

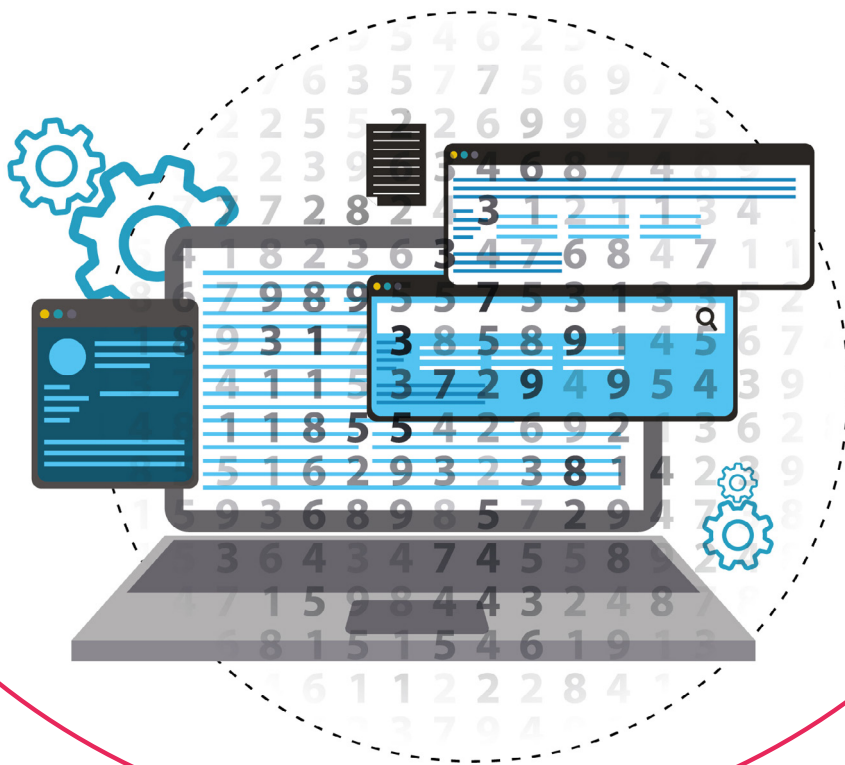


## Syllabus

# Cambridge International AS & A Level Computer Science 9618

Use this syllabus for exams in 2026.

Exams are available in the June and November series.



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## Why choose Cambridge International?

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Cambridge International prepares school students for life, helping them develop an informed curiosity and a lasting passion for learning. We are part of the University of Cambridge.

Our Cambridge Pathway gives students a clear path for educational success from age 5 to 19. Schools can shape the curriculum around how they want students to learn – with a wide range of subjects and flexible ways to offer them. It helps students discover new abilities and a wider world, and gives them the skills they need for life, so they can achieve at school, university and work.

Our programmes and qualifications set the global standard for international education. They are created by subject experts, are rooted in academic rigour and reflect the latest educational research. They provide a strong platform for students to progress from one stage to the next, and are well supported by teaching and learning resources. Learn more about our research at [www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/our-research/](http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/our-research/)

We review all our syllabuses regularly, so they reflect the latest research evidence and professional teaching practice – and take account of the different national contexts in which they are taught.

We consult with teachers to help us design each syllabus around the needs of their learners. Consulting with leading universities has helped us make sure our syllabuses encourage students to master the key concepts in the subject and develop the skills necessary for success in higher education.

We believe education works best when curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment are closely aligned. Our programmes develop deep knowledge, conceptual understanding and higher-order thinking skills, to prepare students for their future. Together with schools, we develop Cambridge learners who are confident, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged – equipped for success in the modern world.

Every year, nearly a million Cambridge students from 10 000 schools in 160 countries prepare for their future with the Cambridge Pathway.

**School feedback:** ‘We think the Cambridge curriculum is superb preparation for university.’

**Feedback from:** Christoph Guttentag, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, Duke University, USA

### Quality management



Cambridge International is committed to providing exceptional quality. In line with this commitment, our quality management system for the provision of international education programmes and qualifications programmes for students aged 5 to 19 is independently certified as meeting the internationally recognised standard, ISO 9001:2015. Learn more at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/about-us/our-standards/](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/about-us/our-standards/)

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## **Important: Changes to this syllabus**



**For information about changes to this syllabus for 2026, go to page 48.**

The latest syllabus is version 1, published September 2023. There are no significant changes which affect teaching.

Any textbooks endorsed to support the syllabus for examination from 2021 are still suitable for use with this syllabus.

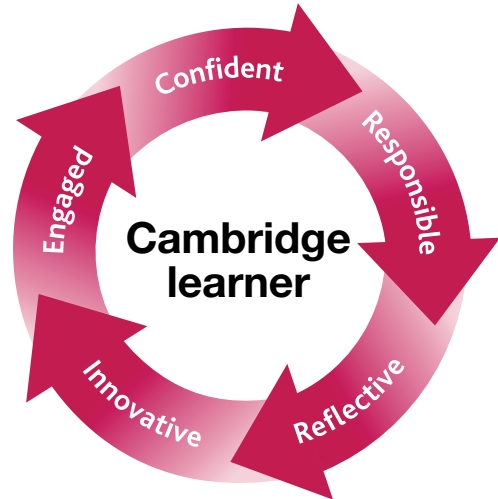
# 1 Why choose this syllabus?

## Key benefits

The best motivation for a student is a real passion for the subject they are learning. By offering students a variety of Cambridge International AS & A Levels, you can give them the greatest chance of finding the path of education they most want to follow. With over 50 subjects to choose from, students can select the ones they love and that they are best at, which helps motivate them throughout their studies.

Following a Cambridge International AS & A Level programme helps students develop abilities which universities value highly, including:

- a deep understanding of their subjects
- higher order thinking skills – analysis, critical thinking, problem solving
- presenting ordered and coherent arguments
- independent learning and research.



**Cambridge International AS & A Level Computer Science** encourages learners to meet the needs of Higher Education courses in computer science as well as twenty-first century digital employers. It encourages learners to think creatively, through applying practical programming solutions, demonstrating that they are effective users of technology.

Our approach in Cambridge International AS & A Level Computer Science encourages learners to be:

**confident**, using a range of technology and programming paradigms

**responsible**, using technology ethically

**reflective**, as programmers, improving their own programming solution

**innovative**, creating efficient solutions to problems

**engaged**, in technology, how it is built and how software solutions are developed.

**School feedback:** ‘Cambridge students develop a deep understanding of subjects and independent thinking skills.’

**Feedback from:** Principal, Rockledge High School, USA

## Key concepts

Key concepts are essential ideas that help students develop a deep understanding of their subject and make links between different aspects. Key concepts may open up new ways of thinking about, understanding or interpreting the important things to be learned.

Good teaching and learning will incorporate and reinforce a subject's key concepts to help students gain:

- a greater depth as well as breadth of subject knowledge
- confidence, especially in applying knowledge and skills in new situations
- the vocabulary to discuss their subject conceptually and show how different aspects link together
- a level of mastery of their subject to help them enter higher education.

The key concepts identified below, carefully introduced and developed, will help to underpin the course you will teach. You may identify additional key concepts which will also enrich teaching and learning.

The key concepts for Cambridge International AS & A Level Computer Science are:

- **Computational thinking**  
Computational thinking is a set of fundamental skills that help produce a solution to a problem. Skills such as abstraction, decomposition and algorithmic thinking are used to study a problem and design a solution that can be implemented. This may involve using a range of technologies and programming languages.
- **Programming paradigms**  
A programming paradigm is a way of thinking about or approaching problems. There are many different programming styles that can be used, which are suited to unique functions, tools and specific situations. An understanding of programming paradigms is essential to ensure they are used appropriately, when designing and building programs.
- **Communication**  
Communication is a core requirement of computer systems. It includes the ability to transfer data from one device or component to another and an understanding of the rules and methods that are used in this data transfer. Communication could range from the internal transfer of data within a computer system, to the transfer of a video across the internet.
- **Computer architecture and hardware**  
Computer architecture is the design of the internal operation of a computer system. It includes the rules that dictate how components and data are organised, how data are communicated between components, to allow hardware to function. There is a range of architectures, with different components and rules, that are appropriate for different scenarios.  
All computers comprise of a combination of hardware components, ranging from internal components, such as the Central Processing Unit (CPU) and main memory, to peripherals. To produce effective and efficient programs to run on hardware, it is important to understand how the components work independently and together to produce a system that can be used. Hardware needs software to be able to perform a task. Software allows hardware to become functional. This enables the user to communicate with the hardware to perform tasks.
- **Data representation and structures**  
Computers use binary and understanding how a binary number can be interpreted in many different ways is important. Programming requires an understanding of how data can be organised for efficient access and/or transfer.

