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*ELPAC*

**English Language Proficiency for Aeronautical Communication**

**ELPAC Rationale**

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ELPAC is developed in cooperation with:

# ENOVATE

ENOVATE is responsible for the technical infrastructure to host and operate the ELPAC test including the provision of technical support to users on request.

Zürich University  
of Applied Sciences



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

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## Design principles

The ELPAC ATC test is currently the only test to receive an endorsement from ICAO. The ICAO endorsement means that the ELPAC test complies with the recommended and best practices in language testing, as they are formulated in ICAO Annex I – Personnel Licensing, and ICAO Document 9835 – Manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements.

ICAO Annex I - Personnel Licensing Chapter 1.2.9 Language Proficiency:

1.2.9.1 Aeroplane, airship, helicopter and powered-lift pilots and those flight navigators who are required to use the radio telephone aboard an aircraft shall demonstrate the ability to speak and understand the language used for radiotelephony communications.

1.2.9.2 Air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators shall demonstrate the ability to speak and understand the language used for radiotelephony communications.

1.2.9.3 **Recommendation.**— *Flight engineers, and glider and free balloon pilots should have the ability to speak and understand the language used for radiotelephony communications.*

1.2.9.4 As of 5 March 2008, aeroplane, airship, helicopter and powered-lift pilots, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators shall demonstrate the ability to speak and understand the language used for radiotelephony communications to the level specified in the language proficiency requirements in Appendix 1.

1.2.9.5 **Recommendation.**— *Aeroplane, airship, helicopter and powered-lift pilots, flight navigators required to use the radiotelephone aboard an aircraft, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators should demonstrate the ability to speak and understand the language used for radiotelephony communications to the level specified in the language proficiency requirements in Appendix 1.*

1.2.9.6 As of 5 March 2008, the language proficiency of aeroplane, airship, helicopter and powered-lift pilots, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators who demonstrate proficiency below the Expert Level (Level 6) shall be formally evaluated at intervals in accordance with an individual's demonstrated proficiency level.

1.2.9.7 **Recommendation.**— *The language proficiency of aeroplane, airship, helicopter and powered-lift pilots, flight navigators required to use the radiotelephone aboard an aircraft, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators who demonstrate proficiency below the Expert Level (Level 6) should be formally evaluated at intervals in accordance with an individual's demonstrated proficiency level, as follows:*

- a) those demonstrating language proficiency at the Operational Level (Level 4) should be evaluated at least once every three years; and*
- b) those demonstrating language proficiency at the Extended Level (Level 5) should be evaluated at least once every six years.*

The rationale of the ELPAC test suite is based on the requirements in ICAO 9835. In summary, the ELPAC tests assess:

- listening and speaking skills only;
- ICAO levels 3 (fail), 4 (operational), 5 (advanced) and 6 (proficient);
- the ability of air traffic controllers and pilots
  - to communicate effectively in plain language using radiotelephony communications in non-visual situations;
  - to switch between the use of ICAO standard phraseology and plain language, whenever appropriate;

- to understand a broad range of foreign and non-native accents of English, as they are likely to encounter in the workplace;
- to hear and understand read backs, frequencies, call signs, flight levels, headings, etc.
- to achieve meaningful communication, even when confronted with an operational difficulty or an unexpected or unusual situation;
- the ability of air traffic controllers to give instructions, confirm, clarify, request, negotiate; read back, etc.
- the ability of pilots to request, confirm, clarify, negotiate, explain, read back, etc.

Below, the format of the ELPAC test suite and the individual parts of ELPAC ATC, ELPAC pilot and ELPAC paper 3 are described. They have been designed in such a way to meet the criteria laid out by ICAO and described above.

## What is being tested with the ELPAC test?

The ELPAC test does not assess the test taker's knowledge or ability to use ICAO standard phraseology! Rather, the ELPAC test focusses on their ability to communicate effectively in unusual or unexpected situations and in the context of aeronautical communication using plain English.

## What is the difference between ICAO standard phraseology and plain English?

ICAO standard phraseology uses a vocabulary of roughly 500 English words. That is really not very much. These words usually have a reduced scope in comparison their use in everyday language in that they are only used with one meaning in ICAO standard phraseology. For example, in radiotelephony communication the word 'confirm' is used only to mark a transmission as a question.

ICAO standard phraseology also uses different pronunciation to 'normal' English. For example, in radiotelephony communication you say the number '9' as 'niner' and the number '5' as 'fife'. Obviously, this is done to distinguish the sounds more clearly. This can be useful, because the quality of the sound on the frequency is not always good and could potentially lead to misunderstanding.

**The ELPAC test assesses the ability to use plain English, as it is used in the context of aeronautical communication; as well as the ability to shift between using plain English and ICAO standard phraseology.**

**In the ELPAC test, test takers will not be assessed on what they think or on the operational correctness of their responses – but on how well they can express themselves in English!**

## Who does the assessment?

There will be two assessors in the room during the oral part of the ELPAC test. One of them is an English language expert who has a background in English language teaching or language testing. The other assessor is an operational expert. So in other words, a pilot or an air traffic controller – somebody who is familiar with radiotelephony communication.

