

CELPIP Test-Day Playbook

Formats, timing, scoring-oriented strategies, traps, and worked examples

Primary objective: Protect a 9+ in every component first; then push higher. Optimize for task completion, development, timing discipline, and avoiding avoidable interface mistakes.

At-a-glance format

Section	What you do	Typical time
Listening	6 scored parts; audio plays once; answer after listening	46-55 min
Reading	4 parts; passage/diagram + questions	43-56 min
Writing	Email + survey/opinion response	53 min total
Speaking	8 recorded tasks	~15 min

Universal production engine POSITION -> REASON -> SPECIFIC DETAIL -> CONSEQUENCE. For advice: SUGGESTION -> WHY -> EXAMPLE. For stories: SETTING -> EVENT -> COMPLICATION -> RESULT -> FEELING.

Test-day operating rules

- Never leave a multiple-choice item blank: there is no penalty for guessing.
- Do not chase the smartest answer in Speaking/Writing. Choose the answer that is easiest to develop clearly.
- Track changes of mind in Listening; the final decision often differs from the first idea mentioned.
- In Reading, “true” is not enough: the choice must answer the exact question and be supported by the text.
- In Writing, visibly satisfy every requested bullet. A polished answer that omits one requirement is structurally weak.
- In Speaking, prep with keywords only. Do not try to script full sentences during preparation time.

Speaking

Scoring lens Content/Coherence + Vocabulary + Listenability + Task Fulfillment. Your safest route to 9+ is a clear structure, developed reasons/details, fluent delivery, and appropriate tone.

Task	Prep	Speak	Core move
1. Giving Advice	30 sec	90 sec	3 suggestions + reason/detail for each
2. Personal Experience	30 sec	60 sec	Tell a compact story with a turning point
3. Describe a Scene	30 sec	60 sec	Overview + spatially organized details
4. Make Predictions	30 sec	60 sec	Evidence -> prediction -> consequence
5. Compare & Persuade	60 + 60 sec	60 sec	Choose easiest case; contrast and persuade
6. Difficult Situation	60 sec	60 sec	Empathy + firm decision + reasons + alternative
7. Express an Opinion	30 sec	90 sec	Position + 3 developed reasons
8. Unusual Situation	30 sec	60 sec	Describe unknown object using ordinary language

30-second prep algorithm

Time	Action
0-5 sec	Decide your answer/position immediately.
5-15 sec	Generate 3 main ideas.
15-25 sec	Attach one concrete detail/example to each.
25-30 sec	Choose an opening and closing.

If you blank: Use a bridge such as “Another reason I feel this way is that...” and keep moving. One small grammar correction is fine; repeated restarting damages fluency.

Task 1 - Giving Advice

30 sec prep / 90 sec speaking

Structure: Friend -> advice 1 + why -> advice 2 + why -> advice 3 + why -> encouraging close

Useful language:

- If I were you, I would...
- The first thing I would suggest is...
- Another thing you could do is...
- Most importantly...
- That way...

Prompt: Your friend is starting a new job. Give advice about making a good impression.

Prep notes: early -> 10 min | notes -> notebook | coworkers -> lunch | close

Hey Sam, congratulations on the new job. If I were you, the first thing I would do is arrive about ten minutes early, especially during your first week. That gives you time to settle in and shows your manager that you are reliable. Another thing I would recommend is taking notes whenever someone explains a process. There will be a lot of information at first, and nobody expects you to remember everything immediately. Finally, make an effort to get to know your coworkers. Even something as simple as joining them for lunch can make it much easier to ask for help later. If you do those three things, I think you will make a very positive first impression.

Trap: Common trap: giving six shallow suggestions. Three developed suggestions beat a long list.

Task 2 - Personal Experience

30 sec prep / 60 sec speaking

Structure: SETTING -> EVENT -> COMPLICATION/TURNING POINT -> RESULT -> FEELING

Useful language:

- A couple of years ago...
- What happened next was...
- At that point...
- In the end...
- I remember feeling...

Prompt: Talk about a time when a stranger helped you.

