EUROCONTROL

EUROCONTROL AVIATION LEARNING CENTRE

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EUROCONTROL

ELPAC

English Language Proficiency

for Aeronautical Communication

Consolidated Handbook — Version 14.2

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About this handbook

This handbook describes the procedures, roles, technical requirements and assessment guidance needed to administer and assess the ELPAC test. It is a single reference for all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the ELPAC test, and it is intended to be read selectively.

> Who should read what
>
> • **Test Administrators** — Section 3 - Roles, Section 4 - Test Administrator Guide, Section 9 - Re-sit and appeals.
>
> • **Assessors (OPE / ELE)** — Section 2 Test structure, Section 5 Paper 1 Assessor Guide, Section 6 Paper 2 Assessor Guide, Appendix B Rating scheme.
>
> • **Third Assessors** — Section 7 Third Assessor guide, Section 9 Re-sit and appeals, Appendix B.
>
> • Trainers and quality reviewers — Section 10 Assessor training, Section 11 Practice and support.
>
> • **Briefing test takers** — point them to Annex C (ATCO) or Annex D (Pilot).

It supersedes and merges the following source documents:

- ELPAC Assessor Handbook, version 11.1 (26 May 2025).
- ELPAC Test Administrator Handbook, version 11.0 (01 February 2025).
- ELPAC Paper 2 Technical Manual, version 1.1 (13 May 2025).

This handbook covers the ELPAC digital test only. Procedures specific to the legacy paper-based ELPAC paper 2 are not considered as the paper-based format of the test was discontinued on 31 January 2026.

Two annexes have been added which reproduce the test taker preparation material distributed to test takers ahead of an ELPAC test, so that assessors and administrators can see what instructions and explanations test takers are given prior to the exam. These annexes are intended for reference and briefing use.

Appendices contain ELPAC reference material for test administrators and assessors (Appendices A and B). Annexes reproduce the material distributed to test takers (Annexes C and D).

Partners

EUROCONTROL

EUROCONTROL is responsible for the ELPAC test, assessor training and the overall ELPAC programme through its Aviation Learning Centre in Luxembourg.

ENOVATE

ENOVATE is responsible for the technical infrastructure that hosts and operates the ELPAC test system and provides technical support to users on request.

ZHAW (Zurich University of Applied Sciences — ZAV Centre for Aviation)

ZHAW is responsible for the English-language and linguistic aspects of the ELPAC test, including the evaluation of test items, test validity, test format, and ELPAC assessor training.

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PART I — OVERVIEW

1. Introduction

1.1 What is the ELPAC Test?

The ELPAC test was developed by EUROCONTROL to meet the ICAO and EU requirements for air traffic controllers and pilots to demonstrate their English language proficiency in aeronautical radiotelephony communication. It is operationalised as a language for specific purpose test and was designed in close collaboration between applied linguists and operational experts (Jacoby, 1998; Jacoby & McNamara, 1999; McNamara, 1996). The ELPAC test is regularly reviewed against the ICAO language proficiency requirements as they are set out in Annex 1 and Manual 9835 by the Aviation English Language Test Service (AELTS).

ELPAC is designed for licensed (operational) air traffic controllers and ATPL pilots. There are separate tests for the two professions. Their contents reflect the range of routine and non-routine communication tasks that these professionals are likely to encounter on the radiotelephony frequency, in the operational environment of the test taker. The focus is on the assessment of communicative competence, the ability to communicate safely, effectively, and efficiently. However, it is important to note that operational procedure or technical knowledge are not part of the construct of ELPAC.

The test comprises two papers and assesses ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6:

- **ELPAC paper 1** — listening comprehension, automatically marked.
- **ELPAC paper 2** — oral interaction, delivered live by two trained assessors.

To achieve a licence endorsement, the test taker must obtain a pass in paper 1 and at least ICAO Level 4 in paper 2. The score in paper 1 does not influence the level awarded in paper 2; if a pass in paper 1 has been achieved, it is the level awarded in paper 2 that determines the final ICAO level endorsed in the test taker's licence.

1.2 The ELPAC Test in Brief

The ELPAC test delivers both paper 1 and paper 2 through a single browser-based application accessible at www.elpactest.eu. Paper 1 is automatically marked, with results available immediately in the test taker's record. Paper 2 is delivered live by two assessors – an English Language Expert (ELE) and an Operational Expert (OPE) – using synchronised browser sessions, with all interlocutor scripts, visualisations, timers and grading screens presented inside the application.

Key benefits of the test

- Improved test security:
    - no need to print and collect paper interlocutor scripts or assessor sheets,
    - audio recording, scoring and result submission are handled inside the system.
    - The test taker, ELE and OPE work in a synchronised session with shared images

and timers.
- The paper 1 results are available immediately in the test taker's record, paper 2 results are submitted directly from the application.

1.3 The ELPAC Test System

The ELPAC test system is hosted on the Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud, with servers located in Europe. The system URL is **www.elpactest.eu**. The platform comprises:

- an online application for administering and delivering the test,
- a web server handling user-application communication, including the real-time WebSocket channel that synchronises paper 2 sessions,
- a database storing test content, assessor records and test taker results.

Access to the system is governed by named user accounts. Assessors use multi-factor authentication, while test takers receive single-use credentials issued by their test administrator.

2. Test Structure

This section summarises the structure of paper 1 (in both ATC and Pilot versions) and of paper 2. Detailed delivery procedures are provided in Sections 5 to 7.

2.1 Paper 1 — ATC (four parts, 45 items)

ELPAC ATC paper 1 tests listening comprehension between pilots and controllers and between controllers. Scenarios cover both routine and non-routine situations and are based on authentic material. The full paper 1 takes approximately 35 minutes.

PART 1 — SAQ (THREE AUDIO FILES, TWO ITEMS EACH)

Recognition task. Test takers write answers in alphanumeric format (max four digits/letters per box). Six items in total, plus an example. Test takers have 30 seconds to look at the questions before the first recording begins.

PART 2 — MCQ (THREE AUDIO FILES, THREE ITEMS EACH)

Comprehension of communications between a controller and one or two pilots, or between two controllers, in unusual and non-routine situations. Nine items plus an example. Each item has one key and two distractors. Test takers have up to 60 seconds to review the questions before each recording (countdown timer, the test taker may start earlier).

PART 3 — MCQ (THREE AUDIO FILES, FIVE ITEMS EACH)

Sentence-completion task testing comprehension of longer, more complex transmissions in unusual and non-routine situations. 15 items plus an example. One key and two distractors per item. 60-second pre-listen timer.

PART 4 — MCQ (THREE AUDIO FILES, FIVE ITEMS EACH)

Comprehension of communications between controllers and pilots dealing with unusual situations (longer and more complex than Part 2). Each item presents three statements referring to the same section of the audio file. 15 items plus an example. 60-second pre-listen timer.

2.2 Paper 1 — Pilot (five parts, 45 items)

ELPAC Pilot paper 1 tests listening comprehension of communications between pilots and controllers and, additionally, between pilots and cabin crew or company operations. The full paper 1 takes approximately 38 minutes.

PART 1 — SAQ (THREE AUDIO FILES, TWO ITEMS EACH)

Recognition task, six items plus an example. 30 seconds to review the questions before the first recording.

PART 2 — MCQ (TWO AUDIO FILES, THREE ITEMS EACH)

Recognition task using two ATIS messages, six items plus an example. 30 seconds to review the questions before the first recording.

PART 3 — MCQ (THREE AUDIO FILES, THREE ITEMS EACH)

Comprehension of communications between pilots and controllers in unusual and non-routine situations. Nine items plus an example. 60-second pre-listen timer.

PART 4 — MCQ (THREE AUDIO FILES, THREE ITEMS EACH)

Sentence-completion task assessing comprehension of communication between pilots, controllers, ground crew or cabin crew dealing with unusual situations. Nine items plus an example. 60-second pre-listen timer.

PART 5 — MCQ (THREE AUDIO FILES, FIVE ITEMS EACH)

Comprehension of longer, more complex transmissions in unusual situations. Each item presents three statements referring to the same section of the audio file. 15 items plus an example. 60-second pre-listen timer.

2.3 Paper 2 (four tasks)

ELPAC paper 2 is the oral interaction component of the test. It is made up of one non-visual task (Task 1a) and three visual tasks (Tasks 1b, 2 and 3) and takes approximately 20 minutes. The scenario context is matched to the test taker's role: Tower ATC, Approach ATC, Area ATC, or ATPL pilot.

Tasks 1a and 1b focus on the identification of the minimally competent test taker, using binary judgements to decide between a no-pass (ICAO Level 3) or a pass (ICAO Level 4). They require the test taker to demonstrate:

- appropriate use of standard ICAO phraseology,
- switching between standard ICAO phraseology and plain English,
- an appropriate response to a pilot/controller message,
- resolving misunderstandings,
- dealing effectively with the pilot–controller relationship,
- negotiating a developing unusual situation,
- making a verbal report in plain English.

Tasks 2 and 3 focus on the assessment of ICAO Levels 4, 5 and 6. They require the test taker to be able to:

- give opinions,
- put forward arguments,
- evaluate advantages and disadvantages,
- speculate,
- hypothesise,
- produce extended speech in an aviation context.

Table 1: Overview of Tasks in the ELPAC Tests for Air Traffic Controllers and Pilots

Task	Format	Duration	Interlocutor
Task 1a (ATC)	Non-visual radiotelephony exchange. Test taker acts as controller, interlocutor plays several pilots in routine and non-routine situations following a script.	6–8 min	OPE
Task 1a (Pilot)	Non-visual radiotelephony exchange. Test taker acts as pilot, interlocutor plays controller and other aircraft following a script.	6–8 min	OPE
Task 1b	Visual (face-to-face) verbal report on the events of Task 1a, given to the interlocutor playing the role of shift supervisor (ATC) or superior (Pilot).	3–4 min	OPE
Task 2	Visual interaction. Test taker describes an aviation-related picture and answers a set of follow-up questions.	3–4 min	ELE
Task 3	Visual interaction. Test taker is asked a set of questions about aviation issues in a broader context, following a script.	4–5 min	ELE

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The ELPAC test is implemented in each organisation by a dedicated team of trained personnel, each with clearly defined duties. Although the roles below are described separately, in most ELPAC test centres one person performs more than one of them — for example, a test administrator may also be a qualified paper 2 assessor and may invigilate paper 1.

3.1 ELPAC Test Administrator

The Test administrator is responsible for setting up ELPAC tests in the ELPAC test system and for coordinating all test activities within an organisation with:

- their own administration,
- test takers,
- paper 2 assessors (one ELE and one OPE per session),
- the test invigilator,
- the EUROCONTROL ELPAC team.

An ELPAC test centre may appoint more than one test administrator to share the workload or to provide cover during absences.

3.2 ELPAC Paper 2 Assessors (OPE and ELE)

Paper 2 is administered by a team of two assessors – one Operational Expert (OPE) and one English Language Expert (ELE). They share interlocution with the test taker and assess the performance against the ICAO scale, each focusing on the criteria that fall within their area of expertise.

