

FREE CELPIP VOCABULARY PDF · 2026 FORMAT

CELPIP Vocabulary List

291 words, phrases and collocations organised by the CELPIP task that actually asks for them.

291 entries	15 themes	Formal / informal	With examples
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Most CELPIP word lists are alphabetical, which is the least useful order possible: you cannot revise for Speaking Task 3 by reading words beginning with C. This list is grouped by the task that needs the words, and every entry carries a meaning and a sentence.

- Grouped by task type, not by letter
- Each entry has a plain-English meaning and an example
- A formal-versus-informal upgrade table for Writing Task 1
- Linking phrases sorted by what they actually do

Practise the same questions online, scored instantly.

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How to use this list

Vocabulary is one of the four criteria your Writing and Speaking responses are rated on, alongside Content and Coherence, Readability and Task Fulfilment. But raters are not counting rare words. They are judging range and precision: whether you can reach for the right word rather than an approximate one, and whether the register matches who you are supposedly speaking or writing to.

That is why memorising an alphabetical list rarely moves a band. Twelve well-chosen phrases you can deploy under time pressure in Speaking Task 1 are worth more than four hundred words you recognise but never produce. Work through one theme at a time, and force each one into a spoken or written answer the same day.

The only reliable way to convert this list into marks

A word you have only read is not yet vocabulary. Take one theme, write a 150 to 200 word Task 2 answer using six of its entries, and submit it at celpipmocks.com/writing/ for expert feedback on whether the usage actually landed.

What is in here

Theme	Where it is used	Entries
Stating an opinion	Writing Task 2, Speaking Tasks 5 and 8	12
Giving advice	Speaking Task 1	12
Talking about personal experience	Speaking Task 2	12
Describing a scene	Speaking Task 3	12
Making predictions	Speaking Task 6, Writing Task 2	12
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Housing and neighbourhood	Writing Task 1, Reading Part 1	12
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WRITING TASK 2, SPEAKING TASKS 5 AND 8

Stating an opinion

Task 2 asks you to choose between two options and defend the choice. Raters look for a position stated early and held, so the opening sentence matters more than anything else on the page.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
in my view phrase	used to introduce your own opinion, slightly more formal than 'I think'	In my view, the community centre is the better use of the land.
I would argue that phrase	introduces an opinion you are about to support with reasons	I would argue that the shopping complex solves a problem the town does not have.
on balance phrase	after weighing both sides	On balance, the second option serves more residents for the same money.
compelling adj	convincing, hard to argue against	The strongest case for the library is a compelling one: it is free to use.
outweigh verb	to be more important than something else	The long-term benefits outweigh the higher construction cost.
decisive adj	the factor that settles the question	For me, the decisive factor is who actually uses the space every day.
come down to phrasal verb	to be ultimately a matter of	It comes down to whether the town wants revenue or somewhere to gather.
firmly believe phrase	to hold an opinion strongly	I firmly believe the money should go to the recreation centre.
make a case for phrase	to argue in favour of something	It is easy to make a case for either option, but only one lasts.
reservations noun	doubts you still hold about something you broadly support	I support the plan, though I do have reservations about the parking.
unequivocally adverb	with no room for doubt	I would unequivocally choose the option that stays free to use.
for that reason phrase	links a conclusion back to the reason you just gave	For that reason, my preference is the first proposal.

SPEAKING TASK 1

Giving advice

Task 1 hands you somebody else's problem. Raters are not checking whether the advice is right; they are listening for a clear recommendation and a reason attached to it, in a tone that fits the person you are talking to.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
if I were you phrase	the standard, natural way to open advice to a friend	If I were you, I would visit the shelter twice before deciding.
you might want to phrase	a soft suggestion that does not sound like an instruction	You might want to talk to your manager before you hand in the form.
the first thing I would do phrase	orders your advice and signals there is more coming	The first thing I would do is write down what you actually spend.
worth considering phrase	presents an option without pushing it	It is worth considering renting for a year before you buy.
hold off on phrasal verb	to delay doing something	I would hold off on signing anything until the inspection is done.
weigh up phrasal verb	to compare the good and bad points carefully	Weigh up the commute against the lower rent.
bear in mind phrase	remember this while you decide	Bear in mind that the fees go up after the first year.
a good starting point phrase	the sensible first step	A good starting point would be a free consultation.
in the long run phrase	over an extended future period	In the long run, the course pays for itself.
steer clear of phrasal verb	to avoid deliberately	I would steer clear of any contract with a two-year lock-in.
sleep on it idiom	to wait a day before deciding	Honestly, sleep on it. The offer will still be there tomorrow.
err on the side of caution idiom	to choose the safer option when unsure	I would err on the side of caution and get it in writing.