## International recognition and acceptance

Our expertise in curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment is the basis for the recognition of our programmes and qualifications around the world. Every year thousands of students with Cambridge International AS & A Levels gain places at leading universities worldwide. Our programmes and qualifications are valued by top universities around the world including those in the UK, US (including Ivy League universities), Europe, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

UK ENIC, the national agency in the UK for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills, has carried out an independent benchmarking study of Cambridge International AS & A Level and found it to be comparable to the standard of AS & A Level in the UK. This means students can be confident that their Cambridge International AS & A Level qualifications are accepted as equivalent, grade for grade, to UK AS & A Levels by leading universities worldwide.

Cambridge International AS Level Computer Science makes up the first half of the Cambridge International A Level course in Computer Science and provides a foundation for the study of Computer Science at Cambridge International A Level. The AS Level can also be delivered as a standalone qualification. Depending on local university entrance requirements, students may be able to use it to progress directly to university courses in Computer Science or some other subjects. It is also suitable as part of a course of general education.

Cambridge International A Level Computer Science provides a foundation for the study of Computer Science or related courses in higher education. Equally it is suitable as part of a course of general education.

For more information about the relationship between the Cambridge International AS Level and Cambridge International A Level see the 'Assessment overview' section of the Syllabus overview.

We recommend learners check the Cambridge recognition database and university websites to find the most up-to-date entry requirements for courses they wish to study.

Learn more at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognition](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognition)

## Supporting teachers

We believe education is most effective when curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment are closely aligned. We provide a wide range of resources, detailed guidance, innovative training and targeted professional development so that you can give your students the best possible preparation for Cambridge International AS & A Level. To find out which resources are available for each syllabus go to

**[www.cambridgeinternational.org/support](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support)**

The School Support Hub is our secure online site for Cambridge teachers where you can find the resources you need to deliver our programmes. You can also keep up to date with your subject and the global Cambridge community through our online discussion forums.

Find out more at **[www.cambridgeinternational.org/support](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support)**

| <b>Support for Cambridge International AS &amp; A Level</b>  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Planning and preparation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Syllabuses</li> <li>• Schemes of work</li> <li>• Specimen Question Papers and Mark Schemes</li> <li>• Teacher guides</li> </ul> | <b>Teaching and assessment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endorsed resources</li> <li>• Online forums</li> </ul> | <b>Learning and revision</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example candidate responses</li> <li>• Past papers and mark schemes</li> </ul> | <b>Results</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidate Results Service</li> <li>• Principal examiner reports for teachers</li> </ul> |

Sign up for email notifications about changes to syllabuses, including new and revised products and services, at **[www.cambridgeinternational.org/syllabusupdates](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/syllabusupdates)**

Syllabuses and specimen materials represent the final authority on the content and structure of all of our assessments.

## Professional development

Find the next step on your professional development journey.

- Introductory Professional Development – An introduction to Cambridge programmes and qualifications.
- Extension Professional Development – Develop your understanding of Cambridge programmes and qualifications to build confidence in your delivery.
- Enrichment Professional Development – Transform your approach to teaching with our Enrichment workshops.
- Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications (PDQs) – Practice-based programmes that transform professional learning for practising teachers. Available at Certificate and Diploma level.

Find out more at:

**[www.cambridgeinternational.org/support-and-training-for-schools/professional-development/](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support-and-training-for-schools/professional-development/)**



### **Supporting exams officers**

We provide comprehensive support and guidance for all Cambridge exams officers.

Find out more at: **[www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)**

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## 2 Syllabus overview

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### Aims

The aims describe the purposes of a course based on this syllabus.

The aims of this course are to enable students to develop:

- computational thinking skills
- an understanding of the main principles of solving problems using computers
- an understanding of the component parts of computer systems and how they interrelate, including software, data, hardware, communication and people
- an understanding of the different methods of communication and the functionality of networks and the internet
- the skills necessary to apply this understanding to develop computer based solutions to problems.

Cambridge Assessment International Education is an education organisation and politically neutral. The contents of this syllabus, examination papers and associated materials do not endorse any political view. We endeavour to treat all aspects of the exam process neutrally.





## Content overview

### AS Level content

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>1 Information representation</b>           | 1.1 Data Representation<br>1.2 Multimedia – Graphics, Sound<br>1.3 Compression   |
| <b>2 Communication</b>                        | 2.1 Networks including the internet  |
| <b>3 Hardware</b>                             | 3.1 Computers and their components<br>3.2 Logic Gates and Logic Circuits   |
| <b>4 Processor Fundamentals</b>               | 4.1 Central Processing Unit (CPU) Architecture<br>4.2 Assembly Language<br>4.3 Bit manipulation  |
| <b>5 System Software</b>                      | 5.1 Operating Systems<br>5.2 Language Translators  |
| <b>6 Security, privacy and data integrity</b> | 6.1 Data Security<br>6.2 Data Integrity  |
| <b>7 Ethics and Ownership</b>                 | 7.1 Ethics and Ownership   |
| <b>8 Databases</b>                            | 8.1 Database Concepts<br>8.2 Database Management Systems (DBMS)<br>8.3 Data Definition Language (DDL) and Data Manipulation Language (DML) |
| <b>9 Algorithm Design and Problem-solving</b> | 9.1 Computational Thinking Skills<br>9.2 Algorithms  |
| <b>10 Data Types and Structures</b>           | 10.1 Data Types and Records<br>10.2 Arrays<br>10.3 Files<br>10.4 Introduction to Abstract Data Types (ADT)                                 |
| <b>11 Programming</b>                         | 11.1 Programming Basics<br>11.2 Constructs<br>11.3 Structured Programming  |
| <b>12 Software Development</b>                | 12.1 Program Development Life cycle<br>12.2 Program Design<br>12.3 Program Testing and Maintenance   |

## A Level content

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>13 Data Representation</b>                        | 13.1 User-defined data types<br>13.2 File organisation and access<br>13.3 Floating-point numbers, representation and manipulation |
| <b>14 Communication and internet technologies</b>    | 14.1 Protocols<br>14.2 Circuit switching, packet switching  |
| <b>15 Hardware and Virtual Machines</b>              | 15.1 Processors, Parallel Processing and Virtual Machines<br>15.2 Boolean Algebra and Logic Circuits                              |
| <b>16 System Software</b>                            | 16.1 Purposes of an Operating System (OS)<br>16.2 Translation Software  |
| <b>17 Security</b>                                   | 17.1 Encryption, Encryption Protocols and Digital certificates  |
| <b>18 Artificial Intelligence (AI)</b>               | 18.1 Artificial Intelligence  |
| <b>19 Computational thinking and Problem-solving</b> | 19.1 Algorithms<br>19.2 Recursion   |
| <b>20 Further Programming</b>                        | 20.1 Programming Paradigms<br>20.2 File Processing and Exception Handling   |

**School feedback:** ‘Cambridge International AS & A Levels prepare students well for university because they’ve learnt to go into a subject in considerable depth. There’s that ability to really understand the depth and richness and the detail of a subject. It’s a wonderful preparation for what they are going to face at university.’

**Feedback from:** US Higher Education Advisory Council

## Assessment overview

### Paper 1

Theory Fundamentals 1 hour 30 minutes

75 marks

Paper 1 will assess sections 1 to 8 of the syllabus content.

Written paper.

Externally assessed. Candidates answer all questions.

50% of the AS Level

25% of the A Level

### Paper 3

Advanced Theory 1 hour 30 minutes

75 marks

Paper 3 will assess sections 13 to 20 of the syllabus content.

Written paper.

Externally assessed. Candidates answer all questions.