Table 2: Overview of the Necessary Qualifications for ELPAC Assessors (ELE and OPE)

Accreditation	ELE qualifications	OPE qualifications
Certified to assess up to ICAO Level 5	Formal education in English-language teaching, language testing or equivalent experience, with a minimum IELTS Level 6.5 (or equivalent), or native-speaker proficiency in English. May also be a person with an operational background at ICAO Level 5 who has successfully completed the ELPAC assessor course and is trained in the ELE role if deemed fit by the course instructors.	Operational background (holder of an air traffic control or pilot licence) and ICAO Level 5 proficiency.
Certified to assess up to ICAO Level 6	Formal education in English-language teaching, language testing or equivalent experience, with a minimum IELTS Level 7.5 (or equivalent), or native-speaker proficiency in English. Exceptionally, this may also be a person with an operational background at ICAO Level 6 who has successfully completed the ELPAC assessor course and is trained in the ELE role if deemed fit by the course instructors.	Operational background (holder of an air traffic control or pilot licence) and ICAO Level 6 proficiency demonstrated through the ELPAC.

3.3 Third Assessor

A third assessor is called in only when the OPE and ELE cannot agree on a final level. The third assessor listens once to the recording and assesses it using either the ELE or the OPE third-assessor view, depending on the nature of the disagreement. If the disagreement concerns the ICAO Level 3 / 4, the third assessor shall be an OPE, if it concerns ICAO Level 4 or higher, the third assessor is an ELE. An OPE acting as third assessor may not award a level higher than ICAO Level 4 (see Section 7 for a detailed explanation of the procedure).

3.4 ELPAC Test Invigilator

The Invigilator supervises test takers during ELPAC paper 1 to ensure proper conduct of the test. There is no invigilator during ELPAC paper 2 — that session is managed by the assigned paper 2

assessors themselves. The ELPAC Invigilator is not a dedicated role. It is a task that is usually performed either by the ELE or OPE.

3.5 ELPAC Test Taker

The ELPAC test taker is a professional pilot, a licensed air traffic controller, or a student pilot or air traffic controller shortly before they start their on-the-job training.

PART II — RUNNING THE TEST

4. Test Administrator Guide

This section is the day-to-day manual for the persons who set up and run the ELPAC test sessions within an organisation. It takes the reader through preparation in the test system, the technical and environmental requirements, the briefing of test takers, test-day coordination, the handling of incidents, and the re-sit and appeals processes.

4.1 Setting up Tests in the ELPAC Test System

The test administrator is responsible for the following tasks:

- Create test taker profiles in the ELPAC test system.
- Set up a testing schedule for the ELPAC test session(s).
- Assign paper 2 assessors (one OPE and one ELE) to a test session with a test taker.
- Arrange suitable locations for testing.
- Inform test takers and assessors of the test time and place.
- Verify that all computers used for paper 1 work correctly and will not start updating during the test.
- Verify that the three devices needed for paper 2 (one per role) work correctly.
- Ensure that all ELPAC assessors have their personal ELPAC test system login details and are familiar with the multi-factor authentication (MFA) login procedure.
- Log test takers into the ELPAC test system prior to a paper 1 test, and ensure they are correctly logged out afterwards.
- Brief test takers on testing procedures.
- Ensure proper conduct of the ELPAC test.

Setup and workflow for Paper 2

1. Choose a paper 2 ELPAC test version during the test setup. Create a separate setup for each function (licence, ATCO role or pilot type). Test takers sharing the same function (for example, all TWR ATCOs) can be assigned to the same setup.
2. Specify the test type, then choose the date, time and location. Rename the setup to a meaningful name and save it.
3. Assign test takers to the setup. Add them to existing profiles or create new test taker profiles. Each test taker receives unique paper 1 and paper 2 tests.
4. Assign one ELE and one OPE assessor per test taker. Use the bulk-select option to apply the same assessors to all test takers or assign them individually.
5. To check or modify a test taker's assigned test versions or scripts, click the cogwheel next to the candidate and select **paper 2 score**, the assigned script can be changed in the popup window.
6. Download usernames and passwords for paper 1 and paper 2 from the **Reports** button above the test setup. Test-taker credentials are identical for paper 1 and paper 2.

> Scripts in the test
>
> No scripts need to be downloaded or printed. All interlocutor scripts, instructions and grading screens are presented to assessors by the application at the appropriate time.

4.2 Technical Requirements

The paper 2 specifications below also apply to paper 1 in ELPAC and supersede earlier published minimums. Run the sample test on www.elpac.info to verify your equipment in advance.

Table 3: Necessary Technical Requirements to be Able to Run the ELPAC Test

Component	Minimum requirement	Recommended
Operating system	Windows 10 or macOS 12 (Monterey)	Windows 11 or latest macOS
Processor	Intel Core i5 (10th gen or later) / Apple M1	Intel Core i7 / Apple M2 or better
Memory (RAM)	8 GB	16 GB
Storage	256 GB SSD	512 GB SSD
Display	13" Full HD (1920 × 1080)	15" or larger Full HD or better
Browser	Latest versions of Chrome, Edge, Safari or Firefox	Preferably Chrome or Edge
Internet connection	Stable internet, minimum 5 Mbps	Wired or stable Wi-Fi preferred
Ports	No specific requirement	HDMI or USB-C for external screen support
Audio / video	Built-in microphone and webcam	—
Other	WebSocket support in browser (default in modern browsers)	No special installations required

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- The test system operates entirely online in modern browsers, using WebSocket for real-time communication.
- Run the sample test on www.elpac.info to verify your equipment and to check for any possible IT configured restrictions.
- Ensure that computers used for paper 1 will not start operating-system or browser updates during the test.

4.3 Briefing Test Takers

Test takers shall have enough time to prepare and shall receive a detailed briefing ahead of taking the ELPAC test. The briefing can be delivered by the test administrator or an ELPAC Assessor, preferably in English, and should make clear that the test assesses communicative competence rather than operational performance.

Encourage test takers to read the ELPAC Test Taker Preparation booklet appropriate to their function (the ATCO and pilot versions are reproduced in Annexes C and D respectively of this handbook), to do the paper 1 sample test on www.elpac.info at least once, and to review the paper 2 demonstration available on the same site.

4.4 Test-Day Coordination

On test day, the test administrator should:

- Verify that all three devices required for each paper 2 session (ELE, OPE, test taker) are working and on a stable network.
- Distribute usernames and passwords printed from the **Reports** view of the test setup.
- Confirm that assessors can log in (MFA configured) and that the test taker, ELE and OPE are in the same paper 2 session — the connection indicator at the top right of the assessor app must be dark blue for all three roles.

4.5 Handling Technical Problems

If a problem occurs:

1. Note the time, the test taker username, the nature of the problem and the action taken.
2. Log out and log in again with the test taker username and password. Enter the daily authentication code if asked. The test should resume where it stopped.
3. If this does not work, restart the test. Contact the ENOVATE helpdesk for support.
4. If the test cannot be completed for technical reasons, the test taker shall take another test version at the earliest opportunity.
5. Record all problems in the report on test administration and notify ENOVATE so that the situation can be corrected and a repetition avoided.

> ENOVATE helpdesk

- Email: support@enovate.no
- Telephone: +47 4000 2138 (07:00–15:00 UTC, weekdays).
- ENOVATE is based in Norway. For tests scheduled on weekends, notify ENOVATE in advance by email so that support arrangements can be made.

5. Paper 1 – Assessor Guide

The assessors ensure the proper conduct of the test. One assessor shall be present in the testing room throughout paper 1 to ensure the security of the test and that the results of paper 1 are the test taker's own original work: it is the only point in the test where the assessors are not directly observing and marking the test taker.

5.1 ELPAC Paper 1

- Test takers do not have to make notes during paper 1 as they input their responses online, directly in the testing system.
- Mobile phones and other equipment are not permitted in the examination room.
- Test takers must work completely on their own and must not talk with anybody in the room except the invigilator.
- The invigilator ensures that each test taker is seated in front of and logged into their own test, with their name displayed on the screen (from the set-up procedure).
- The invigilator also ensures that headphones are correctly connected and working.
- The Administrator or Invigilator briefs the test taker on the structure of paper 1, on what to do in case of technical problems, and on how to log out cleanly when the test is finished.

5.2 ELPAC Paper 2

There is no need for a separate invigilator during ELPAC paper 2. The session is managed and invigilated by the assigned ELE and OPE, who are responsible for opening and closing the session, recording, interacting and grading.

6. Paper 2 – Assessor Guide

EUROCONTROL does not employ ELPAC paper 2 assessors of its own. They are employed by the organisations that have signed a licence agreement with EUROCONTROL for the use of the ELPAC test. In most cases, assessors perform other duties within their organisation and conduct testing in addition to their main job, which means there may be long periods between testing sessions. This section is therefore intended as a structured refresher: it can be read in full before a session, or scanned by topic individually to recall a specific procedure.

6.1 Preparing the Session

In preparation of an ELPAC paper 2 session, the assessors shall

- review and practise all test tasks together with their fellow assessor,
- confirm that the three devices (ELE, OPE, test taker) are powered, networked and signed in to the ELPAC test system,
- ensure good audio quality by avoiding distracting background noise (air conditioning, external sounds, etc.),
- verify their MFA setup before the session — see *ELPAC Test System – MFA v1.0.pdf*, available from the main page of the ELPAC test system application.

6.2 Logging In

Test taker's device

Use the test taker credentials obtained during test preparation (identical to those used for paper 1). Multi-factor authentication (MFA) is not required for test takers. After login, the test taker selects the paper 2 entry under **Available setups** and clicks **Start test (redirect to App)**. A neutral background appears on the test taker's screen while the session is being prepared.

Assessors' devices (ELE and OPE)

Assessors log in to www.elpactest.eu with their own credentials and complete multi-factor authentication using their authenticator app (recommended), SMS or email code. From the profile menu, select **Assessor app**. The assessor app lists the day's test takers assigned to their respective assessor role, click **Begin** in the row of the relevant test taker. The first page of paper 2 opens in a new browser tab.

> Verify the session is synchronised
>
> • The connection indicator (top right) must show all three roles – ELE, OPE and test taker – in dark blue.

- The three URLs after starting paper 2 must be identical.
- ELE and OPE must see the same test taker's name and time on the first page of paper 2.

6.3 Elements of the Paper 2 Interface

Assessors see the following elements during test delivery:

1. **Role and time** — the top-left corner shows the user's role (ELE/OPE) and the elapsed time.
2. **Role-control indicator** — shows which role currently has control (ELE or OPE highlighted in blue).
3. **Progress bar** — shows test progress.
4. **Information box** — provides information for the assessors.
5. **Read-aloud element** — items to be read by the assessor delivering that part.
6. **Control buttons** — navigation buttons and the toggle button to show or hide images and charts on the candidate's screen.
7. **Timer** — measures 60 or 30 seconds.
8. **Test scripts** — the actual content of the tasks.
9. **Connection indicator** — shows the connection status of ELE, OPE and test taker.

6.4 Navigation

Either ELE or OPE is responsible for delivery at any given moment. Tasks 1a and 1b are led by the OPE, whereas Task 2 and Task 3 and all instructions are managed by the ELE. The role in charge controls the application and uses the next/back navigation arrows, the current-role indicator shows who is in charge at any moment.

At the start of the test, the ELE controls the application and hands control to OPE by clicking next after the instructions for Task 1a and Task 1b. Once the OPE finishes a task, control returns to the ELE automatically when the OPE clicks next. The navigation arrows are only active for the assessor currently in charge – preventing accidental clicks while a colleague is speaking.

