

AS Level Thinking Skills (8436) & Cambridge Award in Thinking Skills (8435)

What is the difference between CATS and AS?

CATS is part of the Cambridge Career and Skills Awards and is available at Advanced level only. It consists of a single multiple choice question paper of 50 items. These are split into three categories: Applied Arithmetic, Communications and Assessing Argument. It is a stand-alone assessment that can be taken by anyone, whether in employment or education.

AS Thinking Skills is designed as an academic one-year course for students in schools and colleges who are taking other AS and A level examinations. It has the same value as any other AS in terms of university entrance or acceptance by employees. It consists of two papers. Paper 1 is the same as the CATS paper. Paper 2 consists of structured answers and essays concerned with evaluating evidence and evaluating and presenting an argument.

Can I take the CATS exam?

The last examination for CATS will be in June 2003. However, Paper 1 of the AS examination will continue to be offered.

Is the syllabus due for revision?

The syllabus for Thinking Skills is currently undergoing revision and it is hoped that a new syllabus will be ready for teaching in Sept. 2003 for the new exams in 2004.

How many hours contact time do you recommend for AS/CATS?

For AS Thinking Skills 4 hours per week of teaching time is adequate over one year. Obviously students will need to do individual work outside of this time. CATS would require half this time. Students with good understanding of language and problem solving abilities may require less formal teaching. However, the Assessing Argument part will usually require intensive teaching of reasoning, but some students may be able to do well at CATS with little or no formal teaching.

Can students take the CATS paper without any formal teaching?

It is possible, but as mentioned above certain parts of the syllabus do require specialist knowledge and understanding.

What knowledge of mathematics is required by students?

High level mathematical skills are not required. The questions for Applied Arithmetic are all based on scenarios (as are the questions for all other parts of the examination) and the candidate is simply required to be able to extract and process data using addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Knowledge of percentages, fractions and ratios is also necessary. The basis of the examination is to test the candidates understanding of what data to use and how to manipulate them to achieve the correct answer. In addition candidates will need to be able to understand information in the form of graphs, tables, scale drawings, etc.

Do candidates need to have English as a first language to be able to study Thinking Skills?

The level of language used is similar to that of other advanced level courses offered by CIE. Every effort is made to simplify language where possible, but care has to be taken by the question setters not to alter the meaning of the passages as this could invalidate the questions in the sections on Communications and Assessing Argument. Candidates will need to be able to understand fairly length pieces of text (400 to 500 words) in some parts of the examination. Their understanding will need to be sufficiently good to identify understand the meaning, relevance, significance and function of the text as a whole or in part. In Assessing Argument, the language has to be precise. In this context

an argument is 'a number of reasons put forward as grounds for a conclusion'. Therefore candidates must have sufficiently good understanding of English to be able to identify and draw conclusions, as well as being able to identify flaws and assumptions in arguments.

What support materials are available?

Syllabus;
Specimen Question Papers and Mark Schemes;
November 2001 Question Papers
June 2001 AS Question Paper and Mark Scheme will be available in July 2001;

All the above are available from CIE Publications

See also the question and answer below.

I can only afford one textbook for each student. What should I buy?

The best resources for CATS are the Tutor Resource Guides. Three of these cover the CATS course, Applied Arithmetic, Communications and Assessing Argument. There is a fourth guide available which covers Paper 2 of the AS level in Thinking Skills, but this is not essential for CATS. Each guide consists of photocopiable A4 pages, so each Centre only needs one set rather than one of each student. These may be purchased through our Publications Department.

At the moment the most suitable text for Paper 2 of the AS level is Critical Thinking by Alec Fisher, published by CUP.