Prep notes: airport | late flight | missed connection | employee helped | relieved

A couple of years ago, I was flying to Toronto for an important meeting. My first flight was delayed, so when I landed I had only about twenty minutes to make my connection. I was completely lost and starting to panic. I asked an airport employee for directions, and instead of simply pointing me toward the gate, she walked me through a shortcut and contacted the gate staff to tell them I was coming. I reached the plane just before boarding closed. I remember feeling incredibly relieved and grateful because she had no obligation to go that far for me.

Trap: Common trap: trying too hard to make the story true. You can invent a plausible experience if needed.

Task 3 - Describe a Scene

30 sec prep / 60 sec speaking

Structure: GLOBAL SCENE -> FOREGROUND -> CENTRE -> BACKGROUND -> OVERALL MOOD

Useful language:

- In the foreground...
- On the left-hand side...
- Just behind...
- Farther back...
- Overall, the atmosphere seems...

Prompt: Describe a busy public park scene.

Prep notes: warm afternoon | boy/ball | women/bench | couple/dog | picnic | relaxed

This appears to be a busy public park on a warm afternoon, with several families enjoying themselves. In the foreground, a young boy is chasing a red ball while his father seems to be watching him carefully. To their left, two women are sitting on a bench and chatting. Farther back, there is a couple walking a large dog, and behind them several people are having a picnic under a tree. The weather looks pleasant because everyone is dressed lightly and the sky is clear. Overall, the atmosphere seems relaxed and cheerful.

Trap: Common trap: random object inventory. Organize spatially instead.

Task 4 - Make Predictions

30 sec prep / 60 sec speaking

Structure: VISIBLE EVIDENCE -> LIKELY EVENT -> CONSEQUENCE

Useful language:

- Judging by...
- will probably...
- is likely to...
- seems about to...
- because..., I expect...

Prompt: Predict what will happen next in the same park scene.

Prep notes: boy/ball -> catches | picnic unpacking -> stay | dog couple -> leaving | calm

Judging by the way the boy is running toward the ball, I think he will probably catch it in a moment, although his father may have to stop him from getting too close to the path. The people having the picnic seem to be unpacking more food, so they will probably stay there for another hour or two. Meanwhile, the couple with the dog is heading toward the exit, so I suspect they are about to leave the park. Overall, I think the scene will remain fairly calm.

Trap: Common trap: inventing predictions with no visual evidence.

Task 5 - Compare and Persuade

Part 1: 60 sec inspect; Part 2: 60 sec prep + 60 sec speaking

Structure: ACKNOWLEDGE -> CHOICE -> DIFFERENCE 1 -> DIFFERENCE 2 -> DIFFERENCE 3 -> PERSUADE

Useful language:

- I can see why you prefer...
- However, I still think...
- The biggest advantage is...
- Compared with...
- Considering..., I would choose...

Prompt: Choose between a \$900 furnished apartment with a 30-minute commute and a \$1,150 unfurnished one with a 10-minute commute; persuade a friend who prefers an even pricier downtown option.

Prep notes: \$ savings | furniture included | commute acceptable | contrast downtown

I can definitely see why you like the downtown apartment, especially because it is close to everything. However, I still think the \$900 apartment is the better choice for us. First, we would save hundreds of dollars every month, which adds up to several thousand dollars a year. Second, it is already furnished, so we would not need to spend money on beds, tables and other essentials. The commute is longer, but thirty minutes is still manageable, especially if public transit is reliable. Considering how much we would save, I think that is a reasonable compromise.

Trap: Common trap: choosing the option you truly prefer rather than the option that gives you the easiest developed arguments.

Task 6 - Difficult Situation

60 sec prep / 60 sec speaking

Structure: EMPATHY -> FIRM DECISION -> REASON 1 -> REASON 2 -> ALTERNATIVE -> POLITE CLOSE

Useful language:

- I understand that...

- Unfortunately, I cannot...
- The main reason is...
- On top of that...
- What I can do instead is...