Navigation backwards is possible until the grading phases. Once a grading page is completed and the ELE navigates forward, it is not possible to return to that grading page to change the grades. The **Show image to candidate** button can be operated by either assessor, regardless of the role in charge, its status is synchronised between ELE and OPE.

6.5 Using the Timer

1. Click the timer icon in the bottom right corner to open it. Defaults: 60 seconds for Task 1a and 30 seconds for Task 2.
2. Use the blue button to start or pause the timer.
3. Click the reset icon to reset the timer.
4. Close the timer by clicking X or the timer icon again.

6.6 Step-by-Step Delivery

PREVIEW

Both ELE and OPE can preview tasks and study scenarios before the test taker enters the room. Click **Preview** to open a task, the script appears in a popup window. Close the popup by clicking the grey area next to it. When ready, the ELE clicks next to start.

BEFORE TEST

The OPE sees role details, whereas the ELE sees a checklist. The ELE must start the recording, identify the date, time and test taker's name, and invites the test taker into the room. Each item is confirmed by ticking a checkbox. Ticking is mandatory before proceeding. The stopwatch starts when the ELE clicks next.

> Where checkboxes are mandatory
>
> Page 2 (Before test) is the only page where ticking the checkboxes is mandatory. On all other pages, checkboxes are optional and exist to help the assessors track progress.

WELCOME

The ELE reads the welcome script and asks the readiness question. The OPE screen remains blank.

TASK 1A INSTRUCTIONS

The ELE reads the test taker instructions for Task 1a. Meanwhile, the OPE reviews the Task 1a scenario on screen. The image must not be shown to the candidate at this stage.

TASK 1A

The ELE turns on the image, so that it appears on the test taker's computer. Once the image appears on the test taker's screen, they start the 60-second timer. After 60 seconds, the ELE reads the handover script and clicks next. Control transfers to the OPE, who delivers Task 1a using the prepared messages, ticking the checkboxes next to each script line as appropriate. When the OPE clicks next at the end of the task, control returns to the ELE and the next page appears.

> Image visibility
>
> When assessors navigate to a new page, the image (or chart) is automatically removed from the test taker's screen, regardless of the toggle-button state.

TASK 1B INSTRUCTIONS

The ELE's screen contains the script with the instructions for Task 1b. Meanwhile, the OPE's screen remains blank.

TASK 1B

Initially, the ELE retains control, reads the script aloud and clicks next, transferring control to the OPE. The OPE turns on the image so that it appears on the test taker's screen, then delivers the Task 1b script using the key events checklist. When the OPE finishes, control returns to the ELE by clicking next. The image is turned off from the test taker's screen automatically when assessors proceed to the next page.

GRADING TASK 1

The ELE and OPE each select one option per criterion. The navigation arrows on the ELE's screen remain inactive until both assessors have completed their grading. If an assessor selects a descriptor that produces an ICAO Level 3 outcome, the ELE is asked whether to continue the test. If the ELE stops the test, the application proposes a Level 3 result, which the ELE must confirm in a popup. If the test continues, after clicking next a popup asks the ELE to confirm the grades – once confirmed, it is not possible to go back to this page or to modify the ratings.

TASK 2 INSTRUCTIONS

Scripts for the Task 2 instructions appear on the ELE's screen, while the OPE sees a blank screen. The ELE remains in charge.

TASK 2

The ELE turns on the image so that it appears on the test taker's screen and then starts the 30-second preparation timer. The ELE **begins Task 2 using the checkboxes to track answered questions.** The OPE can see the image but cannot interact. After the task, the ELE turns off the image from the test taker's screen (or it is removed automatically when the ELE clicks next).

TASK 3

Task 3 is led by the ELE. They tick the checkboxes for the questions used. The OPE cannot interact but can follow Task 3 because the questions are also displayed on their screen. Task 3 contains three topic sections, each with three questions. The ELE shall choose two of the topics and ask at least two questions per chosen topic. The two questions from the same topic shall be asked in sequence before moving on to the next topic. After the last question, the ELE thanks the test taker, informs them that they have reached the end of the test, and stops the recording.

GRADING TASK 2 AND 3

Both the ELE and OPE select one option per criterion. The navigation buttons on the ELE's screen remain inactive until both have completed their grading. After clicking next, a popup asks the ELE to confirm the grades. Once confirmed, it is not possible to return or modify the ratings.

FINAL RESULT SHEET

The last page contains the final test taker result sheet. The system automatically recommends a final level based on how the assessors graded the performance. The page is pre-filled, only the highlighted area is editable. Both ELE and OPE may add comments. Submission of the result is the responsibility of the ELE.

The ELE may confirm or refuse the proposed final grade after discussion with OPE:

- **Scenario A** — ELE accepts the proposed level. The submit button becomes active. Clicking submit saves all results to the database.
- **Scenario B** — ELE overwrites the final level. ELE must select a different final level and provide a justification in the comment section.
- **Scenario C** — ELE requests a third assessor. The role to be re-assessed (ELE or OPE) must be selected, with a justification in the comment section.

A successful submission is shown by a popup message and the submit button turns green. Assessors can then close the browser tab. The assessor app stays open so the team can continue with the next test taker.

6.7 General Do / Do Not

DO

- Be polite and attentive.
- Create and maintain a stress-free atmosphere as far as possible.
- Keep to the defined time parameters for each task, know them before you start examining.
- Set up a system with your co-assessor to monitor the time.
- Speak clearly so that the test taker can understand you.
- Keep to the interlocutor framework presented on screen.
- Be aware of your speed of delivery (see Section 6.11).
- Allow the test taker enough opportunity to speak.
- Be discreet when making notes or checking the time.
- Listen to the test taker and maintain eye contact as much as possible (except in Task 1a).

DO NOT

- Be unfriendly, disapproving or patronising.
- Dominate the conversation.
- Correct the test taker’s mistakes.
- Help the test taker to finish what they want to say.
- Interrupt the test taker before they have finished speaking.
- Interrupt the test taker’s speech flow unless necessary to make the conversation more interactive.
- Repeat what the test taker says.
- Interrupt or fill in pauses — allow the test taker time to think.
- Give any indication of the test taker’s performance (negative or positive). Use sparingly neutral expressions such as "mmm", "aha".
- Over-accommodate (e.g. simplify your language or slow down your delivery too much).

6.8 Task-Specific Recommendations

6.8.1 Task 1a

- Use the prepared messages presented on screen. Do not construct new messages (PPM/PCM or US).
- Some scenarios contain messages which should or should not be used depending on what the test taker says – observe the script.
- Allow a two- to four-second pause between individual messages (sometimes longer, depending on context).
- Take note of clearances and instructions issued by the test taker to maintain situational awareness.

6.8.2 Task 1b, Task 2 and Task 3

- In Task 1b, use the key events checklist to ensure the test taker provides a comprehensive summary.
- Ask only one question at a time and wait for an answer before asking a back-up if necessary.
- Questions on the interlocutor sheet do not have to be asked in sequential order. However, in Task 3 it is recommended to start with question 1 of each chosen topic.
- Listen to what the test taker says and do not ask questions to which you have already received answers.
- Do not ask questions which are not on the interlocutor sheet.
- If a test taker does not seem to know the answer or does not seem to understand the question, repeat the question verbatim. If they still do not understand, rephrase your question once only, and then progress to the next question.

6.9 Questioning Techniques

DO

- Use scripted questions for elicitation.
- Ask open "wh"-questions whenever possible (why, who, when, etc.).
- Frame questions so that the test taker can take over and develop the point.
- Ask only one question at a time.
- Encourage test takers to answer as fully as possible — "How can you tell?", "How do you know?", "Can you explain why?", "Can you explain a bit further?".
- Repeat the question or instruction if it has not been understood. If still not understood, rephrase using language of the same level of difficulty. If still not understood, progress to the next question.

DO NOT

- Ask confusing, sensitive, embarrassing or taboo questions.
- Use knowledge-based questions.
- Make understanding one question dependent on understanding the previous one.
- Ask "yes/no" questions.

- Use statements as question prompts.

6.10 Paraphrasing

To paraphrase means to repeat something said using different words, and/or in a different form, to make the original meaning clearer. If a test taker does not seem to know the answer or to understand a question or instruction, repeat the question or instruction verbatim. If the test taker still does not understand, paraphrase your question only once and then move on. Do not over-explain — paraphrasing more than once turns the test into a tutorial and undermines the assessment.

6.11 Speed of Delivery

Assessors' own speech sets the pace for the test taker. Use the following ranges as a guide:

Table 4: Guidelines for Speech Rates in the ELPAC Test

Element	Words per minute
Instructions	130–170 wpm
Task 1a (OPE)	100 wpm
Tasks 1b, 2 and 3	130–170 wpm

6.12 Working with the Assessor Sheets

Both assessors assess the test taker during the exam, but they focus on different features and have clearly divided roles. The ELE and OPE views in the application correspond to the ELE and OPE assessor sheets.

In Tasks 1a and 1b, the focus is on the identification of the minimally competent test taker at ICAO Level 4. The OPE assesses four ICAO criteria – Pronunciation, Fluency, Comprehension, and Interaction. The ELE focuses on Vocabulary and Structure and makes a holistic, lexicogrammatically judgement of language skill. For a pass at ICAO Level 4, the OPE must mark the test taker at ICAO Level 4 in every one of the four criteria for Tasks 1a and 1b, and the ELE must mark the test taker at ICAO Level 4 in the corresponding view. There is no compensatory marking.

In Tasks 2 and 3, the focus is on language proficiency at the higher ICAO Levels 5 and 6. The ELE takes over interaction with the test taker and carries the main responsibility for grading. The ELE assesses every one of the six ICAO criteria – Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Structure, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction. The OPE makes a holistic judgement to confirm or challenge the ELE's decision.

6.12.1 Assessor Interaction in Task 1a

The OPE uses the traffic-light system on the interlocutor view to keep track of the performance:

- **Green box** — the test taker's understanding of, and response to, a transmission is appropriate.
- **Orange box** — the test taker's understanding of, or response to, a transmission requires clarification.
- **Red box** — the test taker's response to a transmission suggests a lack of understanding.

6.12.2 Assessor Interaction in Task 1b

The OPE is the interlocutor in Task 1b. The key events checklist in Task 1b contains the most important points from Task 1a that the test taker can be expected to mention. However, Task 1b is not a memory test – follow-up questions exist to elicit pieces of information the test taker may initially have forgotten. If the test taker still does not mention some elements, that is still acceptable. However, factually incorrect summaries that do not realistically reflect Task 1a may suggest a lack of understanding or an underlying language issue.

6.12.3 Assessor Interaction in Task 2

The ELE plays the interlocutor in Task 2. The ELE may use follow-up questions to elicit more detail about the picture but should not ask follow-ups that refer to things the test taker has already mentioned.

6.12.4 Assessor Interaction in Task 3

The ELE plays the interlocutor in Task 3.

6.13 At the End of Paper 2

At the end of Task 3, inform the test taker that the test is finished. Stop the recording before the test taker leaves the room and advise them on how they will be informed of the test outcome. ELE and OPE complete their grading independently in the application. Once both have submitted, they complete the final result sheet together.

First, the ELE and OPE check whether they both awarded the test taker ICAO Level 4 in Tasks 1a and 1b. If they did not, they tick **No** in the **Level 4 observed by both the ELE and OPE** box, this means the test taker has failed and the final level is Level 3.