25% of the A Level

### Paper 2

Fundamental Problem-solving and Programming Skills 2 hours

75 marks

Paper 2 will assess sections 9 to 12 of the syllabus content.

Candidates will need to write answers in pseudocode.

Written paper.

Externally assessed. Candidates answer all questions.

50% of the AS Level

25% of the A Level

### Paper 4

Practical 2 hours 30 minutes

75 marks

Paper 4 will assess sections 19 to 20 of the syllabus content, except for low-level and declarative programming.

Candidates will submit complete program code and evidence of testing.

Candidates will be required to use either Java (console mode), Visual Basic\* (console mode) or Python (console mode) programming languages.

Externally assessed. Candidates answer all questions on a computer without internet or email facility.

25% of the A Level

Information on availability is in the **Before you start** section.

\*Visual Basic in this syllabus refers to any .Net versions of the Visual Basic programming language. Candidates are asked to use one of these versions of the software and not Visual Basic 6.0 or earlier versions of this programming language.

Check the samples database at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/samples](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/samples) for submission information, forms and deadlines for Component 4.

There are three routes for Cambridge International AS & A Level Computer Science:

| Route   | Paper 1 | Paper 2 | Paper 3 | Paper 4 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>1 AS Level only</b><br>(Candidates take all AS components in the same exam series) | yes     | yes     | no      | no      |
| <b>2 A Level</b> (staged over two years)  |         |         |         |         |
| Year 1 AS Level*  | yes     | yes     | no      | no      |
| Year 2 Complete the A Level   | no      | no      | yes     | yes     |
| <b>3 A Level</b><br>(Candidates take all components in the same exam series)          | yes     | yes     | yes     | yes     |

\* Candidates carry forward their AS Level result subject to the rules and time limits described in the *Cambridge Handbook*. See **Making entries** for more information on carry forward of results.

Candidates following an AS Level route are eligible for grades a–e. Candidates following an A Level route are eligible for grades A\*–E.

## Assessment objectives

The assessment objectives (AOs) are:

### AO1

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the principles and concepts of computer science, including abstraction, logic, algorithms and data representation.

### AO2

Apply knowledge and understanding of the principles and concepts of computer science, including to analyse problems in computational terms.

### AO3

Design, program and evaluate computer systems to solve problems, making reasoned judgements about these.

## Weighting for assessment objectives

The approximate weightings allocated to each of the assessment objectives (AOs) are summarised below.

### Assessment objectives as a percentage of each qualification

| Assessment objective | Weighting in AS Level % | Weighting in A Level % |
|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| AO1                  | 30                      | 30                     |
| AO2                  | 40                      | 30                     |
| AO3                  | 30                      | 40                     |
| Total                | 100                     | 100                    |

### Assessment objectives as a percentage of each component

| Assessment objective | Weighting in components % |         |         |         |
|----------------------|---------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                      | Paper 1                   | Paper 2 | Paper 3 | Paper 4 |
| AO1                  | 60                        | 0       | 60      | 0       |
| AO2                  | 40                        | 40      | 40      | 0       |
| AO3                  | 0                         | 60      | 0       | 100     |
| Total                | 100                       | 100     | 100     | 100     |

## 3 Subject content

This syllabus gives you the flexibility to design a course that will interest, challenge and engage your learners. Where appropriate you are responsible for selecting resources and examples to support your learners' study. These should be appropriate for the learners' age, cultural background and learning context as well as complying with your school policies and local legal requirements.

### AS content

Computational thinking is developed using a structured approach that includes the use of programming and problem-solving skills to provide solutions to real life problems. It requires the manipulation and storage of different types of data and the communication of solutions over networks.

Computational thinking is supported by developing an understanding of how computer architecture, hardware, systems software, security measures and communication systems, provide the infrastructure required in an efficient and ethical way. The syllabus supports opportunities for students to apply their skills in practical contexts that are required in the digital industry.

#### 1 Information representation

##### 1.1 Data Representation

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of binary magnitudes and the difference between binary prefixes and decimal prefixes

Show understanding of different number systems

Perform binary addition and subtraction

Describe practical applications where Binary Coded Decimal (BCD) and Hexadecimal are used

Show understanding of and be able to represent character data in its internal binary form, depending on the character set used

Notes and guidance

Understand the difference between and use:

- kibi and kilo
- mebi and mega
- gibi and giga
- tebi and tera

Use the binary, denary, hexadecimal number bases and Binary Coded Decimal (BCD) and one's and two's complement representation for binary numbers

Convert an integer value from one number base/representation to another

Using positive and negative binary integers

Show understanding of how overflow can occur

Students are expected to be familiar with ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange), extended ASCII and Unicode. Students will not be expected to memorise any particular character codes

**1.2 Multimedia****Graphics****Candidates should be able to:**

Show understanding of how data for a bitmapped image are encoded

Perform calculations to estimate the file size for a bitmap image

Show understanding of the effects of changing elements of a bitmap image on the image quality and file size

Show understanding of how data for a vector graphic are encoded

Justify the use of a bitmap image or a vector graphic for a given task

**Notes and guidance**

Use and understand the terms: pixel, file header, image resolution, screen resolution, colour depth / bit depth

Use the terms: image resolution, colour depth / bit depth

Use the terms: drawing object, property, drawing list

**Sound****Candidates should be able to:**

Show understanding of how sound is represented and encoded

Show understanding of the impact of changing the sampling rate and resolution

**Notes and guidance**

Use the terms: sampling, sampling rate, sampling resolution, analogue and digital data

Including the impact on file size and accuracy

**1.3 Compression****Candidates should be able to:**

Show understanding of the need for and examples of the use of compression

Show understanding of lossy and lossless compression and justify the use of a method in a given situation

Show understanding of how a text file, bitmap image, vector graphic and sound file can be compressed

**Notes and guidance**

Including the use of run-length encoding (RLE)

## 2 Communication

### 2.1 Networks including the internet

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of the purpose and benefits of networking devices

Show understanding of the characteristics of a LAN (local area network) and a WAN (wide area network)

Explain the client-server and peer-to-peer models of networked computers

Show understanding of thin-client and thick-client and the differences between them

Show understanding of the bus, star, mesh and hybrid topologies

Show understanding of cloud computing

Show understanding of the differences between and implications of the use of wireless and wired networks

Describe the hardware that is used to support a LAN

Describe the role and function of a router in a network

Show understanding of Ethernet and how collisions are detected and avoided

Show understanding of bit streaming

Show understanding of the differences between the World Wide Web (WWW) and the internet

Describe the hardware that is used to support the internet

Notes and guidance

Roles of the different computers within the network and subnetwork models

Benefits and drawbacks of each model

Justify the use of a model for a given situation

Understand how packets are transmitted between two hosts for a given topology

Justify the use of a topology for a given situation

Including the use of public and private clouds

Benefits and drawbacks of cloud computing

Describe the characteristics of copper cable, fibre-optic cable, radio waves (including WiFi), microwaves, satellites

Including switch, server, Network Interface Card (NIC), Wireless Network Interface Card (WNIC), Wireless Access Points (WAP), cables, bridge, repeater

Including Carrier Sense Multiple Access/Collision Detection (CSMA/CD)

Methods of bit streaming, i.e. real-time and on-demand

Importance of bit rates broadband speed on bit streaming

Including modems, PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network), dedicated lines, cell phone network



## 2.1 Networks including the internet continued

Explain the use of IP addresses in the transmission of data over the internet

Including:

- format of an IP address including IPv4 and IPv6
- use of subnetting in a network
- how an IP address is associated with a device on a network
- difference between a public IP address and a private IP address and the implications for security
- difference between a static IP address and a dynamic IP address

Explain how a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) is used to locate a resource on the World Wide Web (WWW) and the role of the Domain Name Service (DNS)

## 3 Hardware

### 3.1 Computers and their components

Candidates should be able to:

Notes and guidance

Show understanding of the need for input, output, primary memory and secondary (including removable) storage

Show understanding of embedded systems

Including: benefits and drawbacks of embedded systems

Describe the principal operations of hardware devices

Including: Laser printer, 3D printer, microphone, speakers, magnetic hard disk, solid state (flash) memory, optical disc reader/writer, touchscreen, virtual reality headset

Show understanding of the use of buffers

Explain the differences between Random Access Memory (RAM) and Read Only Memory (ROM)

Including their use in a range of devices and systems

Explain the differences between Static RAM (SRAM) and Dynamic RAM (DRAM)

Including the use of SRAM and DRAM in a range of devices and systems and the reasons for using one instead of the other depending on the device and its use

Explain the difference between Programmable ROM (PROM), Erasable Programmable ROM (EPROM) and Electrically Erasable Programmable ROM (EEPROM)

Show an understanding of monitoring and control systems

Including:

- difference between monitoring and control
- use of sensors (including temperature, pressure, infra-red, sound) and actuators
- importance of feedback

### 3.2 Logic Gates and Logic Circuits

Candidates should be able to:

Use the following logic gate symbols:



NOT



AND



OR



NAND



NOR



XOR

Understand and define the functions of :  
NOT, AND, OR, NAND, NOR and XOR (EOR) gates

Construct the truth table for each of the logic gates above

Construct a logic circuit

Construct a truth table

Construct a logic expression

Notes and guidance

All gates except the NOT gate will have two inputs only.