Prompt: Your friend wants to bring a large dog to stay at your apartment, but pets are prohibited.

Prep notes: understand | no pets policy/fine | neighbor allergy | pet-friendly hotel | drive

Mike, I know you would really like to bring Max with you, and I understand that finding someone to look after him is not easy. Unfortunately, I cannot let him stay in my apartment. The biggest issue is that my building has a strict no-pets policy, and I could receive a warning or fine for violating it. On top of that, my neighbour has a severe allergy. What I can do is help you find a nearby pet-friendly hotel or boarding service, and I will happily drive you there. I hope you understand; I would love to have you stay with me, but I cannot take that risk with the dog.

Trap: Common trap: spending half the response apologizing before stating the decision.

Task 7 - Express an Opinion

30 sec prep / 90 sec speaking

Structure: POSITION -> REASON 1 + EXAMPLE -> REASON 2 + EXAMPLE -> REASON 3 + EXAMPLE -> CONCLUSION

Useful language:

- I strongly believe...
- The first reason is...
- More importantly...
- For example...
- For these reasons...

Prompt: Should public transit be free?

Prep notes: YES | access low-income | fewer cars/traffic | simpler | tax concession

Yes, I think public transit should eventually be free, particularly in large cities. The first reason is accessibility. Transportation is necessary for work and education, and fares can become a significant expense for low-income families. Second, free transit would give people a stronger incentive to leave their cars at home. If even a modest percentage of commuters switched to buses and trains, cities could reduce congestion and emissions. Finally, the system would become simpler to use because visitors would not need to understand different fare zones or passes. Governments would still need to fund the system through taxes, but I think the social and environmental benefits justify that cost.

Trap: Common trap: debating yourself. Pick a side quickly and develop it.

Task 8 - Unusual Situation

30 sec prep / 60 sec speaking

Structure: CATEGORY -> SIZE/SHAPE -> COLOR/MATERIAL -> PARTS -> ACTION -> COMPARISON

Useful language:

- It is basically like... except...
- It looks roughly...
- The unusual part is...
- The top/bottom/front...

- It reminds me of...

Prompt: Describe an old-fashioned bicycle with an enormous front wheel to someone who cannot see it.

Prep notes: bicycle | huge front wheel | tiny back | rider very high | pedals on front | circus

Hi Sarah, I am looking at the strangest bicycle I have ever seen. It is basically an old-fashioned bike, but the front wheel is enormous, probably four or five times the size of the back one. The rider is sitting extremely high above the ground. The frame looks metallic, and the pedals appear to be attached directly to the huge front wheel. It honestly looks like somebody combined a bicycle with a giant circus wheel. I will send you a picture later because it is difficult to believe without seeing it.

Trap: Common trap: freezing because you do not know the exact noun. Describe the object using ordinary language instead.

Writing

Target Aim for about 175-190 words on each task: comfortably inside the 150-200 word requirement while leaving room for development and proofreading.

Task	Time	Recommended split
1. Email	27 min	2-3 min plan ~20 min write 3-4 min proofread
2. Survey / opinion	26 min	2-3 min plan ~19 min write 3-4 min proofread

Writing Task 1 - Email

Decision procedure Convert every prompt bullet into a checkbox before writing. Your paragraphs should make it obvious that each checkbox has been satisfied.

Paragraph	Job
Opening	State why you are writing.
Body 1	Complete prompt requirement #1 + concrete detail.
Body 2	Complete prompt requirement #2 + concrete detail/consequence.
Body 3	Complete prompt requirement #3 / requested action or solution.
Close	Polite expectation or thanks.

Worked example

Prompt: You joined a gym, but several machines are frequently broken. Describe the problem, explain how it affects you, and suggest a solution.

Plan: problem = treadmill + rower broken | effect = evening wait ~20 min | request = repair + status updates

Dear Fitness Centre Manager,

I am writing regarding the condition of several exercise machines at the Downtown Fitness Centre, where I recently purchased an annual membership.