If both confirm ICAO Level 4, the ELE informs the OPE of the level recommended for Tasks 2 and 3. The OPE confirms by ticking **Yes** in the **Recommended level confirmed by the OPE** box, and the final level is recorded. If the OPE does not confirm, the final level remains empty. A test taker cannot achieve ICAO Level 5 or 6 unless they are first confirmed to be at least at ICAO Level 4 in Tasks 1a and 1b.

When the OPE does not confirm the ELE's recommendation, the main points of the discussion and justifications must be summarised in the comment box, and **Yes** must be ticked in the **Third Assessor required** field. The administrator is responsible for assigning the audio file to the third

assessor – without giving any indication of the suggested level or the test taker's performance. If the dispute between assessors concerns the ICAO Level 3 or 4 threshold, the third assessors shall be an OPE. They will listen to the entire audio file and may not award a grade higher than ICAO Level 4. If the dispute is between ICAO Level 4 or higher, the third assessor shall be an ELE.

6.14 Test-Taker Record

Paper 2 results are displayed in the test taker's record. Administrators navigate to the test sessions, click the cogwheel next to the test taker's line and select **Paper 2 score**. The scoring tab shows the final level (which is fixed). Detailed assessment results can later be downloaded in PDF format (this feature is still being developed).

6.15 Assessor Fatigue

Language assessment requires sustained concentration. To mitigate the effects of assessor fatigue, it is recommended that the number of paper 2 tests assessed by one team (one OPE and one ELE) does not exceed six per day, and that assessments are scheduled in such a way that assessors have enough breaks between assessments.

7. Third Assessor Guide

The third assessor is the backstop of ELPAC paper 2. They are called in only when the OPE and the ELE cannot agree on a final level for a test taker. Their decision is final.

7.1 Role of the Third Assessor

The third assessor listens to the recording of the performance and assesses it using the ELE or the OPE third assessor sheet depending on the nature of the disagreement. The assessor sheet for the third assessors is on paper and not an integrated part of the test app. The third assessor shall listen to the recording only once. The third assessor record is attached to the test taker's file by the test administrator.

7.2 When to Call a Third Assessor

- When the two assessors cannot agree on a final level for a particular test taker, a third assessor is asked to evaluate the performance and decide on the level.
- If the disagreement concerns the ICAO Level 3 / 4 threshold, the third assessor is an OPE. They listen to the entire recording and may not award a level higher than ICAO Level 4. If the disagreement concerns ICAO Level 4 or higher, the third assessor is an ELE.
- No indication of a level, or hint of the test taker's performance, shall be given to the third assessor.
- No indication of the reasons for the request for a third assessment shall be given to the third assessor.
- The third assessor has the casting vote.

7.3 Interaction with Appeals and Re-Sits

A third assessor may also be assigned during an appeal - see Section 9 for the full appeals procedure and the re-sit recommendations.

PART III — MARKING, RESULTS & APPEALS

8. Marking and Results

8.1 Paper 1 — Automatic Marking

Paper 1 in its current format (introduced in 2021) consists mainly of multiple-choice and short-answer questions that require only a few characters of input. Test takers select the correct response by clicking the corresponding box or type a short alphanumeric answer.

Automatic marking improves the comparability of test scores by reducing susceptibility to construct-irrelevant variance and to co-production by the assessor. Paper 1 results are available immediately in the test taker's record on the ELPAC test system after the test is completed, the test administrator does not need to upload, score or moderate paper 1.

8.2 Paper 2 — Marking and Final Result

Paper 2 is marked by an OPE (Operational Expert) and an ELE (English Language Expert), working as a team in the ELPAC application. This subsection summarises how their two assessments combine into a single ICAO level and how that level becomes the test taker's official result. Detailed assessor instructions are given in Sections 6.12 and 6.13.

Division of labour between OPE and ELE

- **Tasks 1a and 1b** (operational readiness, target ICAO Level 4): the OPE assesses Pronunciation, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction. The ELE assesses Vocabulary and Structure (holistic). There is no compensatory marking – Level 4 must be reached on every criterion in both views.
- **Tasks 2 and 3** (higher proficiency, ICAO Levels 5 and 6): the ELE assesses all six ICAO criteria and leads the grading. The OPE makes a holistic judgement to confirm or challenge the ELE's decision. Only assessors accredited for ICAO Level 6 may award Level 6.

Reaching the final level

Both assessors grade independently in the application, they consolidate their gradings on the final result sheet and proceed in two steps:

- **Level 4 gate (Tasks 1a and 1b).** Both OPE and ELE must have awarded Level 4. If either did not, **Level 4 observed by both the ELE and OPE***?* is ticked No and the final level is recorded as Level 3.
- **Level recommendation (Tasks 2 and 3).** If the ICAO Level 4 threshold is reached, the ELE proposes the final level and the OPE confirms by ticking **Recommended level confirmed by the OPE**. If the OPE does not confirm, the final level is left empty pending a third assessor.

A test taker can never be awarded ICAO Level 5 or 6 without first receiving ICAO Level 4 as the result of Tasks 1a and 1b.

Disagreement and the third assessor

When the OPE does not confirm the ELE's recommendation, the assessors record the main points of their discussion in the comment box and tick Yes in **Third Assessor required**. The test administrator then assigns the recording to a third assessor with no indication of the suggested level or the test taker's performance (full procedure: Section 7). The third assessor's decision is the casting vote and becomes the final level.

Issuing the final result

Once the final level is decided:

- The result is stored against the test taker's record in the ELPAC test system. Test administrators open the test session, click the cogwheel on the test taker's line and select **Paper 2 score**, the scoring tab shows the final level, which is read-only.
- Detailed assessment results can be downloaded as PDF from the same record (feature in development).
- The test taker is informed of the outcome by the test administrator following the testing organisation's standard reporting process.
- The result may subsequently be challenged through the appeals procedure explained in Section 9.

Record retention. Candidate records, including the assessors' assessment scores and the Paper 2 audio recording, are retained for 10 years. Where the final result is ICAO Level 6, the records are retained for 50 years. ELPAC test centres may, in addition, keep records of their own test takers on file. This retention practice meets the applicable regulatory requirements.

9. Re-Sit and Appeals

This section consolidates the re-sit recommendations and the appeals procedure that previously appeared in the Administrator and Third Assessor sections. Test administrators own the operational side of these processes. Assessors and third assessors are involved as described below.

9.1 Re-Sit Recommendations

ELPAC measures communicative competence in aeronautical radiotelephony communication. It is a robust test with rigid guidelines, and statistical analysis of past results has shown that test takers who re-sit the ELPAC test only after a short period do not achieve significantly different results. Test takers who fail to achieve ICAO Level 4 should focus on improving their English language proficiency before attempting the test again.

However, there may be circumstances that require or justify a re-sit. Local legislation or licensing rules prevail. ELPAC test centres manage and administer the ELPAC tests independently and are fully responsible for ensuring that their assessments and practices comply with ELPAC guidelines, local licensing legislation and rules.

- First-time ELPAC test takers may do a re-sit immediately or very shortly after their first ELPAC test.
- For test takers already familiar with the ELPAC format, a period of three months between two complete ELPAC tests is recommended (the minimum time required to improve English language proficiency).
- In case of special circumstances such as technical errors or test taker distraction, an immediate re-sit shall be organised.

9.2 Appeals Procedure

Every test taker is entitled to initiate an appeal. The appeal shall be filed within 14 days after receiving the results from the ELPAC test centre administrator, by completing the ELPAC appeal form and giving it to the administrator, who shall confirm the start of the appeal process. The appeals process shall be completed within four weeks. These provisions are the ELPAC default: where the local competent authority prescribes or approves a different appeals procedure or different time limits, the procedure of that authority prevails.

An appeal may relate to one or more of the following aspects:

1. **Paper 1 technical, room or noise issues** affecting completion of the test. The test taker is given the benefit of the doubt, if approved, a new paper 1 is organised after conditions are resolved.
2. **Paper 1 results.** The EUROCONTROL ELPAC team can be asked to verify the responses (request via elpac@eurocontrol.int with the test taker name and username, reply within three working days).

3. **Paper 2 assessor behaviour, room or noise issues.** The test centre verifies the reason with the assessors, assigns a paper 2 third assessor to listen to the recording and complete the third-assessor view, and may, exceptionally, request the EUROCONTROL ELPAC team to verify the recording (reply within four working days). If confirmed, a new paper 2 is organised (this requires support from the ELPAC support desk because the system cannot prepare a paper-2-only test).
4. **Paper 2 results.** A paper 2 third assessor is assigned and listens to the recording. The third assessor's assessment is conclusive. Exceptionally, if the third assessor also has serious doubts and the question is whether the test taker passes or fails, the EUROCONTROL ELPAC team may be asked to verify the recording. The team's recommendation is not binding for the test centre administrator, who may accept it or organise a new paper 2 test.

9.3 Third-Assessor Involvement in Appeals

Appeals concerning paper 2 assessor behaviour or paper 2 results trigger the assignment of a third assessor (see Section 7). The third assessor reviews the recording without any indication of the suggested level, the reasons for the appeal or the test taker's identity. Their decision is conclusive for the test outcome, only in exceptional cases may the EUROCONTROL ELPAC team be asked for an additional opinion.

9.4 ELPAC Appeal Form (template)

Table 5: Template of the ELPAC Appeals form for Test Takers

Field	Details
Test taker name	
ELPAC test centre	
ELPAC test date — paper 1	
ELPAC test date — paper 2	
Appeal date	
Test taker signature	
Appeal form accepted by (name / date / signature)	

Field	Details
Reason(s) for appeal — what happened and how the ELPAC test was affected	
Actions taken by the ELPAC test centre administrator	
Outcome of the appeal evaluation	

PART IV — TRAINING & SUPPORT

10. Assessor Training

Paper 2 assessor shall complete ELPAC assessor training before being assigned to an ELPAC test in the role of ELPAC assessor. Training is offered by EUROCONTROL and is mandatory for both initial accreditation and periodic recurrent training.

10.1 Accreditation (ACR) Training

Initial ELPAC assessor accreditation training is a classroom course organised by the EUROCONTROL Aviation Learning Centre. It is open to all designated ELPAC assessors from organisations that have signed the ELPAC licence agreement. Accreditation training is offered:

- in Luxembourg, three to four times per year, free of charge, open to all interested participants,
- on-site on request, for a fee, open to participants from the host organisation,
- on-site, free of charge, open to all interested participants, based on an offer to host the course.

After the accreditation course, the assessor is assigned the role of OPE, ELE or both, based on professional background and demonstrated competence during the course.

10.2 Refresher (REF) Training

ELPAC assessor accreditations do not expire. However, ELPAC assessors shall not be assigned to an ELPAC test more than three years after completing ELPAC assessor refresher training. If the last refresher was more than three years ago, attending a refresher course is mandatory before being assigned to an ELPAC test.

It is also advisable to complete refresher training before being re-assigned after long periods of inactivity, even if the most recent refresher was less than three years ago.

Refresher training is organised by the EUROCONTROL Aviation Learning Centre, open to all ELPAC assessors. It consists of one day (6 study hours) of instructor-led virtual classroom (online).

Refresher training is offered monthly, free of charge.

10.3 Competency Monitoring

EUROCONTROL monitors the competency status of ELPAC assessors through the EUROCONTROL Learning Zone. Every course participant receives login details for a personal account. After logging in, every ELPAC assessor can sign up for ELPAC training, consult their training history, monitor their competency status and generate an ELPAC assessor certificate.