From:

- a problem statement
- a logic expression
- a truth table

From:

- a problem statement
- a logic circuit
- a logic expression

From:

- a problem statement
- a logic circuit
- a truth table

## 4 Processor Fundamentals

### 4.1 Central Processing Unit (CPU) Architecture

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of the basic Von Neumann model for a computer system and the stored program concept

Show understanding of the purpose and role of registers, including the difference between general purpose and special purpose registers

Show understanding of the purpose and roles of the Arithmetic and Logic Unit (ALU), Control Unit (CU) and system clock, Immediate Access Store (IAS)

Show understanding of how data are transferred between various components of the computer system using the address bus, data bus and control bus

Show understanding of how factors contribute to the performance of the computer system

Understand how different ports provide connection to peripheral devices

Describe the stages of the Fetch-Execute (F-E) cycle

Show understanding of the purpose of interrupts

Notes and guidance

Special purpose registers including:

- Program Counter (PC)
- Memory Data Register (MDR)
- Memory Address Register (MAR)
- The Accumulator (ACC)
- Index Register (IX)
- Current Instruction Register (CIR)
- Status Register

Including:

- processor type and number of cores
- the bus width
- clock speed
- cache memory

Including connection to:

- Universal Serial Bus (USB)
- High Definition Multimedia Interface (HDMI)
- Video Graphics Array (VGA)

Describe and use 'register transfer' notation to describe the F-E cycle

Including:

- possible causes of interrupts
- applications of interrupts
- use of an Interrupt Service handling Routine (ISR)
- when interrupts are detected during the fetch-execute cycle
- how interrupts are handled

## 4.2 Assembly Language

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of the relationship between assembly language and machine code

Describe the different stages of the assembly process for a two-pass assembler

Trace a given simple assembly language program

Show understanding that a set of instructions are grouped

Show understanding of and be able to use different modes of addressing

Notes and guidance

Apply the two-pass assembler process to a given simple assembly language program

Including the following groups:

- Data movement
- Input and output of data
- Arithmetic operations
- Unconditional and conditional instructions
- Compare instructions

Including immediate, direct, indirect, indexed, relative

The following table is an example of an instruction set:

| Instruction |            | Explanation   |
|-------------|------------|---|
| Opcode      | Operand    |   |
| LDM         | #n         | Immediate addressing. Load the number n to ACC  |
| LDD         | <address>  | Direct addressing. Load the contents of the location at the given address to ACC  |
| LDI         | <address>  | Indirect addressing. The address to be used is at the given address. Load the contents of this second address to ACC                          |
| LDX         | <address>  | Indexed addressing. Form the address from <address> + the contents of the index register. Copy the contents of this calculated address to ACC |
| LDR         | #n         | Immediate addressing. Load the number n to IX   |
| MOV         | <register> | Move the contents of the accumulator to the given register (IX)   |
| STO         | <address>  | Store the contents of ACC at the given address  |
| ADD         | <address>  | Add the contents of the given address to the ACC  |
| ADD         | #n/Bn/&n   | Add the number n to the ACC   |
| SUB         | <address>  | Subtract the contents of the given address from the ACC   |
| SUB         | #n/Bn/&n   | Subtract the number n from the ACC  |
| INC         | <register> | Add 1 to the contents of the register (ACC or IX)   |
| DEC         | <register> | Subtract 1 from the contents of the register (ACC or IX)  |
| JMP         | <address>  | Jump to the given address   |
| CMP         | <address>  | Compare the contents of ACC with the contents of <address>  |
| CMP         | #n         | Compare the contents of ACC with number n   |
| CMI         | <address>  | Indirect addressing. The address to be used is at the given address. Compare the contents of ACC with the contents of this second address     |
| JPE         | <address>  | Following a compare instruction, jump to <address> if the compare was True  |
| JPN         | <address>  | Following a compare instruction, jump to <address> if the compare was False   |
| IN          |            | Key in a character and store its ASCII value in ACC   |
| OUT         |            | Output to the screen the character whose ASCII value is stored in ACC   |
| END         |            | Return control to the operating system  |

All questions will assume there is only one general purpose register available (Accumulator)

ACC denotes Accumulator

IX denotes Index Register

<address> can be an absolute or symbolic address

# denotes a denary number, e.g. #123

B denotes a binary number, e.g. B01001010

& denotes a hexadecimal number, e.g. &4A

### 4.3 Bit manipulation

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of and perform binary shifts

Show understanding of how bit manipulation can be used to monitor/control a device

Notes and guidance

Logical, arithmetic and cyclic

Left shift, right shift

Carry out bit manipulation operations

Test and set a bit (using bit masking)

| Label    | Instruction |              | Explanation  |
|----------|-------------|--------------|--|
|          | Opcode      | Operand      |  |
|          | AND         | #n / Bn / &n | Bitwise AND operation of the contents of ACC with the operand                                      |
|          | AND         | <address>    | Bitwise AND operation of the contents of ACC with the contents of <address>                        |
|          | XOR         | #n / Bn / &n | Bitwise XOR operation of the contents of ACC with the operand                                      |
|          | XOR         | <address>    | Bitwise XOR operation of the contents of ACC with the contents of <address>                        |
|          | OR          | #n / Bn / &n | Bitwise OR operation of the contents of ACC with the operand                                       |
|          | OR          | <address>    | Bitwise OR operation of the contents of ACC with the contents of <address>                         |
|          | LSL         | #n           | Bits in ACC are shifted logically n places to the left. Zeros are introduced on the right hand end |
|          | LSR         | #n           | Bits in ACC are shifted logically n places to the right. Zeros are introduced on the left hand end |
| <label>: | <opcode>    | <operand>    | Labels an instruction  |
| <label>: |             | <data>       | Gives a symbolic address <label> to the memory location with contents <data>                       |

All questions will assume there is only one general purpose register available (Accumulator)

ACC denotes Accumulator

IX denotes Index Register

<address> can be an absolute or symbolic address

# denotes a denary number, e.g. #123

B denotes a binary number, e.g. B01001010

& denotes a hexadecimal number, e.g. &4A

## 5 System Software

### 5.1 Operating Systems

Candidates should be able to:

Explain why a computer system requires an Operating System (OS)

Explain the key management tasks carried out by the Operating System

Show understanding of the need for typical utility software provided with an Operating System

Show understanding of program libraries

Notes and guidance

Including memory management, file management, security management, hardware management (input/output/peripherals), process management

Including disk formatter, virus checker, defragmentation software, disk contents analysis/disk repair software, file compression, back-up software

Including:

- software under development is often constructed using existing code from program libraries
- the benefits to the developer of software constructed using library files, including Dynamic Link Library (DLL) files

### 5.2 Language Translators

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of the need for:

- assembler software for the translation of an assembly language program
- a compiler for the translation of a high-level language program
- an interpreter for translation and execution of a high-level language program

Explain the benefits and drawbacks of using either a compiler or interpreter and justify the use of each

Show awareness that high-level language programs may be partially compiled and partially interpreted, such as Java (console mode)

Describe features found in a typical Integrated Development Environment (IDE)

Notes and guidance

Including:

