**. Ideally, read recent texts published in North America to get a good sense of the characteristics of modern Canadian academic writing.

- **Read opinion pieces** in the news; notice how writers express and support their views. Where applicable, observe how writers support their ideas with information from other sources.

- **Listen to formal monologues on academic topics**, such as TED talks, podcast episode excerpts, and YouTube videos by experts in a variety of fields.

- **Keep a vocabulary journal** and note down the meaning, pronunciation, and usage of new words. Familiarize yourself with the most common words in the **Academic Word List**. Incorporate new words into your daily practice as much as possible.

- Develop your sentence structure by learning to use **compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences**.

- **Learn a range of transition words and phrases**; attempt to develop your transition usage past the standard *Firstly, Secondly, Lastly, In conclusion*. There are dozens of transitions that can be used within and between sentences to add meaning to the ideas.

- **Practice summarizing and paraphrasing ideas.** This can be done using any academic text or audio clip. It can be done with longer and shorter passages, with or without a time limit.

- **Do timed writing practice: long responses with a 35-minute time limit and short responses within 10 minutes.** There are lots of general academic writing questions online that require expressing an opinion (like the Long Writing), and any text or lecture can be summarized (like the Short Writing). The sources don't have to be official CAEL resources to be useful for practice. Get a sense of how much time you benefit from spending on prewriting, writing, and reviewing.

CAEL Preparation Resources

CAEL Webinars

Webinar	Focus	Length
CAEL 101: Get the Facts	An overview of the features and format of the CAEL Test	90 minutes
CAEL 201: Speaking and Test Format	CAEL Part 1: Independent Speaking	90 minutes
CAEL 202: Reading and Speaking	CAEL Part 2: Integrated Reading	90 minutes
CAEL 203: Listening and Speaking	CAEL Part 3: Integrated Listening	90 minutes
CAEL 204: Writing, Reading, and Listening	CAEL Parts 4 + 5: Academic Units A + B	90 minutes
CAEL 301: Speaking	CAEL Speaking tasks	2 hours
CAEL 302: Writing	CAEL Writing tasks	90 minutes

- **Everyone is welcome to register for all CAEL webinars!** It is not necessary to attend them in sequence. Register here.
- You can participate and ask questions to the instructor in all sessions.
- After each session, you will receive an email that includes a link to **free study materials**: a PDF containing the most important content from the webinar, including checklists and strategies.
- You can attend the same session more than once, but please be aware that **the content will be the same**. We repeat these webinars frequently to help new test takers learn about the test!
- One recording of each webinar is posted on our **YouTube channel**.

Additional Resources

Free CAEL Practice Tests: access them here

CAEL Preparation Program: cael.ca/cael-prep-program

Online Store: cael.ca/prepare-for-cael/paid-study-materials

CAEL Live on YouTube: find playlist here

CAEL Prep with Brandi on YouTube: find playlist here

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