EUROCONTROL

ELPAC

English Language Proficiency for Aeronautical Communication
ELPAC Test Taker Preparation – Air Traffic Controllers

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.

Zurich University
of Applied Sciences

zh
aw
School of
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and Transport Systems

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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Introduction

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

Why do I have to do this test?

Perhaps you're wondering why you have to do this test? And indeed, it may well be that you've 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 they are defined by ICAO.

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 a pilot or air traffic controller we're pretty sure you've come across situations where you were unable to use ICAO standard phraseology – for example because it was such an unusual or unexpected circumstance.

The ELPAC test does not assess your knowledge or ability to use ICAO standard phraseology! Rather, the ELPAC test focusses on your ability to communicate effectively in unusual or unexpected situations and in the context of aeronautical communication using plan 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 your ability to use plain English, as it is used in the context or aeronautical communication; as well as your ability to shift between using plain English and ICAO standard phraseology.

In the ELPAC test you will not be assessed on what you think or on the operational correctness of your responses – but on how well you can express yourself in English!

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 who has a background in English language teaching or language testing. The other assessor in an operational expert. So in other words, 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 and 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 Aviation Learning Centre in Luxembourg. frequently, 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.

So you may rest assured that the people testing you know what they are doing and have been properly and professionally trained!

How is my performance on the test evaluated?

The assessors both use the ICAO rating scale to mark your performance. You can find a copy of the ICAO rating scale on the last page of this document. The ICAO rating scale was designed by an expert panel on behalf of ICAO.

You are tested in six language areas: pronunciation, vocabulary, structure, fluency, comprehension and interaction. You are only tested for your listening and speaking skill. **You 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, and in order to pass the test, you will need to achieve at least a level 4.

To achieve a licence endorsement, it is necessary to obtain at least a pass for ELPAC paper 1 and a level 4 for paper 2. There is no accumulative score. This is a rule that was defined by ICAO. It means that you need to achieve at least a level 4 in every one of the six criteria that are being tested in paper 2. So for example, let's just say you 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?

Okay, so probably by now you're wondering what the ELPAC test looks like? In this chapter we'll be taking you through the test step by step, so you'll know what to expect.

Before we start though, we'd just like to point out that there is a sample version of paper 1 of the ELPAC test available at www.elpac.info, where you will also find a videos of paper 2 of the test.

We strongly recommend that, in order to become familiar with the layout and questions of the test, you do the sample test version and watch the videos at least once before taking the ELPAC test.

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 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 together 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 of ELPAC ATC tests listening comprehension, i.e. the understanding of communications between pilots and controllers. Additionally, the test includes scenarios with controller – controller communications. The scenarios cover both routine and non-routine situations, which are based on authentic material. They range from short standard pilot/controller transmissions to longer communications in which the controller deals with non-routine or unexpected situations. Paper 1 of the ELPAC ATC test is timed and takes approximately 35 minutes, depending on the length of the pauses used by the test taker.

ELPAC paper 1 has four parts. In each part of paper 1 you will hear a number of recordings. As each part appears on the screen before you, you will see and hear instructions on how to answer the questions – by typing a few characters in the space provided or by clicking on the correct answer.

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 – **Do not try to answer these items**.

In part 2, 3 and 4 you will be given one minute to study the questions. Click "override" to skip the pause and start the sound files. 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 – **You should align the cursor with the blue frame in which you have to type your answers.**

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 to.

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' – **Please log out completely.**

Paper 1, part 1

This part tests recognition. Test takers write answers in alphanumeric format. There are 3 short audio files with two items each (6 items in total). There is an additional audio file at the beginning as an example. In each answer box test takers can write a maximum of four digits/letters. The corresponding answer boxes for the 6 items are presented on the same screen. Test takers are given 15 seconds to look at the questions before the first recording begins.

Paper 1, part 2

This part tests comprehension of communications between a controller and one or two pilots or between two controllers, in unusual and non-routine situations. There are 3 audio files with 3 items each (9 items in total). There is an additional audio file at the beginning as an example.

Every item comprises a question with one key and two distractors. Test takers must select the response that they think is the most accurate, by checking the corresponding box. For each audio file, the items appear on the same screen. Test takers are given a maximum of 60 seconds before each recording begins to review the questions. There is a timer with a countdown in the top left corner. Test takers may start this part of the test before the 60 second are up, by clicking on the corresponding button to the right of the countdown.