- for coding, including context-sensitive prompts
- for initial error detection, including dynamic syntax checks
- for presentation, including prettyprint, expand and collapse code blocks
- for debugging, including single stepping, breakpoints, i.e. variables, expressions, report window

## 6 Security, privacy and data integrity

### 6.1 Data Security

Candidates should be able to:

Explain the difference between the terms security, privacy and integrity of data

Show appreciation of the need for both the security of data and the security of the computer system

Describe security measures designed to protect computer systems, ranging from the stand-alone PC to a network of computers

Show understanding of the threats to computer and data security posed by networks and the internet

Describe methods that can be used to restrict the risks posed by threats

Describe security methods designed to protect the security of data

Notes and guidance

Including user accounts, passwords, authentication techniques such as digital signatures and biometrics, firewall, anti-virus software, anti-spyware, encryption

Including malware (virus, spyware), hackers, phishing, pharming

Including encryption, access rights

### 6.2 Data Integrity

Candidates should be able to:

Describe how data validation and data verification help protect the integrity of data

Describe and use methods of data validation

Describe and use methods of data verification during data entry and data transfer

Notes and guidance

Including range check, format check, length check, presence check, existence check, limit check, check digit

During data entry including visual check, double entry

During data transfer including parity check (byte and block), checksum



## 7 Ethics and Ownership

### 7.1 Ethics and Ownership

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of the need for and purpose of ethics as a computing professional

Show understanding of the need to act ethically and the impact of acting ethically or unethically for a given situation

Show understanding of the need for copyright legislation

Show understanding of the different types of software licencing and justify the use of a licence for a given situation

Show understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Notes and guidance

Understand the importance of joining a professional ethical body including BCS (British Computer Society), IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers)

Licences to include free Software Foundation, the Open Source Initiative, shareware and commercial software

Understand the impact of AI including social, economic and environmental issues

Understand the applications of AI

## 8 Databases

### 8.1 Database Concepts

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of the limitations of using a file-based approach for the storage and retrieval of data

Describe the features of a relational database that address the limitations of a file-based approach

Show understanding of and use the terminology associated with a relational database model

Use an entity-relationship (E-R) diagram to document a database design

Show understanding of the normalisation process

Explain why a given set of database tables are, or are not, in 3NF

Produce a normalised database design for a description of a database, a given set of data, or a given set of tables

Notes and guidance

Including entity, table, record, field, tuple, attribute, primary key, candidate key, secondary key, foreign key, relationship (one-to-many, one-to-one, many-to-many), referential integrity, indexing

First Normal Form (1NF),  
Second Normal Form (2NF) and  
Third Normal Form (3NF)

## 8.2 Database Management Systems (DBMS)

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of the features provided by a Database Management System (DBMS) that address the issues of a file based approach

Show understanding of how software tools found within a DBMS are used in practice

Notes and guidance

Including:

- data management, including maintaining a data dictionary
- data modelling
- logical schema
- data integrity
- data security, including backup procedures and the use of access rights to individuals / groups of users

Including the use and purpose of:

- developer interface
- query processor

## 8.3 Data Definition Language (DDL) and Data Manipulation Language (DML)

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding that the DBMS carries out all creation/modification of the database structure using its Data Definition Language (DDL)

Show understanding that the DBMS carries out all queries and maintenance of data using its DML

Show understanding that the industry standard for both DDL and DML is Structured Query Language (SQL)

Understand given SQL (DDL) statements and be able to write simple SQL (DDL) statements using a sub-set of statements

Notes and guidance

Understand a given SQL statement

Create a database (CREATE DATABASE)

Create a table definition (CREATE TABLE), including the creation of attributes with appropriate data types:

- CHARACTER
- VARCHAR(n)
- BOOLEAN
- INTEGER
- REAL
- DATE
- TIME

change a table definition (ALTER TABLE)

add a primary key to a table (PRIMARY KEY (field))

add a foreign key to a table (FOREIGN KEY (field) REFERENCES Table (Field))

### 8.3 Data Definition Language (DDL) and Data Manipulation Language (DML) continued

Write an SQL script to query or modify data (DML) which are stored in (at most two) database tables

Queries including SELECT... FROM, WHERE, ORDER BY, GROUP BY, INNER JOIN, SUM, COUNT, AVG

Data maintenance including. INSERT INTO, DELETE FROM, UPDATE

## 9 Algorithm Design and Problem-solving

Refer to Pseudocode Guide [www.cambridgeinternational.org/support](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support)

### 9.1 Computational Thinking Skills

Candidates should be able to:

Show an understanding of abstraction

Notes and guidance

Need for and benefits of using abstraction

Describe the purpose of abstraction

Produce an abstract model of a system by only including essential details

Describe and use decomposition

Break down problems into sub-problems leading to the concept of a program module (procedure / function)

### 9.2 Algorithms

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding that an algorithm is a solution to a problem expressed as a sequence of defined steps

Notes and guidance

Use suitable identifier names for the representation of data used by a problem and represent these using an identifier table

Write pseudocode that contains input, process and output

Write pseudocode using the three basic constructs of sequence, selection and iteration (repetition)

Document a simple algorithm using a structured English description, a flowchart or pseudocode

Write pseudocode from:

- a structured English description
- a flowchart

Draw a flowchart from:

- a structured English description
- pseudocode

## 9.2 Algorithms continued

Describe and use the process of stepwise refinement to express an algorithm to a level of detail from which the task may be programmed

Use logic statements to define parts of an algorithm solution

## 10 Data Types and Structures

### 10.1 Data Types and Records

Candidates should be able to:

Select and use appropriate data types for a problem solution

Show understanding of the purpose of a record structure to hold a set of data of different data types under one identifier

Notes and guidance

including integer, real, char, string, Boolean, date (pseudocode will use the following data types: INTEGER, REAL, CHAR, STRING, BOOLEAN, DATE, ARRAY, FILE)

Write pseudocode to define a record structure

Write pseudocode to read data from a record structure and save data to a record structure

### 10.2 Arrays

Candidates should be able to:

Use the technical terms associated with arrays

Select a suitable data structure (1D or 2D array) to use for a given task

Write pseudocode for 1D and 2D arrays

Write pseudocode to process array data

Notes and guidance

Including index, upper and lower bound

Sort using a bubble sort

Search using a linear search

### 10.3 Files

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of why files are needed

Write pseudocode to handle text files that consist of one or more lines

Notes and guidance

## 10.4 Introduction to Abstract Data Types (ADT)

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding that an ADT is a collection of data and a set of operations on those data

Show understanding that a stack, queue and linked list are examples of ADTs

Use a stack, queue and linked list to store data

Describe how a queue, stack and linked list can be implemented using arrays

Notes and guidance

Describe the key features of a stack, queue and linked list and justify their use for a given situation

Candidates will not be required to write pseudocode for these structures, but they should be able to add, edit and delete data from these structures

## 11 Programming

### 11.1 Programming Basics

Candidates should be able to:

Implement and write pseudocode from a given design presented as either a program flowchart or structured English

Write pseudocode statements for:

- the declaration and initialisation of constants
- the declaration of variables
- the assignment of values to variables
- expressions involving any of the arithmetic or logical operators input from the keyboard and output to the console

Use built-in functions and library routines

Notes and guidance

Any functions not given in the pseudocode guide will be provided

String manipulation functions will always be given

### 11.2 Constructs

Candidates should be able to:

Use pseudocode to write:

- an 'IF' statement including the 'ELSE' clause and nested IF statements
- a 'CASE' structure
- a 'count-controlled' loop:
- a 'post-condition' loop
- a 'pre-condition' loop

Justify why one loop structure may be better suited to solve a problem than the others

Notes and guidance

### 11.3 Structured Programming

Candidates should be able to:

Define and use a procedure

Explain where in the construction of an algorithm it would be appropriate to use a procedure

Use parameters

Define and use a function

Explain where in the construction of an algorithm it is appropriate to use a function

Use the terminology associated with procedures and functions

Write efficient pseudocode

Notes and guidance

A procedure may have none, one or more parameters

A parameter can be passed by reference or by value

A function is used in an expression, e.g. the return value replaces the call

including procedure/function header, procedure/function interface, parameter, argument, return value

## 12 Software Development

### 12.1 Program Development Life cycle

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of the purpose of a development life cycle