Over the past three weeks, two treadmills and one rowing machine have repeatedly been marked out of service. Since I usually visit between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m., when the gym is busiest, this leaves only a few machines available. On Tuesday, for example, I waited nearly twenty minutes for a treadmill before giving up and changing my workout entirely.

I understand that equipment occasionally requires maintenance; however, three weeks seems excessive for frequently used machines. I would appreciate it if the centre could arrange repairs as soon as possible. It would also be helpful to post an estimated repair date on each machine or in the gym app so members can plan accordingly.

I otherwise enjoy using the facility and hope this issue can be resolved soon.

Kind regards,
Alex

Trap: A polished email that omits one prompt requirement is not a strong answer. Task fulfillment is load-bearing.

Writing Task 2 - Survey / Opinion

Decision procedure Choose the side that gives you the lowest idea-generation cost, not necessarily your real-world preference.

Paragraph	Job
Opening	State your preference clearly.
Body 1	Reason 1 + concrete example/consequence.
Body 2	Reason 2 + concrete example/consequence.
Body 3	Brief comparison/concession: why the other option is still weaker.
Close	Restate the practical conclusion.

Worked example

Prompt: Your company can either provide free lunches or give employees an extra \$100 per month.

I would strongly prefer the additional \$100 per month rather than free office lunches.

First, employees have very different dietary requirements and preferences. Some may be vegetarian, have allergies, or simply prefer bringing food from home. A lunch program that satisfies everyone would therefore be difficult and potentially wasteful. By contrast, additional pay benefits every employee equally.

More importantly, employees can decide how to use the money according to their own circumstances. One person might spend it on groceries, while another could use it for transportation or childcare. That flexibility makes the benefit much more valuable.

Free lunches would certainly be convenient, particularly for employees who work long days in the office. However, many people now work remotely several days a week and might rarely receive that benefit.

For these reasons, I believe an additional \$100 each month would be the fairer and more practical choice.

Final proofreading pass

1. TASK: Did I explicitly answer every bullet / choose and defend one option?
2. STRUCTURE: Does each paragraph have one clear job?
3. LANGUAGE: Check subject-verb agreement, tense, articles, plurals and prepositions.
4. DAMAGE CONTROL: Fix spelling, repeated words, fragments and unfinished sentences.

Listening

Core model Do not transcribe words. Track state: who wants what, what options appear, what gets rejected, why, what changes, what is finally decided, and how each person feels.

High-value trap detector Correct answers often paraphrase the audio. A choice that repeats an exact phrase from the recording can still be wrong.

Part 1 - Problem Solving

Notes: PROBLEM | option A -> rejected + why | option B -> rejected + why | FINAL choice

Example notes: laptop broken before trip | repair = 5 days X | replacement = expensive X | loaner = free YES | final = loaner + repair

Trap: initial plan vs final plan. If the speaker changes their mind, answer from the final state.

Part 2 - Daily-Life Conversation

Notes: WHO | RELATIONSHIP | TOPIC | A wants | B wants | DECISION | ATTITUDE

Listen for softened disagreement, hesitation and sarcasm. "I suppose we could..." is not the same as enthusiastic agreement.

Trap: interpreting literal words while ignoring tone.

Part 3 - Listening for Information

Notes: GOAL | STEP 1 | STEP 2 | STEP 3 | RULE | EXCEPTION | COST/TIME

Example: normal processing = 10 business days | express = 3 days + \$25. A question about needing it next week becomes a constraint problem.

Trap: remembering facts without remembering which condition they apply to.

Part 4 - News

Notes: WHO | WHAT | WHERE | WHEN | WHY | RESULT

Names, dates, locations, causes and outcomes are especially useful anchors.

Trap: mixing up a person introduced by full name with later references by surname/title.

Part 5 - Discussion

Notes: Make speaker-indexed notes: A stance/reason | B stance/reason | C stance/reason

Example: A = Saturday / cheaper | B = Sunday / more people free | C = Saturday evening.

Trap: chronological notes. Organize by speaker instead.

