

# English at Work: global analysis of language skills in the workplace



# Executive summary

Cambridge English and QS present a global, cross-industry overview of English language skills at work. The findings are based on data from 5,373 employers in 38 countries that completed the annual QS Global Employer Survey, as well as insights from industry experts at Cambridge English.

Findings based on responses from employers who felt that English is important.

## How important are English language skills?

English is immensely important wherever you are in the world. In countries where English is not a native or official language, over two thirds of employers say that English is important for their business.

English is the language of international business, so increasingly it is just as important for businesses in native and non-native English-speaking countries. The survey shows that English language skills are important for over 95% of employers in many non-native English-speaking countries.



**The English language requirements of our staff can only increase in the next 10 years, because our business will depend more and more on global business.'**

Natsuki Segawa, Manager, Aerospace Systems, ITOCHU Corporation, Japan

## The most important English language skills

Employers say it is important to have proficiency in all four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). However, the *most* important language skill is reading (in 11 industries), followed by speaking (in nine industries).

Reading in English is essential for maintaining professional knowledge, as it is the language most often used in international journals, contracts and instructions. Speaking tends to be the most important skill in service industries such as Travel, Leisure and Hospitality, where social interaction is a big part of the job.

## Employers' English language requirements

There is a wide range of English requirements in countries where English is not a native or official language, with 7% of job tasks requiring native-level English, 49% requiring advanced English, 33% requiring intermediate English and 8% requiring basic English.\*

The highest English language requirements are in business sectors, such as Banking, Finance and Law, where business publications tend to use complex and technical English. Language requirements are lower in Travel, Leisure, Hospitality, Transportation, Distribution and Utilities, possibly because customer-facing roles tend to use more everyday English, and issues in understanding can be resolved with relatively simple English.

\* The remaining respondents answered 'Don't know' or 'Not applicable'.

## How many employers have an English language skills gap?

In every industry, there is a gap between the English language skills required and the skills that are actually available. Interestingly, there is little difference between large, medium-sized and small employers. Across all company sizes there is at least a 40% skills gap.

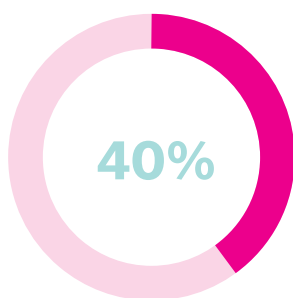
The biggest skills gaps are found in:

- **Internal-facing roles**, such as HR and Personnel, Accounting and Finance, Production and Logistics. External-facing roles, such as Marketing, Sales, and Customer Services, tend to have smaller skills gaps.

- **Non-native English-speaking countries**, where some of the highest skills gaps are in China, Japan, Russia and South Korea.

The lowest skills gaps are in middle and top management, where there is a 25% skills gap.

Countries that have historically traded with non-English-speaking countries often have the highest English skills gaps. The gap is smaller in countries where English is an official language (e.g. Singapore and India).

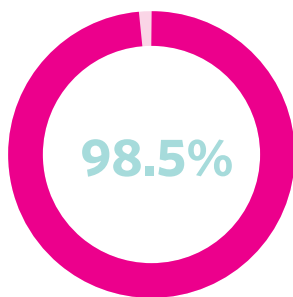


**Across all company sizes there is at least a 40% skills gap.**

## Evaluating English language skills during recruitment

98.5% of employers have at least one method of assessing English language competency. The most common method is to interview applicants in English. In addition, over a quarter of employers use an externally created English language test.

The use of external, expert-created English language tests indicates how important English language skills are to employers and the need to assess language skills in a thorough and reliable way.



**When recruiting, 98.5% of employers have at least one method of assessing English language competency.**

## Benefits for employees

Approximately half of all employers offer a better starting package to applicants with good English language skills. Good English skills can also lead to faster progression through job grades (50% of employers) and higher salary increases (46% of employers).

Better packages are most common in non-native English-speaking countries, such as Brazil, China and Chile. These countries also reported having some of the biggest English skills gaps.

Visit our interactive *English at Work* website to discover more and **download the full report**, with detailed analysis for each industry and country, at:  
[www.cambridgeenglish.org/english-at-work](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/english-at-work)

*English at Work: global analysis of language skills in the workplace* has been compiled by Cambridge English in collaboration with QS. Findings from a series of questions included in the annual QS Global Employer Survey inform the first global, cross-industry overview of English language skills at work.

Cambridge English Language Assessment is part of the University of Cambridge. We develop and produce the most valuable range of qualifications for learners and teachers of English in the world. Over 5 million people in 130 countries take our exams every year. Around the world over 20,000 universities, employers, government ministries and other organisations rely on our exams and qualifications as proof of English language ability. Cambridge English exams are backed by the work of the largest dedicated research team of any English language test provider.

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