ELPAC test administrators have additional tools and can consult the competency status of all allocated assessors and download an ELPAC test centre status overview. Competency status updates automatically after the completion of accreditation or refresher training.

11. Practice and Support

11.1 Practising Paper 2

To familiarise yourself with the ELPAC test system functions and practise making setups, create dummy test setups and test takers as follows:

Table 6: Example for Preparing Test Setup to Familiarise Assessors with the ELPAC Test Scripts

First name	Last name
Dummy	Candidate 01
Dummy	Candidate 02
Dummy	Candidate 03
Etc.	

Once a test setup is created, rename it for clarity, e.g. "Demo test setup 01 for [organisation]", "Demo test setup 02 for [organisation]", etc.

Select the test versions during setup. Define one ELE and one OPE for each Dummy candidate and log in for practice. You can skip paper 1 if you only want to practise paper 2. Dummy test takers are excluded from the count used for invoicing and cannot be considered for licensing purposes.

11.2 Support and Feedback

Support for ELPAC is available through the ENOVATE helpdesk by email at any time. For urgent issues, telephone support is available between 07:00 and 15:00 UTC on weekdays. ENOVATE is based in Norway. If you schedule ELPAC tests on weekends, notify ENOVATE by email in advance so that support arrangements can be made.

> ELPAC technical helpdesk (ENOVATE)
>
> • Email: support@enovate.no
>
> • Telephone: +47 4000 2138

Feedback on the ELPAC test system is welcome and should be sent to the ELPAC team in Luxembourg:

EUROCONTROL ELPAC team

• Email: elpac@eurocontrol.int

PART V — REFERENCE

Appendix A — Glossary and Related ELPAC documents

A.1 Abbreviations and Glossary

Term	Definition
ACR	ELPAC assessor accreditation training.
ATC	Air Traffic Control.
ATCO	Air Traffic Controller.
ATPL	Airline Transport Pilot Licence.
ELE	English Language Expert (paper 2 assessor role).
ELPAC	English Language Proficiency for Aeronautical Communication.
ENOVATE	Technical partner hosting and operating the ELPAC test system.
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization.
MCQ	Multiple Choice Question.
MFA	Multi-Factor Authentication.
OPE	Operational Expert (paper 2 assessor role).
PPM / PCM	Prepared Pilot/Controller Message used in Task 1a.
REF	ELPAC assessor refresher training.
SAQ	Short Answer Question.

Term	Definition
SARP	Standard And Recommended Practice (ICAO).
US	Unexpected Situation message used in Task 1a.
ZHAW	Zurich University of Applied Sciences (linguistic partner).

A.2 Related ELPAC Documents

In addition to this handbook, the ELPAC test documentation includes:

- ELPAC Test Taker Preparation – Air Traffic Controllers (reproduced as Annex C).
- ELPAC Test Taker Preparation – Pilots (reproduced as Annex D).
- ELPAC Glossary of structures.
- ELPAC Paper 2 rating scale.
- ELPAC Test System – MFA v1.0.pdf (multi-factor authentication setup).

All documents are available in the library section of the ELPAC test system to users with administrator access. Interlocutor scripts are no longer downloaded – they are presented inside the application at the appropriate time.

Appendix B — ICAO Scale, Holistic Descriptors and the ELPAC Assessment Scheme

The cornerstones of the implementation of the ICAO language proficiency requirements are the ICAO scale in Attachment A to ICAO Annex 1 (ICAO, 2022) and the holistic descriptors in Appendix 1 to ICAO Annex 1. The ICAO scale focusses on the speaking (productive) and listening (receptive) subtasks only. It has six levels, with ICAO Level 1 at the bottom end of the scale, and ICAO Level 6 at its top end. ICAO Level 4 is referred to by ICAO as the operational level (ICAO, 2010) which identifies the minimally competent test taker. In other words, a test taker needs to achieve at least ICAO Level 4 to obtain and maintain their licence privileges. The ICAO scale has defined six areas of language ability: Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Structure, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction.

In contrast, the holistic descriptors describe air traffic controllers' and pilots' language ability in broader, more general terms. In total, there are five of these holistic descriptors, of which three describe what communicative competence looks like in both licenced professions, whereas the other two refer to the level of English language proficiency that is necessary for air traffic controllers and pilots to be able to do their job safely, efficiently, and expediently.

The ICAO scale and the holistic descriptors provide valuable information about the features of language performance that matter in the air traffic controller and pilot professions. While they contain a lot of useful and very detailed information, they can be challenging for assessors to apply in making judgements about a test taker's performance in a test. Therefore, the ELPAC assessment scheme was developed as the operationalisation of the ICAO language proficiency requirements as they are described in the ICAO scale and the holistic descriptors. The ELPAC assessment scheme was developed as the byproduct of a Master's thesis and Doctoral thesis that were undertaken at Lancaster University (Agius, 2018, 2024) under the supervision of Dr. John Pill and Professor Luke Harding. It is informed by the opinions of air traffic controllers, on the job training instructors, and pilots, who contributed to the development of the ELPAC assessment scheme in their role as subject matter expert. Their invaluable input has greatly supported the development team in achieving a deep understanding of the features of performance that matter in aeronautical radiotelephony communication and how they are expressed in the ICAO scale and the holistic descriptors.

The information contained in this appendix to the ELPAC Handbook is intended to describe how the six criteria in the ICAO scale and the holistic descriptors have been operationalised in the ELPAC assessment scheme. The information contained herein forms a substantial and important part of the training syllabus for prospective ELPAC assessors that is delivered as part of the ELPAC ACR course.

B.1 Pronunciation

As can be seen in Table 7, the descriptors for Pronunciation at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 cover a wide spectrum of features related to the production of sounds to create words – like pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation. While these are certainly important elements of speech production, it is likely that most persons without a linguistic background would not be able to say for sure wherein exactly the difference between these terms lies. What all the descriptors for Pronunciation in the ICAO scale have in common, is the phrase "… interfere with ease of understanding". Ultimately, that is what pronunciation on the radiotelephony frequency comes down to: mutual intelligibility. A speaker with a heavy non-native accent of English can still be minimally competent. Similarly, simply being a native speaker of English does not automatically qualify for a high score if the speaker has a thick non-standard accent.

Table 7: Descriptors for Pronunciation at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ICAO Scale

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation and frequently interfere with ease of understanding.	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though influenced by the first language or regional variation, rarely interfere with ease of understanding.	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though possibly influenced by the first language or regional variation, almost never interfere with ease of understanding.

As can be seen in Table 8, the assessment of Pronunciation at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is done by the OPE in the ELPAC test. Their focus is on determining whether the test taker is minimally competent in using a pronunciation of English that is comprehensible to an international community of air traffic controllers and pilots. The reference for the descriptors for Pronunciation at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is the ICAO Manual of Radiotelephony – Doc 9432 (ICAO, 2007).

The assessment of Pronunciation at ICAO Levels 5 and 6 is done by the ELE in the ELPAC test. In general terms, an ICAO Level 4 speaker has a pronunciation of English that is understandable. Even if they slightly mispronounce words, the context is usually enough to clarify what they are talking about. At ICAO Level 5, the test taker is not only understandable, but also easy to listen to. It takes little effort to understand and identify the words they are saying.

What the assessors are looking for in Pronunciation at ICAO Level 6 is not so much the test taker's ability to approximate native or near-native pronunciation. Rather, what is at stake at ICAO Level 6 is the test taker's ability to adjust their pronunciation in the interest better comprehensibility.

It is important to remember that Aeronautical Radiotelephony communication is a context of language use for specific purposes and as a lingua franca (Estival et al., 2016; Estival & Farris, 2016; Kim & Billington, 2016; Kim & Elder, 2009), where the achievement of mutual understanding takes

precedent over the use of grammatically correct language. Especially for native or highly proficient speakers, this means that they must be able to adapt the way they would naturally speak English to the perceived level of English language proficiency of the person they are talking to.

Table 8: Descriptors for Pronunciation at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ELPAC Assessment Scheme

ICAO Level 3 – OPE	ICAO Level 4 – OPE	ICAO Level 5 – ELE	ICAO Level 6 — ELE
The test taker's pronunciation does not conform to ICAO recommendations for use on the RTF. Their mispronunciation of words makes them difficult to understand or even unintelligible.	The test taker's pronunciation conforms to ICAO recommendations for use on the RTF. Their pronunciation is intelligible with little effort from the listener.	The test taker has a noticeable accent, but they articulate words clearly and in a way that is easy to understand.	The test taker can adapt the way they articulate in a way that is situationally appropriate, by slowing down or speaking more deliberately for clarity.

B.2 Vocabulary

As can be seen in Table 9, Vocabulary in the ICAO scale refers to the words the test taker is familiar with and able to use actively. The ICAO scale mentions range and accuracy. Range refers to the number of different words the test taker knows, whereas accuracy refers to the ability to use these words correctly. The common, concrete and work-related topical domains of vocabulary that air traffic controllers and pilots most commonly draw from to do their jobs are related to aircraft parts, meteorology, navigation, airport infrastructure and airport vehicles.

Table 9: Descriptors for Vocabulary at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ICAO Scale

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Range and accuracy often sufficient to communicate on common, concrete and work-related topics, but range is limited, and word choice is often inappropriate. Often unable to paraphrase successfully.	Range and accuracy usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete and work-related topics. Often able to paraphrase successfully in unexpected circumstances.	Range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete and work-related topics. Paraphrases consistently and successfully. Vocabulary is sometimes idiomatic.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on a wide variety of familiar and unfamiliar topics. Vocabulary is idiomatic, nuanced and sensitive to register.

Related to vocabulary range in the ICAO scale is the ability to paraphrase – the replacement of potentially problematic (difficult) or low-frequency words (not so common) with easier, higher frequency equivalents that even a speaker of lesser ability is likely to understand. It is a bit unfortunate in the ICAO scale that paraphrasing is not mentioned at ICAO Level 6. It is important to understand that this is not intended to suggest that speakers at ICAO Level 6 shall not or cannot paraphrase.

A further point that is important to note in the ICAO scale, is the reference to the use of idiomatic language at ICAO Levels 5 and 6. An idiomatic phrase describes a way of speaking that is typical of first language speakers of a language. For example, in English it is possible to say that “I’m not sure if I’m quite familiar with the location of the station” instead simply say that “I don’t know which way the station is”. ICAO Doc 9835 is very clear about the use of idioms on the radiotelephony frequency, stating that the “use of idioms is an obstacle to mutual intelligibility and mutual understanding between non-expert users and should therefore be avoided by all users in this environment”(ICAO, 2010, para. 4.6.4).

As can be seen in , the assessment of Vocabulary is always done by the ELE in the ELPAC test. However, at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 assessors make holistic, lexicogrammatically informed judgements. This means that they make a judgement of the test taker’s general ability to use correct English language forms. A test taker at ICAO Level 3 is not necessarily impossible to understand, but the meaning of what they are trying to convey must be inferred and relies heavily on the listener’s goodwill, whereas the test taker at ICAO Level 4 does not need to rely so much on the listener making an educated guess to understand what they are saying.

A test taker at ICAO Level 5 draws on vocabulary from a much wider range of domains of topical knowledge that are not necessarily, or only loosely, linked to aeronautical radiotelephony communication and the kind of language air traffic controllers and pilots are likely to need on the radiotelephony frequency.