Having two assessors in the room is simply a question of best practice. Furthermore, the operational expert has the responsibility to ensure that the language you use during the test is appropriate for the context of aeronautical communication.

In order to become an ELPAC assessor, both the English language expert and the operational expert had to undergo screening and training. The training course takes a whole week and usually takes place at the Eurocontrol Institute of Air Navigation Services in Luxembourg. Every year, assessors are required by ICAO to attend a refresher training course. In addition, Eurocontrol does spot checks to ensure that the assessors are applying the ELPAC test methodology correctly.

## How is the performance on the test evaluated?

The assessors both use the ICAO rating scale to mark the performance. The ICAO rating scale was designed by an expert panel on behalf of ICAO. Test takers are tested in six language areas: pronunciation, vocabulary, structure, fluency, comprehension and interaction. They are only tested for their listening and speaking skill. **They are not being tested for reading or writing!**

The ICAO rating scale has six levels. Level 1 is the lowest, and level 6 is the highest you can achieve. Level 4 is the so called 'operational' level, because in order to pass the test, the test taker will need to achieve at least a level 4.

There is no cumulative score. This is a rule that was defined by ICAO. It means that test taker need to achieve at least a level 4 in every one of the six criteria that are being tested.

If, for example, they achieve the following score:

Pronunciation:	4
Structure:	3
Vocabulary:	4
Fluency:	4
Comprehension:	5
Interaction:	4

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

## So what does the ELPAC test look like?

There are three parts to the ELPAC test. The ELPAC test has three parts, which are referred to as paper 1, paper 2 and paper 3.

- Paper 1 is the listening comprehension part of the test.
- Paper 2 is the oral interaction part of the test. In paper 2 there are specific versions that were designed for tower, approach, en route and apron controllers and for pilots with an ATP licence. Paper 2 reflects the range of communication tasks undertaken in the ops room and the cockpit respectively.

The focus of the test is on language proficiency and not on operational procedures. Papers 1 and 2 of the ELPAC test assess language proficiency at ICAO levels 4 and 5. The level 6 criteria of the ICAO rating scale are assessed in paper 3, which is a test of communicative ability.

In the following chapters we will go through the three papers of the ELPAC test, one by one.

### ELPAC Paper 1

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 43 minutes.

ELPAC paper 1 has six parts. In each part of paper 1 you will hear a number of recordings. As each part appears on the screen, the test taker sees and hears instructions on how to answer the questions – by clicking on boxes in a table or by typing a few words in the spaces provided – **they will not lose marks for spelling mistakes.**

The full instructions will disappear once the test part starts, but simplified instructions will remain on the screen. At the beginning of each part there is an example. The example will illustrate the type of test questions in that respective test part. The example items will be answered by the computer.

There is a limited amount of time to answer each test item. When the time for each item is over, the next item, highlighted by a blue frame, will start automatically.

The test is time-driven. Once it starts, you must complete each item as it is presented to you. When part 6 is finished you will hear 'That is the end of the test' – **Don't forget to log-out completely. Otherwise, the assessors cannot mark the results of your test.**

## Paper 1, part 1

In this part of the test the test taker hears short transmissions and then type your answer – by typing a few digits (sometimes a short word will be required). Items for this part will be presented on one screen.

## Paper 1, part 2

In this part of the test the test taker will see the instructions given by a controller. They will then hear the readback given by the pilot and must decide if the readback<sup>1</sup> was correct. There will be one or two correct answers (out of three options). The maximum number of checkmarks (✓) in the table is not specified. Items for this part will be presented on one screen.

## Paper 1, part 3

In this part of the test there are four audio files (one for the example items and the remaining three for the test items). Each audio file has three questions and these will be presented on a separate screen.

## Paper 1, part 4 (ELPAC ATC only)

In this part of the test, the test taker will hear a number of audio files. They will then be asked to type the appropriate flight level(s) into the table cells. Not all cells will require an answer. The number of answers required will not be specified. Items for this test part will be presented on one screen.

## Paper 1, part 4 (ELPAC Pilot only)

In this part of the test, the test taker will hear six audio files of ATIS messages (one for the example and five for the test items). Each ATIS message has three questions. The first two questions require them to type a few digits (sometimes a short word will be required). The third question requires a short sentence or phrase. Items for this test part will be presented on one screen.

## Paper 1, part 5

In this part of the test there will be four audio files (one for the example item and the remaining three for the test items). The audio files are longer and more complex than those found in part 3. Each audio file has five questions and these will be presented on a separate screen.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: in their readback pilot and controllers often omit the "decimal" e.g. 135560 instead of 135.560. This is not considered a fault as long as all the numbers are correct.