Show understanding of the need for different development life cycles depending on the program being developed

Describe the principles, benefits and drawbacks of each type of life cycle

Show understanding of the analysis, design, coding, testing and maintenance stages in the program development life cycle

Notes and guidance

Including: waterfall, iterative, rapid application development (RAD)

### 12.2 Program Design

Candidates should be able to:

Use a structure chart to decompose a problem into sub-tasks and express the parameters passed between the various modules/procedures/functions which are part of the algorithm design

Show understanding of the purpose of state-transition diagrams to document an algorithm

Notes and guidance

Describe the purpose of a structure chart

Construct a structure chart for a given problem

Derive equivalent pseudocode from a structure chart

### 12.3 Program Testing and Maintenance

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of ways of exposing and avoiding faults in programs

Locate and identify the different types of errors

Correct identified errors

Show understanding of the methods of testing available and select appropriate data for a given method

Show understanding of the need for a test strategy and test plan and their likely contents

Choose appropriate test data for a test plan

Show understanding of the need for continuing maintenance of a system and the differences between each type of maintenance

Analyse an existing program and make amendments to enhance functionality

Notes and guidance

- syntax errors
- logic errors
- run-time errors

Including dry run, walkthrough, white-box, black-box, integration, alpha, beta, acceptance, stub

Including normal, abnormal and extreme/boundary

Including perfective, adaptive, corrective

## A Level content

Computational thinking is further developed at A Level to extend methods for searching, sorting, structuring and storage of data. This includes understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Programming paradigms are considered together with an extension of programming skills to include recursion and exception handling.

Computational thinking is supported by developing an in-depth understanding of how computer architecture, hardware, systems software, security measures and communication systems can have different structures and protocols. These can be combined to provide an appropriate infrastructure for solutions of problems. The syllabus encourages opportunities for students to apply their skills in a practical context that are required in the digital industry.

### 13 Data Representation

#### 13.1 User-defined data types

| Candidates should be able to:   | Notes and guidance                     |
|---|--|
| Show understanding of why user-defined types are necessary                  |  |
| Define and use non-composite types  | Including enumerated, pointer          |
| Define and use composite data types   | Including set, record and class/object |
| Choose and design an appropriate user-defined data type for a given problem |  |

#### 13.2 File organisation and access

| Candidates should be able to:  | Notes and guidance  |
|--|---|
| Show understanding of the methods of file organisation and select an appropriate method of file organisation and file access for a given problem | Including serial, sequential (using a key field), random (using a record key)                                   |
| Show understanding of methods of file access   | Including<br>Sequential access for serial and sequential files<br>Direct access for sequential and random files |
| Show understanding of hashing algorithms   | Describe and use different hashing algorithms to read from and write data to a random/sequential file           |



### 13.3 Floating-point numbers, representation and manipulation

Candidates should be able to:

Describe the format of binary floating-point real numbers

Convert binary floating-point real numbers into denary and vice versa

Normalise floating-point numbers

Show understanding of the consequences of a binary representation only being an approximation to the real number it represents (in certain cases)

Show understanding that binary representations can give rise to rounding errors

Notes and guidance

Use two's complement form

Understand of the effects of changing the allocation of bits to mantissa and exponent in a floating-point representation

Understand the reasons for normalisation

Understand how underflow and overflow can occur

## 14 Communication and internet technologies

### 14.1 Protocols

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of why a protocol is essential for communication between computers

Show understanding of how protocol implementation can be viewed as a stack, where each layer has its own functionality

Show understanding of the TCP/IP protocol suite

Show understanding of protocols (HTTP, FTP, POP3, IMAP, SMTP, BitTorrent) and their purposes

Notes and guidance

Four Layers (Application, Transport, Internet, Link)  
Purpose and function of each layer

Application when a message is sent from one host to another on the internet

BitTorrent protocol provides peer-to-peer file sharing

### 14.2 Circuit switching, packet switching

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of circuit switching

Show understanding of packet switching

Notes and guidance

Benefits, drawbacks and where it is applicable

Benefits, drawbacks and where it is applicable  
Show understanding of the function of a router in packet switching

Explain how packet switching is used to pass messages across a network, including the internet

## 15 Hardware and Virtual Machines

### 15.1 Processors, Parallel Processing and Virtual Machines

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of Reduced Instruction Set Computers (RISC) and Complex Instruction Set Computers (CISC) processors

Show understanding of the importance/use of pipelining and registers in RISC processors

Show understanding of the four basic computer architectures

Show understanding of the characteristics of massively parallel computers

Show understanding of the concept of a virtual machine

Notes and guidance

Differences between RISC and CISC

Understand interrupt handling on CISC and RISC processors

SISD, SIMD, MISD, MIMD

Give examples of the role of virtual machines

Understand the benefits and limitations of virtual machines

### 15.2 Boolean Algebra and Logic Circuits

Candidates should be able to:

Produce truth tables for logic circuits including half adders and full adders

Show understanding of a flip-flop (SR, JK)

Show understanding of Boolean algebra

Show understanding of Karnaugh maps (K-map)

Notes and guidance

May include logic gates with more than two inputs

Draw a logic circuit and derive a truth table for a flip-flop

Understand of the role of flip-flops as data storage elements

Understand De Morgan's laws

Perform Boolean algebra using De Morgan's laws

Simplify a logic circuit/expression using Boolean algebra

Understand of the benefits of using Karnaugh maps

Solve logic problems using Karnaugh maps

## 16 System Software

### 16.1 Purposes of an Operating System (OS)

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of how an OS can maximise the use of resources

Describe the ways in which the user interface hides the complexities of the hardware from the user

Show understanding of process management

Show understanding of virtual memory, paging and segmentation for memory management

Notes and guidance

The concept of multi-tasking and a process

The process states: running, ready and blocked

The need for scheduling and the function and benefits of different scheduling routines (including round robin, shortest job first, first come first served, shortest remaining time)

How the kernel of the OS acts as an interrupt handler and how interrupt handling is used to manage low-level scheduling

The concepts of paging, virtual memory and segmentation

The difference between paging and segmentation

How pages can be replaced

How disk thrashing can occur

### 16.2 Translation Software

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of how an interpreter can execute programs without producing a translated version

Show understanding of the various stages in the compilation of a program

Show understanding of how the grammar of a language can be expressed using syntax diagrams or Backus-Naur Form (BNF) notation

Show understanding of how Reverse Polish Notation (RPN) can be used to carry out the evaluation of expressions

Notes and guidance

Including lexical analysis, syntax analysis, code generation and optimisation

## 17 Security

### 17.1 Encryption, Encryption Protocols and Digital Certificates

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of how encryption works

**Notes and guidance**

Including the use of public key, private key, plain text, cipher text, encryption, symmetric key cryptography and asymmetric key cryptography

How the keys can be used to send a private message from the public to an individual/organisation

How the keys can be used to send a verified message to the public

How data is encrypted and decrypted, using symmetric and asymmetric cryptography

Purpose, benefits and drawbacks of quantum cryptography

Show awareness of the Secure Socket Layer (SSL)/Transport Layer Security (TLS)

Purpose of SSL/TLS

Use of SSL/TLS in client-server communication

Situations where the use of SSL/TLS would be appropriate

Show understanding of digital certification

How a digital certificate is acquired

How a digital certificate is used to produce digital signatures

## 18 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

### 18.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of how graphs can be used to aid Artificial Intelligence (AI)

**Notes and guidance**

Purpose and structure of a graph

Use A\* and Dijkstra's algorithms to perform searches on a graph

Candidates will not be required to write algorithms to set up, access, or perform searches on graphs

Show understanding of how artificial neural networks have helped with machine learning

Show understanding of Deep Learning, Machine Learning and Reinforcement Learning and the reasons for using these methods.