Part 6 - Viewpoints

Notes: ISSUE | person/group 1: stance + why | person/group 2: stance + why | narrator/author stance

Example: mayor FOR road closure = safety; businesses AGAINST = deliveries/customers; residents MIXED = less noise but parking concern.

Trap: confusing a reported viewpoint with the narrator's own position.

Multiple-choice decision rule

1. Read the question stem precisely: what relation is it asking for - reason, purpose, final choice, attitude, prediction?
2. Eliminate options that are merely mentioned but do not answer that relation.
3. Prefer meaning over exact wording; expect paraphrase.
4. If uncertain, make the best guess and move on. Never leave it blank.

Reading

Core model Do not read every sentence at the same depth. Build a rough map first, then use the question to decide where to inspect closely.

Part 1 - Correspondence

Model: FROM | TO | RELATIONSHIP | PURPOSE | REQUEST | TONE

Example: an email says the writer cannot volunteer because of a child's tournament. If asked why the writer is contacting someone, "to explain why she cannot attend" is better than the merely true detail "her daughter plays sports."

Trap: TRUE but irrelevant. The answer must address the question stem.

Part 2 - Apply a Diagram

Model: Treat it as constraint satisfaction: filter by each requirement one at a time.

Example: weekend -> before noon -> <= \$100. A Saturday pottery class at \$120 fails the budget even if it matches every other condition.

Trap: stopping after a partial match.

Part 3 - Reading for Information

Model: Create a paragraph map: P1 = history | P2 = mechanism | P3 = benefits | P4 = problems.

For claims, distinguish SUPPORTED / CONTRADICTED / NOT STATED. Real-world plausibility does not count as textual support.

Trap: importing outside knowledge.

Part 4 - Viewpoints

Model: PERSON | POSITION | WHY | degree of certainty/qualification

Example: Lee FOR = jobs | Singh AGAINST = environment | Chen MIXED = useful but costly | author cautious = evidence incomplete.

Trap: matching vocabulary instead of underlying position.

Five recurring MCQ traps

Trap	What it looks like	Defense
Exact-word trap	Option repeats words from audio/text but answers the wrong issue.	Match meaning and question relation, not vocabulary.
True-but-irrelevant	Statement appears in passage but does not answer the stem.	Re-read the stem before selecting.
Old-plan trap	Speaker mentions an early plan and later changes course.	Track the final state.
Wrong-person trap	One person reports another person's view.	Attach each opinion to its owner.
Overclaim trap	Text says often/may; option says always/must.	Watch quantifiers and certainty.

Quantifier alarm words always | never | only | all | must | primarily | most | likely | possibly | except | not

One-Page Cram Sheet

Speaking/Writing generator Position -> reason -> specific detail -> consequence

Task type	Memorize this
Advice	Suggestion -> why -> practical example
Story	Setting -> event -> complication -> result -> feeling
Scene	Overview -> foreground -> centre -> background -> mood
Prediction	Visible evidence -> likely event -> consequence
Persuasion	Acknowledge -> choose -> 3 differences -> persuade
Conflict	Empathy -> firm decision -> reasons -> alternative
Opinion	Position -> 3 developed reasons -> conclusion
Unknown object	Category -> shape/size -> parts -> action -> comparison

Speaking prep

0-5 sec: decide
5-15 sec: generate 3 ideas
15-25 sec: attach concrete detail/example
25-30 sec: opening + closing

Writing check

TASK -> STRUCTURE -> LANGUAGE -> DAMAGE CONTROL

Listening check

Who wants what? What changed? Why? What was finally decided? What is the attitude?

Reading check

What exactly is the stem asking? Where in the text is it supported? Is the option merely true, or actually responsive?

Final rule Protect completion and clarity before sophistication. A simple, fully developed, correctly targeted response beats an ambitious answer with missing requirements, poor timing, or unclear logic.

Reference note

This playbook condenses current official CELPIP format, timing, scoring dimensions, and study-pack guidance into test-day procedures. For last-minute official practice, use CELPIP's current General Overview, Speaking Pro, Writing Pro, Reading Pro, and Listening Pro study materials.