## Paper 1, part 6

In this part of the test, there will be four audio files (one for the example item and the remaining three for the test items). These are longer and more complex than those found in parts 3 and 5. Each audio file has five questions and these will be presented on a separate screen.

## ELPAC Paper 2

Paper 2 tests oral interaction skills and requires test takers to demonstrate:

- appropriate use of standard ICAO phraseology;
- switching between standard ICAO phraseology and plain English;
- making 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
- give opinions;
- putting forward arguments;
- evaluating (advantages & disadvantages);
- speculating;
- hypothesising;
- speaking about aviation topics.

Paper 2 of the test lasts approximately 20 minutes.

**To achieve a licence endorsement, it is necessary to obtain at least a level 4 in both paper 1 and paper 2. There is no accumulative score. The lowest level achieved, in either paper 1 or paper 2, is the final assessment.**

Paper 2 is divided into three tasks (task 1a & 1b, task 2 and task 3) and involves both face to face and non-visual communication.

### Paper 2, task 1a (ELPAC ATC only, 6 – 8 minutes)

In task 1a the test taker will play the part of the air traffic controller communicating with a number of aircraft, as played by one of the examiners. There is be no visual contact with the assessor. Test takers must respond to each transmission, using either ICAO standard phraseology whenever appropriate, or plain English. They have a chart with information necessary for the task. This can be a map of the apron or of the sector that is used in the role play. The test taker is allowed to make notes on the chart provided.

### Paper 2, task 1a (ELPAC Pilot only, 6 – 8 minutes)

In task 1a the test taker plays the part of a pilot communicating with ATC, as played by one of the assessors. There will be no visual contact with the examiner. **Test takers must respond to transmission for their aircraft only**, using either ICAO standard phraseology whenever appropriate, or plain English. They have a prompt with information necessary for the task. This can be a flight plan, a load sheet or an airport map. They are allowed to make notes on the chart provided.

### Paper 2, task 1b (3 - 4 minutes)

This is a face-to-face task in which the test takers give a verbal report on the events in task 1a to the assessor, who is now playing the role of the superior.

### 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 the test taker is asked to describe the picture. After, they may be asked follow-up questions about the picture.

### 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. The test taker is asked to give their opinion on general aviation topics.

## ELPAC Paper 3

In order to be able to take the ELPAC level 6 test, paper 3, test takers must first demonstrate their proficiency in speaking English by passing the ELPAC test at level 5.

### General Information about ELPAC paper 3

ELPAC paper 3 (level 6) has been developed as an add-on to the existing ELPAC test. It was designed for licensed or certified operational air traffic controllers and pilots with an ATP licence and reflects the range of communicative tasks of their work environment. The focus of ELPAC paper 3 is on communicative proficiency – the ability to negotiate meaning successfully – rather than on language proficiency or operational procedures.

ELPAC paper 3 has the format of an oral interview. The tasks require the test taker to:

- identify misunderstandings;
- successfully resolve misunderstandings;
- deal effectively with the controller/pilot relationship by asking and clarifying;
- successfully negotiate meaning;
- understand idiomatic language;
- avoid using idiomatic language;
- identify ambiguity;
- avoid ambiguity;
- accommodate a weaker speaker by adapting the level of language to that of the interlocutor.

Paper 3 lasts approximately 20 minutes and provides a context appropriate to your general experience in aviation.

The focus of paper 3 is on communicative proficiency in aeronautical communication and, more specifically, the following three aspects:

- ambiguity;
- accommodation;
- idiomatic language.

## Description of the structure of ELPAC paper3

There are four tasks in ELPAC paper 3 that all involve face to face communication only.

### Paper 3, task 1

In task 1 the test taker is given two pictures and will be asked to describe and compare the pictures. Then they will hear an audio of somebody describing one of the pictures. After, they will be asked to identify which one of the pictures the person in the audio file was describing and to explain why. They will also be asked a question about aviation in a broader context.

### Paper 3, task 2

In task 2 the test takers hear an audio file of a radiotelephony communication. There is a misunderstanding in the audio file and the assessors will ask the test taker to explain what the misunderstanding is. After, they will be asked to give a summary, in their own words, about what happened in the audio file. The summary must be given as though the test taker were talking to somebody who knows little about aviation and doesn't speak English very well or from a different cultural background.

### Paper 3, task 3

In task 3 the test taker hears another audio file of a radiotelephony communication. There is a misunderstanding in the audio file and the assessors will ask the test taker to explain what the misunderstanding is. After, they will be asked to give a summary, about what happened in the audio file. The summary must be given as though the test taker were talking to somebody who knows little about aviation and doesn't speak English very well or from a different cultural background.

### Paper 3, task 4

In task 4 the test taker hears another audio file of two speakers in an informal setting, talking about an incident in the ops room or the cockpit. After the audio file ends, they are asked a number of questions about the recording. There are a few idiomatic expressions in the audio file.