As previously mentioned in discussing Pronunciation, aeronautical radiotelephony communication is a language for specific purposes and a lingua franca, where mutual comprehensibility is key. Therefore, the test taker at ICAO Level 6 not only has a very wide range of vocabulary. They are also able to adapt their vocabulary use as the need arises, based on their subjective impression of their interlocutor’s ability to understand – for example, by avoiding low-frequency words that speakers of English of lesser ability will unlikely be able to understand.

Table 10: Descriptors for Vocabulary at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ELPAC Assessment Scheme

ICAO Level 3 – ELE	ICAO Level 4 – ELE	ICAO Level 5 – ELE	ICAO Level 6 – ELE
The test taker lacks control in their English language use. They have a limited vocabulary and therefore lack accuracy in speaking.	The test taker has a basic command of English sufficient for them to do their job. Their vocabulary range allows them to speak accurately.	The test taker's vocabulary range and accuracy cover a wide domain of topical knowledge that is not limited to aeronautical radiotelephony communication.	The test taker's range and accuracy of vocabulary allow them to adapt their choice of words in a way that is situationally appropriate, for example by avoiding low frequency words in the interest of comprehensibility.

B.3 Structure

Structure in the ICAO scale refers to the test taker's ability to use English grammar to create sentences that carry meaning. Presumably, the term *structure* was given preference over the use of *grammar* to account for the fact that phraseology follows different rules from plain language – for example, by placing the important piece of information at the start of a transmission and repeating it at the end. A test taker may also use the sentence patterns they are familiar with from phraseology when speaking plain language on the radiotelephony frequency.

As can be seen in , in the ICAO scale Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 are distinguished in terms of the test taker's ability to use simple and complex structures. On the radiotelephony frequency, air traffic controllers usually get by using only simply structures. This is mainly because they try to keep their transmissions short and to the point to avoid blocking the radiotelephony frequency for other users of the airspace. As a result, sentences tend to be kept short, diminishing the need, for example, to coordinate different tenses.

Looking at the descriptors in the ICAO scale in , it is remarkable just how low the threshold is for a test taker to achieve ICAO Level 4 for Structure. As we can see, the test taker at ICAO Level 4 is not expected to be able to use complex language, and even in their use of simple structures they are allowed to make mistakes – as long as they don't get in the way of the interlocutor understanding.

Table 11: Descriptors for Structure at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ICAO Scale

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Basic structures are not always well controlled. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.	Basic structures are usually well controlled. Errors in basic structures may occur, particularly in unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.	Basic structures are consistently well controlled. Complex structures have errors which sometimes interfere with meaning.	Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.

In the ELPAC test, the assessment of Structure at all ICAO levels is done by the ELE. As already explained in the section on Vocabulary, at ICAO Levels 3 and 4, the ELE makes a lexicogrammatically informed judgement of Vocabulary and Structure. The phrase “sentence patterns are consistently well controlled” in the ICAO descriptor for Structure at Level 6 is explained in the ELAPAC rating scheme in terms of the test taker’s ability to use a variety of simple and complex structures in a way that is situationally appropriate and takes into consideration their perception of their interlocutor’s ability to understand.

Table 12: Descriptors for Vocabulary at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ELPAC Assessment Scheme

ICAO Level 3 – ELE	ICAO Level 4 - ELE	ICAO Level 5 - ELE	ICAO Level 6 – ELE
The test taker only uses simple grammatical structures. They make errors which make them difficult to understand, so that the meaning can only be inferred.	They only use simple grammatical structures. They make errors which make them difficult to understand, so that the meaning can only be inferred.	The test taker makes grammatically correct sentences. Both simple and complex structures are used competently and with few isolated errors.	The test taker shows variety in their use of simple and complex grammatical structures that is situationally appropriate – for example by adjusting the use of overly complex language for clarity.

B.4 Fluency

Fluency in the ICAO scale is another criterion that has a wide coverage in terms of the features of performance that it considers: phrasing, pausing, hesitations, slowness, communicative effectiveness, the use of discourse markers and connectors, and naturalness. It's a lot to take in and difficult for assessors to prioritise one over the other – a test taker may be able to do some of the things in the Fluency criterion well, and others perhaps not so well. In addition, we must remain mindful that perceptions of slowness and pausing are subjective. Pausing and slowness may also have varying causes. A highly proficient but rather unimaginative test taker may need to pause too – not because they lack the language ability, but because they simply haven't got anything to say on some of the questions in the test.

Table 13: Descriptors for Fluency at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ICAO Scale

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Produces stretches of language but phrasing and pausing are often inappropriate. Hesitations or slowness may prevent effective communication. Fillers are sometimes distracting.	Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. Limited use of discourse markers and connectors. Occasional loss of fluency on transition to spontaneous interaction but this does not prevent effective communication. Fillers not distracting.	Speaks at length with relative ease on familiar topics. Makes appropriate use of discourse markers and connectors.	Able to speak at length with a natural, effortless flow. Varies speech flow for stylistic effect, e.g. to emphasise a point. Uses appropriate discourse markers and connectors spontaneously.

In the ELPAC test Fluency at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is assessed by the OPE, whereas the ELE assesses ICAO Levels 5 and 6. In the ELPAC assessment scheme (Table 14), the focus is on three features of performance at the ICAO Level 374 threshold: transmitting techniques, the use of phraseology, and the use of callsigns. However, it is important to remember that the ICAO language proficiency requirements were put in place for the assessment of test takers' English language use, and not to assess their correct use of ICAO phraseology. Therefore, the descriptors at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 of the ELPAC assessment scheme referring to phraseology and plain language are not concerned with the test taker's correct use of phraseology, but with their radiotelephony discipline and the ability to use phraseology or plain language in a way that is situationally appropriate.

Fluency at ICAO Levels 5 and 6 is assessed by the ELE in the ELPAC test. At ICAO Level 5, the focus is on the test taker's ability to use connectors and discourse markers. Assessors are looking for is variety and frequency in the use of connectors and discourse markers – so, in other words, how many different discourse markers are used by the test taker, and how frequently do they use them.

Fluency at ICAO Level 6 in the ELPAC assessment scheme builds on the features of performance described at ICAO Level 5. However, the question is not whether an ICAO Level 6 test taker uses even more discourse markers. Instead, the focus at ICAO Level 6 is on the test taker's ability to adjust their speed and the way they speak, based on their perception of their interlocutor's ability to understand.

Table 14: Descriptors for Fluency at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ELPAC Assessment Scheme

ICAO Level 3 – OPE	ICAO Level 4 – OPE	ICAO Level 5 – ELE	ICAO Level 6 – ELE
The test taker's speech transmitting techniques do not meet ICAO recommendations for intelligibility. Slowness, hesitations, and pausing interfere with ease of comprehensibility. The test taker uses phraseology inconsistently: they randomly switch between phraseology and plain language. Call signs are used inconsistently. They may fail to use phraseology correctly.	The test taker's speech transmitting techniques meet ICAO recommendations for intelligibility. Slowness and pausing do not interfere with comprehensibility. The test taker uses phraseology consistently: they prioritise the use of phraseology but can switch to appropriate plain language if necessary. Callsigns are used consistently.	The test taker uses a variety of connectors to link utterances, for example to show cause and effect.	The test taker speaks fluently and adapts the way the speak in a way that is situationally appropriate.

B.5 Comprehension

Comprehension in the ICAO scale focuses, quite simply, on the test taker's ability to understand. The descriptors mention accuracy in comprehending, dealing with an unexpected turn of events, and handling interlocutors with different ways of speaking (Table 15).

Table 15: Descriptors for Comprehension at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ICAO Scale

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Often accurate on common, concrete and work-related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. May fail to understand an unexpected turn of events or situational complication.	Mostly accurate on common, concrete and work-related topics when the accents or varieties are sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. Comprehension may be slower and require clarification strategies when confronted with an unexpected turn of events or situational complication.	Accurate on common, concrete and work-related topics and mostly accurate when confronted with an unexpected turn of events or situational complication. Able to comprehend a range of speech varieties and/or registers.	Comprehension is consistently accurate in nearly all contexts and includes comprehension of linguistic and cultural subtleties.

In the ELPAC test, Comprehension at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is assessed by the OPE, while Comprehension at ICAO Levels 5 and 6 is assessed by the ELE (Table 16). The main difference between a test taker at ICAO Level 3 and one at ICAO Level 4 is how they handle unfamiliar or unexpected communications. A Level 3 test taker may understand routine transmissions but struggle when communication strays from phraseology or routine events. Even after requesting clarification, they may still fail to understand. A Level 4 test taker may initially be slow to understand, but they can usually grasp the situation and use basic clarification strategies successfully.

At ICAO Level 5, the construct of Comprehension is expanded and includes the ability to understand on an overarching level, for example when meanings are only stated implicitly. More importantly, at ICAO Level 5 the test taker can reliably detect when a miscommunication occurs. At ICAO Level 6, the ELE focusses on the test taker's ability to negotiate for better understanding in cases where they have detected a miscommunication or have difficulties in understanding.

Table 16: Descriptors for ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ELPAC Assessment Scheme

ICAO Level 3 – OPE	ICAO Level 4 – OPE	ICAO Level 5 – ELE	ICAO Level 6 – ELE
The test taker understands routine transmissions but may fail to understand an unfamiliar accent or an unusual or unexpected situation – even after asking for clarification.	The test taker understands routine transmissions. They may be slow to understand initially in unusual or unexpected situations but can apply basic clarification strategies that lead to successful comprehension.	The test taker can handle an unusual or unexpected situation. They understand meaning even when it is stated implicitly. They reliably detect instances of miscommunication.	The test taker handles comprehension issues successfully by asking clarifying questions to check and confirm, to resolve misunderstandings, and to ensure that they have correctly understood.

B.6 Interaction

Interaction in the ICAO scale (Table 17) is narrowly defined in terms of the test taker's ability to provide responses that are immediate, appropriate and informative, and the ability deal with an unexpected situation. Interaction is closely linked to Comprehension. In spoken language it is impossible for the assessor to watch the test taker understand. The only means of inferring if there has been comprehension is by how well the test taker's response matches the question they were asked.

In the ELPAC test, the assessment of Interaction at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is done by the OPE (Table 18). Their focus is on the assessment of the test taker's ability to handle misunderstandings and negotiate for better understanding, in the sense of making sure that their interlocutor has correctly understood what they are trying to convey to them.

In contrast, Interaction at ICAO Levels 5 and 6 is assessed by the ELE. The test taker at ICAO Level 5 responds with ease to the interlocutor, even when meaning is expressed vaguely or implicitly, by applying clarification strategies successfully to make meaning explicit. A test taker at ICAO Level 6 interacts with ease across all levels of ability, by adapting to the interlocutor in a way that is situationally appropriate and based on their subjective impression of their interlocutor's ability to understand. For example, they paraphrase to improve the interlocutor's understanding. However, it is important to note that paraphrasing is assessed in Vocabulary. Interaction is more concerned with the test taker's sensitivity to feedback they receive from their interlocutor and how they respond to it.

Table 17: Descriptors for Interaction at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ICAO Scale

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Responses are sometimes immediate, appropriate and informative. Able to initiate and maintain exchanges on familiar topics and in predictable situations. Generally inadequate when dealing with an unexpected turn of events.	Responses are usually immediate, appropriate and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming or clarifying.	Responses are immediate, appropriate and informative. Manages the speaker–listener relationship effectively.	Interacts with ease in nearly all situations. Is sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues and responds to them appropriately.