Paper 1, part 3

Part 3 is a sentence completion task. There are 5 audio files with 5 items each (15 items in total). Every item comprises the beginning of a sentence, with one key and two distractors to complete the sentence. Test takers select the option that they think is the most accurate, by checking the corresponding box. For each audio file, the items appear on the same screen. Test takers are given a maximum of 60 seconds before each recording begins to review the questions. There is a timer with a countdown in the top left corner. Test takers may start this part of the test before the 60 seconds are up, by clicking on the corresponding button to the right of the countdown.

Paper 1, part 4

This part tests comprehension of communication between controllers and pilots dealing with unusual situations (these are longer and more complex transmissions than found in part 2). There are 3 audio files with 5 items each (15 items in total). There is an additional audio file at the beginning as an example.

Every item comprises three statements which refer to the same section in the audio file. There is one key and two distractors. Test takers must select the statement that they think is the most accurate, by checking the corresponding box. For each scenario, the items appear on the same screen. Test takers are given a maximum of 60 seconds before each recording begins to review the questions. There is a timer with a countdown in the top left corner. Test takers may start this part of the test before the 60 seconds are up, by clicking on the corresponding button to the right of the countdown.

Tips for ELPAC paper 1 test takers

- Make sure that you become familiar with the instructions for each part of paper 1 and the type of answer you are expected to give.

- This is a listening test – so listen carefully. Do not assume that the pilot/controller will do something because 'that's the obvious thing to do'.

- The questions are deliberately spaced to give you time to type 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**. Type the answer as you hear the required information which is presented in a logical sequence.

ELPAC Paper 2

Paper 2 test your oral interaction skills and requires you 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.

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 (6 – 8 minutes)

In task 1a you will play the role of the air traffic controller communicating with a number of aircraft, as played by one of the examiners. There will be no visual contact between you and the assessor. You will have to respond to each transmission, using either ICAO standard phraseology whenever appropriate, or plain English. You will 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. You will be allowed to make notes on the chart provided. Remember, you are being assessed on your language proficiency, **not** your skills as a controller.

Your use of ICAO standard phraseology will not 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 in 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. After, you 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. You will be asked to give your opinion on general aviation topics. But again, keep in mind that **you will not be assessed on what you think**, but on how well you can express yourself in English.

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, then you risk being assessed at a level below your true proficiency – because you did not demonstrate the level of language you are normally capable of producing.

Remember, ELPAC is a high-stakes test. The security of the test is paramount. In your own interest, avoid discussing the test items and tasks with colleagues.

You are not allowed to bring into the examination room mobile phones, sound recording devices and similar electronic equipment or to take notes about the content of the test. Do not talk with anybody in the room except the invigilator/assessors(s).

ELPAC Paper 3

In order to be able to take the ELPAC level 6 test, paper 3, you must first demonstrate your 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 you 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 you will be given two pictures and will be asked to describe and compare the pictures. Then you will hear an audio of somebody describing one of the pictures. After, you will be asked to identify which one of the pictures the person in the audio file was describing and to explain why. You will also be asked a question about aviation in a broader context.

Paper 3, task 2

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

> **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.

Paper 3, task 3

In task 3 you will hear another audio file of a radiotelephony communication. There is a misunderstanding in the audio file and the assessors will ask you if you can explain what the misunderstanding is. After, you will be asked to give a summary, in your own words, about what happened in the audio file. But, you will be asked to give the summary as though you were talking to somebody who knows little about aviation and doesn't speak English very well or from a different cultural background.

What is accommodation in language?

Accommodation 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 to use less complex sentence structures.

Paper 3, task 4

In task 4 you will hear 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, you will be asked a number of questions about what you hear in the recording. There are a few idiomatic expressions in the audio file that you hear. You should be prepared to be able to explain the meaning of these idioms in your own words.

What is an idiom, what is idiomatic language?

An idiom is an expression of which the meaning is different from the meaning of the individual words. The meaning of the idiom can therefore not necessarily be deducted from the meaning of the individual words. That is why idioms are so hard to learn in a foreign language. That is also why you should try to avoid using idioms when speaking to a less proficient speaker. Here is an example:

'Ben kicked the bucket recently.' The idiom 'to kick the bucket' means 'to die'. This specific meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of 'kick' and 'bucket'.