Understand machine learning categories, including supervised learning, unsupervised learning

Show understanding of back propagation of errors and regression methods in machine learning

## 19 Computational thinking and Problem-solving

### 19.1 Algorithms

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of linear and binary searching methods

Show understanding of insertion sort and bubble sort methods

Show understanding of and use Abstract Data Types (ADT)

Show how it is possible for ADTs to be implemented from another ADT

Show understanding that different algorithms which perform the same task can be compared by using criteria (e.g. time taken to complete the task and memory used)

**Notes and guidance**

Write an algorithm to implement a linear search

Write an algorithm to implement a binary search

The conditions necessary for the use of a binary search

How the performance of a binary search varies according to the number of data items

Write an algorithm to implement an insertion sort

Write an algorithm to implement a bubble sort

Performance of a sorting routine may depend on the initial order of the data and the number of data items

Write algorithms to find an item in each of the following: linked list, binary tree

Write algorithms to insert an item into each of the following: stack, queue, linked list, binary tree

Write algorithms to delete an item from each of the following: stack, queue, linked list

Show understanding that a graph is an example of an ADT. Describe the key features of a graph and justify its use for a given situation. Candidates will not be required to write code for a graph structure

Describe the following ADTs and demonstrate how they can be implemented from appropriate built-in types or other ADTs: stack, queue, linked list, dictionary, binary tree

Including use of Big O notation to specify time and space complexity

### 19.2 Recursion

Candidates should be able to:

Show understanding of recursion

Show awareness of what a compiler has to do to translate recursive programming code

**Notes and guidance**

Essential features of recursion

How recursion is expressed in a programming language

Write and trace recursive algorithms

When the use of recursion is beneficial

Use of stacks and unwinding

## 20 Further Programming

### 20.1 Programming Paradigms

Candidates should be able to:

Understanding what is meant by a programming paradigm

Show understanding of the characteristics of a number of programming paradigms:

- Low-level
  
- Imperative (Procedural)
  
- Object Oriented
  
- Declarative

Notes and guidance

Low-level Programming:

- understanding of and ability to write low-level code that uses various addressing modes: immediate, direct, indirect, indexed and relative

Imperative (Procedural) programming:

- Assumed knowledge and understanding of Structural Programming (see details in AS content section 11.3)
- understanding of and ability to write imperative (procedural) programming code that uses variables, constructs, procedures and functions. See details in AS content

Object-Oriented Programming (OOP):

- understanding of the terminology associated with OOP (including objects, properties/ attributes, methods, classes, inheritance, polymorphism, containment (aggregation), encapsulation, getters, setters, instances)
- understanding of how to solve a problem by designing appropriate classes
- understanding of and ability to write code that demonstrates the use of OOP

Declarative programming:

- understanding of and ability to solve a problem by writing appropriate facts and rules based on supplied information
- understanding of and ability to write code that can satisfy a goal using facts and rules

### 20.2 File Processing and Exception Handling

Candidates should be able to:

Write code to perform file-processing operations

Show understanding of an exception and the importance of exception handling

Notes and guidance

Open (in read, write, append mode) and close a file  
 Read a record from a file and write a record to a file  
 Perform file-processing operations on serial, sequential, random files

Know when it is appropriate to use exception handling

Write program code to use exception handling

## Teacher guidance

### Equipment and facilities

Computer science is a practical subject and the Cambridge AS and A Level syllabus places emphasis on the use of procedural high-level programming languages. Centres must ensure that their equipment and facilities are adequate for candidates to be able to satisfy the requirements of the syllabus. The hardware facilities needed will depend on the number of candidates, but should be sufficient for all candidates to have enough time to practise their programming skills.

### Hardware

Candidates need to have access to a system with direct-access file capability on backing store and hardcopy facilities.

### Software

Candidates should have experience of using a high-level programming language, chosen by the centre, from the following list:

- Java (console mode)
- Visual Basic (console mode)
- Python (console mode).

### Books

The British Computer Society (BCS) book list for schools and colleges are suitable for use as reference. Teachers will need to consult several books to cover the whole syllabus adequately. There is a suggested book list on our website.

### Practical skills

Computing is a practical subject and a range of practical exercises should supplement the study of most parts of the syllabus.

It is important that centres encourage candidates, as early as possible in the course, to develop a systematic approach to practical problem-solving using appropriate resources.

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## 4 Details of the assessment

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The **AS Level** will be assessed through two external written papers. Both papers are compulsory.

- Paper 1 – Theory Fundamentals
- Paper 2 – Fundamental Problem-solving and Programming Skills

Paper 1 Theory Fundamentals will assess content described in this syllabus, sections 1 to 8. Candidates will answer a number of questions, requiring some short and some longer answers. The questions will test knowledge and understanding of the principles behind computer science as well as the application of these to solve problems.

Paper 2 Fundamental Problem-solving and Programming Skills will assess content described in this syllabus, sections 9 to 12. Candidates will answer a number of questions, requiring some short and some longer answers. The questions will test programming knowledge and skills. Candidates will not be required to write programming code. Candidates will be provided with an Insert to use in the exam with pseudocode built-in functions and operators. For more information on the pseudocode please see [www.cambridgeinternational.org/support](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support)

The **A Level** will be examined through four papers, papers 1 and 2 at AS Level plus:

- Paper 3 – Advanced Theory (written paper)
- Paper 4 – Practical

Paper 3 is a written paper and paper 4 is a practical programming paper carried out on a computer. Both papers are compulsory.

Paper 3 Advanced Theory will assess content described in this syllabus, sections 13 to 20. Candidates will answer a number of questions, requiring some short and some longer answers.

Paper 4 Practical will assess practical application of content described in the syllabus, sections 19 to 20, except for low-level and declarative programming. The programming tasks will be based around a small number of scenarios, candidates will be assessed on their ability to write programs or program elements to solve tasks. Centres must ensure that all candidates have access to computers that belong to the centre and these must **not** have internet access or access to email.

The source files given will not contain binary files.

Please see section 2: Assessment overview.

### Submission of Paper 4 Practical

The evidence document supplied by Cambridge International should be saved with the centre number, candidate's name and candidate's number. At each stage in the assessment of Paper 4, candidates will be asked to copy program listings or take screenshots of results to paste into the evidence document. Candidates must save their work at regular intervals and centres are recommended to enable the auto save function. If there is no evidence of work in the evidence document, the work will not receive any marks.

Details of how to administer Paper 4 Practical can be found in the *Cambridge Handbook* which is available on our website: [www.cambridgeinternational.org/examsofficers](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/examsofficers)



## Command words

Command words and their meanings help candidates know what is expected from them in the exams. The table below includes command words used in the assessment for this syllabus. The use of the command word will relate to the subject context.

| Command word       | What it means   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Analyse</b>     | examine in detail to show meaning, identify elements and the relationship between them  |
| <b>Assess</b>      | make an informed judgement  |
| <b>Calculate</b>   | work out from given facts, figures or information   |
| <b>Comment</b>     | give an informed opinion  |
| <b>Compare</b>     | identify/comment on similarities and/or differences   |
| <b>Complete</b>    | add information to an incomplete diagram or table   |
| <b>Consider</b>    | review and respond to given information   |
| <b>Contrast</b>    | identify/comment on differences   |
| <b>Define</b>      | give precise meaning  |
| <b>Demonstrate</b> | show how or give an example   |
| <b>Describe</b>    | state the points of a topic / give characteristics and main features  |
| <b>Develop</b>     | take forward to a more advanced stage or build upon given information   |
| <b>Discuss</b>     | write about issue(s) or topic(s) in depth in a structured way   |
| <b>Draw</b>        | draw a line to match a term with a description  |
| <b>Evaluate</b>    | judge or calculate the quality, importance, amount, or value of something   |
| <b>Examine</b>     | investigate closely, in detail  |
| <b>Explain</b>     | set out purposes or reasons / make the relationships between things clear / say why and/or how and support with relevant evidence |
| <b>Give</b>        | produce an answer from a given source or recall/memory  |
| <b>Identify</b>    | name/select/recognise   |
| <b>Justify</b>     | support a case with evidence/argument   |
| <b>Outline</b>     | set out the main points   |
| <b>Predict</b>     | suggest what may happen based on available information  |
| <b>Sketch</b>      | make a simple freehand drawing showing the key features, taking care over proportions   |

| <b>Command Word</b> | <b>What it means</b>   |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>State</b>        | express in clear terms   |
| <b>Suggest</b>      | apply knowledge and understanding to situations where there are a range of valid responses in order to make proposals / put forward considerations |
| <b>Summarise</b>    | select and present the main points, without detail   |
| <b>Write</b>        | write an answer in a specific way  |

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## 5 What else you need to know

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This section is an overview of other information you need to know about this syllabus. It will help to share the administrative information with your exams officer so they know when you will need their support. Find more information about our administrative processes at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)

### Before you start

#### Previous study

We recommend that learners starting this course should have completed a course in Computer Science equivalent to Cambridge IGCSE™ or Cambridge O Level.