Table 18: Descriptors for Interaction at ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the ELPAC Assessment Scheme

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
The test taker is unable to detect and resolve instances of miscommunication. When a misunderstanding occurs, they lack the ability to negotiate for better understanding. They are unable to adapt the way they speak.	The test taker can adapt and vary the way they formulate transmissions on the radiotelephony frequency in a way that is situationally appropriate and leads to communicative success in the interest of safety, expediency, and efficiency. They apply basic clarification strategies to ensure they have been understood correctly.	The test taker's responses are concise and to the point. They respond appropriately to meaning, even when it is only stated implicitly, by checking and clarifying.	The test taker interacts with ease with interlocutors at all proficiency levels. They provide feedback to interlocutors to indicate that they understand and ask probing questions to ensure the interlocutor is able to follow.

B.7 Construct-Irrelevant Variance

Construct-irrelevant variance refers to factors that may influence the test result, but which have nothing to do with the test taker's performance. The most common cause of construct-irrelevant variance is the performance of the assessor, which is why we also speak of co-variance or co-production. Remember that your behaviour will inevitably influence that of the test taker.

Annex C — Test Taker Preparation: Air Traffic Controllers

C.1 Introduction

This document has been given to you because you are registered to take the ELPAC test soon. Perhaps you already know the time and place of the assessment. The document should help you to prepare for the test. It provides useful information on the structure of the test, as well as tips on how best to answer the questions in the different tasks of the test.

C.2 Why do I have to take this test?

You may be wondering why you must take this test. It may well be that you have been working in an operational environment for many years, using ICAO standard phraseology every day and without ever encountering any problems or issues related to language.

The requirement for air traffic controllers and pilots to demonstrate their proficiency in English was introduced in 2011 by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). The language proficiency requirements were introduced as the result of a series of severe incidents and accidents in which communication, or a lack of language skill, were contributing factors.

The ELPAC test was designed specifically to meet the language proficiency requirements for air traffic controllers and pilots, as defined by ICAO and included in the EASA air traffic controller and flight crew licensing rules.

C.3 What is being tested with the ELPAC test?

As part of your training to become an air traffic controller, you attended a course in radiotelephony communication, in which you learned how to use ICAO standard phraseology properly. However, in your experience as an air traffic controller you have certainly come across situations in which you were unable to use ICAO standard phraseology – for example because the circumstance was so unusual or unexpected.

The ELPAC test does not assess ICAO standard phraseology. Instead, it first evaluates your ability to communicate successfully in an operational environment, followed by a language-based assessment of your English proficiency in aeronautical contexts.

C.4 What is the difference between ICAO standard phraseology and plain English?

ICAO standard phraseology uses a vocabulary of approximately 500 English words. These words usually have a reduced scope in comparison with their use in everyday language. They are only used with one meaning in ICAO standard phraseology. For example, in radiotelephony communication the word *confirm* is often used to mark a transmission as a question.

ICAO standard phraseology also uses different pronunciation to *normal* English. For example, in radiotelephony communication the number 9 is pronounced niner and the number 5 is pronounced *fife*. This is done to distinguish the sounds more clearly, because the quality of the audio on the frequency is not always good and could potentially lead to misunderstandings.

The ELPAC test assesses your ability to use plain English in the context of aeronautical communication, as well as your ability to shift between using plain English and ICAO standard phraseology. In the ELPAC test you are not assessed on your opinions or on the operational correctness of your responses, but on how well you can express yourself in English.

C.5 Who will be assessing me?

There will be two assessors in the room during the oral part of the ELPAC test. One of them is an English Language Expert (ELE), who has a background in English language teaching or testing. The other assessor is an Operational Expert (OPE) – a pilot or an air traffic controller, somebody who is familiar with radiotelephony communication.

Having two assessors in the room is a question of best practice. The OPE has the responsibility to ensure that the language used during the test is appropriate for the context of aeronautical communication.

To become an ELPAC assessor, both the ELE and the OPE have undergone screening and training. The training course takes a week and usually takes place at the EUROCONTROL Aviation Learning Centre in Luxembourg. Assessors are required by ICAO to attend a refresher training course at regular intervals. EUROCONTROL also monitors ELPAC test performance to ensure that assessors apply the ELPAC test methodology correctly.

C.6 How is my performance on the test evaluated?

The assessors both use the ELPAC assessment criteria to mark your performance. The ELPAC assessment criteria have been developed to assess a test taker's performance in accordance with the ICAO rating scale in Annex 1. A copy of the ICAO rating scale is included at the end of this document.

You are tested in six language areas: Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Structure, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction. You are tested only on listening and speaking – there is no reading or writing component.

The ICAO rating scale has six levels, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 6 the highest. ICAO Level 4 is the so-called *operational* level. To pass the test, you need to achieve at least a Level 4. **ICAO Level 4 identifies the minimally competent air traffic controller.**

C.7 The two parts of the ELPAC test

The ELPAC test has two parts, referred to as ELPAC paper 1 and ELPAC paper 2.

- ELPAC paper 1 is the listening comprehension part of the test.
- ELPAC paper 2 is the oral interaction part of the test. There are specific paper 2 versions designed for tower, approach and en route air traffic controllers, and for pilots with an ATPL licence. ELPAC paper 2 reflects the range of communication tasks undertaken in the operational environment of the test taker.

The focus of the test is on English language proficiency and not on operational procedures.

C.7.1 ELPAC Paper 1

Before we start, we would like to point out that there is a sample version of paper 1 of the ELPAC test available at www.elpac.info. We strongly recommend that, to become familiar with the layout and questions of the test, you do the sample test version at least once before taking the ELPAC test.

Paper 1 tests your understanding of radiotelephony communications in routine and non-routine situations. The recordings are all based on authentic material and range from short standard pilot/controller transmissions to longer communications in which controllers and pilots deal with non-routine or unexpected situations on the frequency. This part of the ELPAC test lasts approximately 35 minutes.

ELPAC paper 1 has four parts. In each part you will hear several recordings. As each part appears on the screen, you will see and hear instructions on how to answer the questions – **by typing a few digits in the spaces provided or by selecting the most appropriate answer option. At the beginning of each part there is an example, which is answered by the computer**. Do not try to answer it.

There is a limited amount of time to answer each item. When the time for an item is over, the next item – highlighted by a blue frame – starts automatically. Align the cursor with the blue frame in which you must select your answer.

Answer each question as you hear the information. Do not wait until the end of the audio file before answering. This is not a memory test. Once a test part is completed, you cannot go back to it. However, within the time available for each part you can correct or change your answers if you wish.

The test is time-driven. Once it starts, you must complete each item as it is presented to you. When Part 4 is finished, you will hear *That is the end of the test* – do not forget to log out.

PAPER 1, PART 1

Tests recognition. In this task, you write answers in alphanumeric format. Three short audio files with two items each (six items in total), plus an example. Each answer box accepts up to four digits/letters.

The six answer boxes are presented on the same screen. You **have 30 seconds to look at the questions before the first recording begins.**

PAPER 1, PART 2

Tests comprehension of communications between a controller and one or two pilots, or between two controllers, in unusual and non-routine situations. Three audio files with three items each (nine items in total), plus an example. Each item has one key and two distractors. Select the response you think is the most accurate by checking the corresponding box. The items appear together on the same screen for each audio file. A 60-second pre-listen timer counts down in the top left corner. You may start before the 60 seconds are up.

PAPER 1, PART 3

Sentence-completion task. Three audio files with five items each (15 items in total). Each item provides the beginning of a sentence with one key and two distractors to complete it. Select the option you think is the most accurate by checking the corresponding box. 60-second pre-listen timer per audio file.

PAPER 1, PART 4

Tests comprehension of communication between controllers and pilots dealing with unusual situations (longer and more complex than in Part 2). Three audio files with five items each (15 items in total), plus an example. Each item presents three statements which refer to the same section in the audio file, one key and two distractors. 60-second pre-listen timer per audio file.

C.7.2 TIPS FOR ELPAC PAPER 1 TEST TAKERS

- Become familiar with the instructions for each part of ELPAC paper 1 and with the type of answer you are expected to give. Take the sample test on www.elpac.info.
- **Read the questions carefully — particularly for Parts 2, 3 and 4, and especially if the question begins with "Who", "What", "Why", "Where", "When" or "How" — and respond appropriately.**
- This is a listening test, so listen carefully. Do not assume that the pilot or controller will do something because "that is the obvious thing to do".
- The questions are deliberately spaced to give you time to select the response before you hear the relevant piece of information for the next question.
- Do not listen to the complete transmission before you start to answer the questions — **this is not a memory test**. Select or type the answer as you hear the required information, which is presented in a logical sequence.
- Your phraseology is not part of the assessment. Phraseology is used in ELPAC to make you feel comfortable, to build an operational picture, to provide a scenario for the next task and to allow you to demonstrate code-switching (switching between phraseology and non-coded plain language).

C.7.3 ELPAC Paper 2

Paper 2 tests your oral interaction skills and requires you to demonstrate:

- appropriate use of standard ICAO phraseology,
- switching between standard ICAO phraseology and plain English,
- an appropriate response to a message,
- resolving misunderstandings,
- dealing effectively with the pilot/controller relationship,
- negotiating a developing unusual situation,
- making a verbal report in plain English,
- giving opinions,
- putting forward arguments,
- evaluating advantages and disadvantages,
- speculating,
- hypothesising,
- speaking about aviation topics.

ELPAC paper 2 lasts approximately 20 minutes. It is divided into four tasks (Task 1a and 1b, Task 2 and Task 3) and involves both face-to-face and non-visual communication.

PAPER 2, TASK 1A (6–8 MINUTES)

In Task 1a you play the role of the air traffic controller communicating with several aircraft, played by one of the assessors. There is no visual contact between you and the assessor. You respond to each transmission, using either ICAO standard phraseology where appropriate, or plain English. You are given a chart with information necessary for the task – for example a map of the apron or of the sector used in the role play – and you may make notes on it. Remember, you are being assessed on your language proficiency, **not** on your skills as a controller. **Your use of ICAO standard phraseology will not be assessed.**

PAPER 2, TASK 1B (3–4 MINUTES)

This is a face-to-face task in which you give a verbal report on the events of Task 1a to the assessor, who is now playing the role of your superior. You can use the chart and your notes and may be asked to clarify some points in your report.

PAPER 2, TASK 2 (3–4 MINUTES)

This is a face-to-face task with an assessor in which the discussion is based on an aviation photograph. First you will be asked to describe the picture, afterwards you may be asked follow-up questions about it.

PAPER 2, TASK 3 (4–5 MINUTES)

This is a face-to-face task with an assessor in which the discussion is based on aviation issues in a broader context. You will be asked to give your opinion on general aviation topics. Keep in mind that **you will not be assessed on what you think**, but on how well you can express yourself in English.

C.7.4 TIPS FOR ELPAC PAPER 2 TEST TAKERS

In Task 1, listen carefully to the transmissions and respond as you see fit. Make a complete and accurate report about the unusual situation. The assessor may ask for clarification on some points.

In Tasks 2 and 3, answer all questions as fully as possible. You will not be assessed on what you think but on how well you can express yourself in English.