Tips for ELPAC paper 3 test takers

In most language test you have taken so far in your life, probably the main aim was for you to show off your language skills to your fullest ability – by using fairly advanced words, complex structures and showing off your native-like accent of English.

However, keep in mind that in ELPAC paper 3 you are not being assessed on your proficiency in speaking general English. What is being assessed is your ability to communicate effectively in English in the context of aeronautical communication. Effective communication can sometimes require you to tone it down a little, as they say. That means, to simplify the way you speak by using simpler words and easier structures, for example by making shorter sentences.

Other than that, as in paper 2, 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, then you risk being assessed at a level below your true proficiency – because you did not demonstrate the level of language you are normally capable of producing.

Please note that the security of the test is paramount. In your own interest, avoid discussing the test items and tasks with colleagues.

You are not allowed to bring into the examination room mobile phones, minidisk players, sound recording devices and similar electronic equipment or to take notes. Do not talk with anybody in the room except the invigilator/assessors.

Proving your identity

Before presenting yourself for the ELPAC test, ensure that you have a valid ID with you. You will be asked for proof of identity before being allowed to take the ELPAC test.

LEVEL	PRONUNCIATION Assumes a dialect and/or accent intelligible to the aeronautical community.	STRUCTURE Relevant grammatical structures and sentence patterns are determined by language functions appropriate to the task.	VOCABULARY	FLUENCY	COMPREHENSION	INTERACTIONS
Expert 6	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, though possibly influenced by the first language or regional variation, almost never interfere with ease of understanding.	Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.	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.	Able to speak at length with a natural, effortless flow. Varies speech flow for stylistic effect, e.g. to emphasize a point. Uses appropriate discourse markers and connectors spontaneously.	Comprehension is consistently accurate in nearly all contexts and includes comprehension of linguistic and cultural subtleties.	Interacts with ease in nearly all situations. Is sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues and responds to them appropriately.
Extended 5	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, though influenced by the first language or regional variation, rarely interfere with ease of understanding.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled. Complex structures are attempted but with errors which sometimes interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work-related topics. Paraphrases consistently and successfully. Vocabulary is sometimes idiomatic.	Able to speak at length with relative ease on familiar topics but may not vary speech flow as a stylistic device. Can make use of appropriate discourse markers or connectors.	Comprehension is accurate on common, concrete, and work-related topics and mostly accurate when the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events. Is able to comprehend a range of speech varieties (dialect and/or accent) or registers.	Responses are immediate, appropriate, and informative. Manages the speaker/ listener relationship effectively.
Operational 4	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are used creatively and are usually well controlled. Errors may occur, particularly in unusual or unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work-related topics. Can often paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary in unusual or unexpected circumstances.	Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. There may be occasional loss of fluency on transition from rehearsed or formulaic speech to spontaneous interaction, but this does not prevent effective communication. Can make limited use of discourse markers or connectors. Fillers are not distracting.	Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete, and work-related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. When the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events, comprehension may be slower or require clarification strategies.	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.
Pre-operational 3	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation and frequently interfere with ease of understanding.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns associated with predictable situations are not always well controlled. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are often sufficient to communicate on common, concrete, or work-related topics, but range is limited and the word choice often inappropriate. Is often unable to paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary.	Produces stretches of language, but phrasing and pausing are often inappropriate. Hesitations or slowness in language processing may prevent effective communication. Fillers are sometimes distracting.	Comprehension is 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 a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events.	Responses are sometimes immediate, appropriate, and informative. Can initiate and maintain exchanges with reasonable ease on familiar topics and in predictable situations. Generally inadequate when dealing with an unexpected turn of events.
Elementary 2	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are heavily influenced by the first language or regional variation and usually interfere with ease of understanding.	Shows only limited control of a few simple memorized grammatical structures and sentence patterns.	Limited vocabulary range consisting only of isolated words and memorized phrases.	Can produce very short, isolated, memorized utterances with frequent pausing and a distracting use of fillers to search for expressions and to articulate less familiar words.	Comprehension is limited to isolated, memorized phrases when they are carefully and slowly articulated.	Response time is slow and often inappropriate. Interaction is limited to simple routine exchanges.
Pre-elementary 1	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.