#### Guided learning hours

We design Cambridge International AS & A Level syllabuses to require about 180 guided learning hours for each Cambridge International AS Level and about 360 guided learning hours for a Cambridge International A Level. The number of hours a learner needs to achieve the qualification may vary according to each school and the learners' previous experience of the subject.

#### Availability and timetables

All Cambridge schools are allocated to an administrative zone. Each zone has a specific timetable. Find your administrative zone at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/adminzone](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/adminzone)

You can view the timetable for your administrative zone at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables)

You can enter candidates in the June and November exam series.

Check you are using the syllabus for the year the candidate is taking the exam.

Private candidates can enter for this syllabus provided that the accommodating centre can make appropriate arrangements to conduct the practical paper. For more information, see the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*.

#### Combining with other syllabuses

Candidates can take this syllabus alongside other Cambridge International syllabuses in a single exam series. The only exceptions are:

- Cambridge International AS & A Level Information and Communication Technology 9626
- syllabuses with the same title at the same level.

#### Group awards: Cambridge AICE

Cambridge AICE (Advanced International Certificate of Education) is a group award for Cambridge International AS & A Level. It encourages schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum by recognising the achievements of learners who pass exams in a range of different subjects.

Learn more about Cambridge AICE at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/aice](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/aice)

## Making entries

Exams officers are responsible for submitting entries to Cambridge International. We encourage them to work closely with you to make sure they enter the right number of candidates for the right combination of syllabus components. Entry option codes and instructions for submitting entries are in the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*. Your exams officer has access to this guide.

### Exam administration

To keep our exams secure, we produce question papers for different areas of the world, known as administrative zones. We allocate all Cambridge schools to one administrative zone determined by their location. Each zone has a specific timetable.

Some of our syllabuses offer candidates different assessment options. An entry option code is used to identify the components the candidate will take relevant to the administrative zone and the available assessment options.

### Support for exams officers

We know how important exams officers are to the successful running of exams. We provide them with the support they need to make entries on time. Your exams officer will find this support, and guidance for all other phases of the Cambridge Exams Cycle, at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)

### Retakes and carrying forward marks

Candidates can retake Cambridge International AS Level and Cambridge International A Level as many times as they want to. Information on retake entries is at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/retakes](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/retakes)

Candidates can carry forward the result of their Cambridge International AS Level assessment from one series to complete the Cambridge International A Level in a following series. The rules, time limits and regulations for carry-forward entries for staged assessment and carrying forward component marks can be found in the *Cambridge Handbook* for the relevant year of assessment at [www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)

To confirm what entry options are available for this syllabus, refer to the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries* for the relevant series.

### Language

This syllabus and the related assessment materials are available in English only.

## Accessibility and equality

### Syllabus and assessment design

At Cambridge International, we work to avoid direct or indirect discrimination in our syllabuses and assessment materials. We aim to maximise inclusivity for candidates of all national, cultural or social backgrounds and candidates with protected characteristics, which include special educational needs and disability, religion and belief, and characteristics related to gender and identity. We also aim to make our materials as accessible as possible by using accessible language and applying accessible design principles. This gives all candidates the fairest possible opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding and helps to minimise the requirement to make reasonable adjustments during the assessment process.

## Access arrangements

Access arrangements (including modified papers) are the principal way in which Cambridge International complies with our duty, as guided by the UK Equality Act (2010), to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for candidates with special educational needs (SEN), disability, illness or injury. Where a candidate would otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to a candidate with no SEN, disability, illness or injury, we may be able to agree pre-examination access arrangements. These arrangements help a candidate by minimising accessibility barriers and maximising their opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding in an assessment.

### Important:

Requested access arrangements should be based on evidence of the candidate’s barrier to assessment and should also reflect their normal way of working at school. This is explained in the *Cambridge Handbook* [www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)

- For Cambridge International to approve an access arrangement, we will need to agree that it constitutes a reasonable adjustment, involves reasonable cost and timeframe and does not affect the security and integrity of the assessment.
- Availability of access arrangements should be checked by centres at the start of the course. Details of our standard access arrangements and modified question papers are available in the *Cambridge Handbook* [www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide)
- Please contact us at the start of the course to find out if we are able to approve an arrangement that is not included in the list of standard access arrangements.
- Candidates who cannot access parts of the assessment may be able to receive an award based on the parts they have completed.

## After the exam

### Grading and reporting

Grades a, b, c, d or e indicate the standard a candidate achieved at Cambridge International AS Level. ‘a’ is the highest and ‘e’ is the lowest grade.

Grades A\*, A, B, C, D or E indicate the standard a candidate achieved at Cambridge International A Level. A\* is the highest and E is the lowest grade.

‘Ungraded’ means that the candidate’s performance did not meet the standard required for the lowest grade (E or e). ‘Ungraded’ is reported on the statement of results but not on the certificate. In specific circumstances your candidates may see one of the following letters on their statement of results:

- Q (PENDING)
- X (NO RESULT).

These letters do not appear on the certificate.

If a candidate takes a Cambridge International A Level and fails to achieve grade E or higher, a Cambridge International AS Level grade will be awarded if both of the following apply:

- the components taken for the Cambridge International A Level by the candidate in that series included all the components making up a Cambridge International AS Level
- the candidate’s performance on the AS Level components was sufficient to merit the award of a Cambridge International AS Level grade.

On the statement of results and certificates, Cambridge International AS & A Levels are shown as General Certificates of Education, GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level (GCE AS Level) and GCE Advanced Level (GCE A Level).

**School feedback:** ‘Cambridge International A Levels are the ‘gold standard’ qualification. They are based on rigorous, academic syllabuses that are accessible to students from a wide range of abilities yet have the capacity to stretch our most able.’

**Feedback from:** Director of Studies, Auckland Grammar School, New Zealand

## How students, teachers and higher education can use the grades

### Cambridge International A Level

Assessment at Cambridge International A Level has two purposes:

- 1 to measure learning and achievement

The assessment confirms achievement and performance in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the syllabus.

- 2 to show likely future success

The outcomes help predict which students are well prepared for a particular course or career and/or which students are more likely to be successful.

The outcomes help students choose the most suitable course or career

### Cambridge International AS Level

Assessment at Cambridge International AS Level has two purposes:

- 1 to measure learning and achievement

The assessment confirms achievement and performance in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the syllabus.

- 2 to show likely future success

The outcomes help predict which students are well prepared for a particular course or career and/or which students are more likely to be successful.

The outcomes help students choose the most suitable course or career

The outcomes help decide whether students part way through a Cambridge International A Level course are making enough progress to continue

The outcomes guide teaching and learning in the next stages of the Cambridge International A Level course.

## Changes to this syllabus for 2026

The syllabus has been updated. This is version 1, published September 2023.

**You must read the whole syllabus before planning your teaching programme.** We review our syllabuses regularly to make sure they continue to meet the needs of our schools. In updating this syllabus, we have made it easier for teachers and students to understand, keeping the familiar features that teachers and schools value.

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**Changes to assessment  
(including changes to  
specimen papers)**

- For Paper 4, source files given will not contain binary files.
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Significant changes to the syllabus are indicated by black vertical lines either side of the text.

Any textbooks endorsed to support the syllabus for examination from 2021 are still suitable for use with this syllabus.





**School feedback:** ‘While studying Cambridge IGCSE and Cambridge International A Levels, students broaden their horizons through a global perspective and develop a lasting passion for learning.’

**Feedback from:** Zhai Xiaoning, Deputy Principal, The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China

We are committed to making our documents accessible in accordance with the WCAG 2.1 Standard. We are always looking to improve the accessibility of our documents. If you find any problems or you think we are not meeting accessibility requirements, contact us at **info@cambridgeinternational.org** with the subject heading: Digital accessibility. If you need this document in a different format, contact us and supply your name, email address and requirements and we will respond within 15 working days.

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