It is important that you relax and speak as confidently as you can. It is your responsibility as the test taker to participate in the conversation to the best of your ability.

You can only be assessed on what you say. If you do not say very much, you risk being assessed at a level below your true proficiency, simply because you did not demonstrate the level of language you are normally capable of producing.

C.8 ELPAC final score

To achieve a licence endorsement, it is necessary to obtain at least a pass in ELPAC paper 1 and a Level 4 in paper 2. There is no accumulative score. This rule was defined by ICAO.

It means you need to achieve at least Level 4 in every one of the six criteria assessed in ELPAC paper 2. For example, suppose you achieve the following scores:

Criterion	Level
Pronunciation	4
Structure	3
Vocabulary	4
Fluency	4
Comprehension	5
Interaction	4

The average score is 4. The lowest score, however, is a 3 for Structure, which means that this result would still be a fail.

C.9 ELPAC Assessment Scheme

The full ELPAC Assessment Scheme is reproduced once in this handbook to avoid duplication. See Appendix B (Section B.1–B.6) for the level descriptors across Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Structure, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction.

C.10 ICAO Annex 1 rating scale

The full ICAO scale is reproduced once in this handbook to avoid duplication. See Appendix B (Section B.1–B.6) for the level descriptors across Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Structure, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction.

C.11 Language notes

What is paraphrasing?

If somebody does not understand what you are saying, it is not necessarily because they lack the intellectual faculty or because their hearing is impaired. They may simply not be familiar with the words you use or the structures of the sentences. In the worst case, their language ability will not even allow them to explain that they do not understand.

That is when you need to paraphrase: *to paraphrase* means to repeat something said using different words, in a simpler or shorter form, that makes the original meaning clearer without changing the original sense of what you wanted to say.

What is adaptation in language?

Adaptation is very similar to paraphrasing. If somebody does not understand what you are saying, it is up to you – as the more proficient speaker – to apply strategies that will ensure successful communication. Accommodation can happen on all levels of language. Perhaps it already helps if you try to neutralise a heavy accent, or to speak more clearly or slowly. It may also require you to use simpler words or less complex sentence structures.

What is an idiom, and what is idiomatic language?

An idiom is an expression whose meaning is different from the meaning of the individual words. The meaning of an idiom can therefore not necessarily be deduced from the meanings of the individual words, that is why idioms are so hard to learn in a foreign language and why you should try to avoid them when speaking to a less proficient speaker. For example: *It's raining cats and dogs* – the idiom means *it's raining heavily* – a meaning which cannot be derived from the meaning of the individual words.

Annex D — Test Taker Preparation: Pilots

D.1 Introduction

This document has been given to you because you are registered to take the ELPAC test soon. Perhaps you already know the time and place of the assessment. The document should help you to prepare for the test. It provides useful information on the structure of the test, as well as tips on how best to answer the questions in the different tasks of the test.

D.2 Why do I have to take this test?

You may be wondering why you must take this test. It may well be that you have been working in an operational environment for many years, using ICAO standard phraseology every day and without ever encountering any problems or issues related to language.

The requirement for air traffic controllers and pilots to demonstrate their proficiency in English was introduced by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in 2011. The language proficiency requirements were introduced as the result of a series of severe incidents and accidents in which operational communication, or a lack of language skill, were contributing factors.

The ELPAC test was designed specifically to meet the language proficiency requirements for air traffic controllers and pilots, as defined by ICAO and included in the EASA air traffic controller and flight crew licensing rules.

D.3 What is being tested with the ELPAC test?

As part of your training to become a pilot, you attended a course in radiotelephony communication, in which you learned how to use ICAO standard phraseology properly. However, in your experience as a pilot you have certainly come across situations in which you were unable to use ICAO standard phraseology – for example because the circumstance was so unusual or unexpected.

The ELPAC test does not assess ICAO standard phraseology. Instead, it first evaluates your ability to communicate in their operational environment, followed by a language based assessment of your English proficiency in aeronautical contexts.

D.4 What is the difference between ICAO standard phraseology and plain English?

ICAO standard phraseology uses a vocabulary of approximately 500 English words. These words usually have a reduced scope in comparison with their use in everyday language, they are only used with one meaning in ICAO standard phraseology. For example, in radiotelephony communication the word *confirm* is often used to mark a transmission as a question.

ICAO standard phraseology also uses different pronunciation to *normal* English. For example, in radiotelephony communication the number 9 is pronounced *niner* and the number 5 is pronounced *fife*. This is done to distinguish the sounds more clearly, because the quality of the sound on the frequency is not always good and could potentially lead to misunderstandings.

The ELPAC test assesses your ability to use plain English in the context of aeronautical communication, as well as your ability to shift between using plain English and ICAO standard phraseology. In the ELPAC test you are not assessed on your opinions or on the operational correctness of your responses, but on how well you can express yourself in English.

D.5 Who will be assessing me?

There will be two assessors in the room during the oral part of the ELPAC test. One of them is an English Language Expert (ELE), who has a background in English-language teaching or testing. The other assessor is an Operational Expert (OPE) – a pilot or an air traffic controller, somebody who is familiar with radiotelephony communication.

Having two assessors in the room is a question of best practice. The OPE has the responsibility to ensure that the language used during the test is appropriate for the context of aeronautical communication.

To become an ELPAC assessor, both the ELE and the OPE have undergone screening and training. The training course takes a whole week and usually takes place at the EUROCONTROL Aviation Learning Centre in Luxembourg. Assessors are required by ICAO to attend a refresher training course at regular intervals. EUROCONTROL also monitors ELPAC test performance to ensure that assessors apply the ELPAC test methodology correctly.

D.6 How is my performance on the test evaluated?

The assessors both use the ELPAC assessment criteria to mark your performance. The ELPAC assessment criteria have been developed to assess a test taker's performance in accordance with the ICAO rating scale. A copy of the ICAO rating scale is included at the end of this document.

You are tested in six language areas: Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Structure, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction. You are tested only on listening and speaking – there is no reading or writing component.

The ICAO rating scale has six levels, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 6 the highest. Level 4 is the so-called *operational* level. To pass the test, you need to achieve at least a Level 4. ICAO Level 4 constitutes the *minimally competent pilot.*

D.7 The two parts of the ELPAC test

The ELPAC test has two parts, referred to as ELPAC paper 1 and ELPAC paper 2.

- ELPAC paper 1 is the listening comprehension part of the test.
- ELPAC paper 2 is the oral interaction part of the test. ELPAC paper 2 reflects the range of communication tasks undertaken in the operational environment of the test taker.

The focus of the test is on English language proficiency and not on operational procedures.

D.7.1 ELPAC Paper 1

Before we start, we would like to point out that there is a sample version of paper 1 of the ELPAC test available at www.elpac.info. **We strongly recommend that, to become familiar with the layout and questions of the test, you do the sample test version at least once before taking the ELPAC test.**

Paper 1 tests your understanding of radiotelephony communications in routine and non-routine situations. The recordings are all based on authentic material and range from short standard pilot/controller transmissions to longer communications in which air traffic controllers and pilots deal with non-routine or unexpected situations on the frequency. This part of the ELPAC test lasts approximately 38 minutes.

ELPAC paper 1 has five parts. In each part you will hear several recordings. As each part appears on the screen, you will see and hear instructions on how to answer the questions – **by typing a few digits in the spaces provided or by selecting the most appropriate answer option. At the beginning of each part there is an example, which is answered by the computer**, do not try to answer it.

PAPER 1, PART 1

Tests recognition. Write your answers in alphanumeric format. Three short audio files with two items each (six items in total), plus an example. Each answer box accepts up to four digits/letters. You **have 30 seconds to look at the questions before the first recording begins.**

PAPER 1, PART 2

Recognition task using two ATIS messages. Two audio files with three items each (six items in total), plus an example. 30 seconds to review questions before the first recording.

PAPER 1, PART 3

Multiple-choice task. Tests comprehension of communications between pilots and controllers in unusual and non-routine situations. Three audio files with three items each (nine items in total), plus an example. 60-second pre-listen timer per audio file.

PAPER 1, PART 4

Tests comprehension of communications between one or two pilots and other pilots, ground crew or cabin crew, in unusual and non-routine situations. Three audio files with three items each (nine items in total), plus an example. Sentence-completion format. 60-second pre-listen timer per audio file.

PAPER 1, PART 5

Comprehension of longer, more complex transmissions in unusual situations. Each item presents three statements referring to the same section of the audio file. 15 items plus an example. 60-second pre-listen timer.

D.7.2 TIPS FOR ELPAC PAPER 1 TEST TAKERS

- Become familiar with the instructions for each part of ELPAC paper 1 and with the type of answer you are expected to give. Take the sample test on www.elpac.info.
- **Read the questions carefully — particularly for Parts 2, 3, 4 and 5, and especially if the question begins with "Who", "What", "Why", "Where", "When" or "How" — and respond appropriately.**
- This is a listening test, so listen carefully. Do not assume that the pilot or controller will do something because "that is the obvious thing to do".
- The questions are deliberately spaced to give you time to select the response before you hear the relevant piece of information for the next question.
- Do not listen to the complete transmission before you start to answer the questions — **this is not a memory test**. Select or type the answer as you hear the required information.
- Your phraseology is not part of the assessment. Phraseology is used in ELPAC to make you feel comfortable, to build an operational picture, to provide a scenario for the next task and to allow you to demonstrate code-switching.

D.7.3 ELPAC Paper 2

Paper 2 tests your oral interaction skills and requires you to demonstrate:

- appropriate use of standard ICAO phraseology,
- switching between standard ICAO phraseology and plain English,
- an appropriate response to a message,
- resolving misunderstandings,
- dealing effectively with the pilot/controller relationship,
- negotiating a developing unusual situation,
- making a verbal report in plain English,
- giving opinions,
- putting forward arguments,
- evaluating advantages and disadvantages,
- speculating,
- hypothesising,
- speaking about aviation topics.

ELPAC paper 2 lasts approximately 20 minutes. It is divided into four tasks (Task 1a and 1b, Task 2 and Task 3) and involves both face-to-face and non-visual communication.

PAPER 2, TASK 1A (6–8 MINUTES)

In Task 1a you play the role of the pilot communicating with the controller and other aircraft, played by the ELPAC operational assessor. There is no visual contact between you and the assessor. **You respond to transmission to your aircraft only**, using either ICAO standard phraseology where appropriate, or plain English. You are given a chart with information necessary for the task and may make notes on it. Remember, you are being assessed on your language proficiency, **not** on your skills as a pilot. **Your use of ICAO standard phraseology will not be assessed.**

PAPER 2, TASK 1B (3–4 MINUTES)

In this task you give a verbal report on the events of Task 1a to the ELPAC operational assessor, who is now playing the role of your superior. You can use the chart and your notes and may be asked to clarify some points in your report.

PAPER 2, TASK 2 (3–4 MINUTES)

In Task 2 you communicate with the ELPAC English linguistic assessor. This is an interaction task in which the discussion is based on an aviation photograph. First you will be asked to describe the picture, afterwards you may be asked follow-up questions about it.

PAPER 2, TASK 3 (4–5 MINUTES)

This is a face-to-face task with the ELE in which the discussion is based on aviation issues in a broader context. You will be asked to give your opinion on general aviation topics. Keep in mind that **you will not be assessed on what you think**, but on how well you can express yourself in English.

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D.10 ICAO Annex 1 rating scale

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