SPEAKING TASK 2

Talking about personal experience

Task 2 asks for a story from your own life. The difference between a mid and a high band is almost always sequencing and detail, not rare words.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
it must have been phrase	an approximate time in the past	It must have been about four years ago, just after we moved.
at the time phrase	then, in that period	At the time I was working nights, so the timing was awful.
looking back phrase	reflecting on it now	Looking back, it was the best decision I made that year.
out of the blue idiom	completely unexpectedly	Out of the blue, my old manager called with an offer.
it turned out phrase	the result was different from what was expected	It turned out the whole street had the same problem.
in hindsight phrase	knowing now what you did not know then	In hindsight, I should have asked more questions.
what struck me phrase	what stood out to you	What struck me was how quickly people offered to help.
ended up phrasal verb	eventually reached a situation, often unplanned	We ended up staying three hours longer than we planned.
one thing led to another idiom	a chain of events followed	One thing led to another and I was running the whole event.
vividly adverb	clearly and in detail, of a memory	I still remember it vividly, right down to the weather.
a turning point noun	the moment something changed direction	That conversation was a real turning point for me.
stick with me phrasal verb	to remain memorable	It is a small thing, but it has stuck with me ever since.

SPEAKING TASK 3

Describing a scene

Task 3 gives you a picture and someone who cannot see it. Position words carry the marks here, because the listener is building the image from your words alone.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
in the foreground phrase	the part of the picture nearest the viewer	In the foreground, two children are feeding ducks.
in the background phrase	the part furthest away	In the background there is a row of low brick buildings.
off to one side phrase	at the edge, not central	Off to one side, an older man is reading on a bench.
directly behind phrase	immediately at the back of	Directly behind them is a food truck with a short queue.
appears to be phrase	hedges a guess about what you can see	It appears to be a weekend market rather than a festival.
bustling adj	busy and full of activity	The whole square looks bustling, almost crowded.
cluttered adj	full of too many things, untidy	The table is quite cluttered with tools and paper.
in the distance phrase	far away in the view	In the distance you can just make out a bridge.
scattered adj	spread irregularly over an area	There are bags scattered across the floor.
make out phrasal verb	to see something with difficulty	I can just make out a sign, but not what it says.
leaning against phrase	resting at an angle on something	A bicycle is leaning against the railing.
taking up phrasal verb	occupying space	A long table is taking up most of the room.

SPEAKING TASK 6, WRITING TASK 2

Making predictions

Prediction tasks reward hedging. A confident 'this will definitely happen' reads as weaker English than a well-hedged 'this is likely to'.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
is likely to phrase	probably will	The queue is likely to get longer once the film ends.
in all probability phrase	very probably	In all probability, they will move the event indoors.
there is every chance phrase	it is quite possible	There is every chance the road will still be closed.
I would expect phrase	a hedged prediction based on reasoning	I would expect the prices to settle within a year.
on the verge of phrase	about to happen	The two of them look to be on the verge of an argument.
bound to phrase	certain to happen	Somebody is bound to notice the mistake eventually.
unlikely adj	probably not going to happen	It is unlikely that the shop reopens before spring.
could well phrase	there is a real possibility	It could well rain before they finish.
the odds are phrase	the probability is	The odds are they will ask for a deposit.
in the near future phrase	soon	I expect that to change in the near future.
if current trends continue phrase	assuming things carry on as they are	If current trends continue, rents will keep climbing.
I doubt verb	you think it probably will not happen	I doubt anyone will complain about a shorter meeting.

SPEAKING TASK 5, WRITING TASK 2

Comparing and persuading

Comparison tasks are scored on how clearly the two things are held against each other. Vague praise for one option earns less than a direct contrast.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
whereas conjunction	in direct contrast with	The first is cheaper to run, whereas the second lasts far longer.
by comparison phrase	when set against the other	By comparison, the older model is noisy and slow.
far superior phrase	much better	For a growing family, the second option is far superior.
the deciding factor noun	what settles the choice	The deciding factor for me is the warranty.
value for money phrase	worth what it costs	It is not the cheapest, but it is better value for money.
hard to justify phrase	difficult to defend as reasonable	Paying double for one extra feature is hard to justify.
edges out phrasal verb	narrowly beats	The second option edges out the first on safety.
falls short phrase	fails to reach a required standard	The cheaper plan falls short on the one thing you need.
in terms of phrase	with regard to a specific measure	In terms of running costs, there is no contest.
not to mention phrase	adds a further supporting point	It is faster, not to mention considerably quieter.
swayed by phrase	persuaded by	I was swayed by how easy it is to cancel.
given that phrase	considering the fact that	Given that you travel weekly, the annual pass wins.

WRITING TASK 1 (FORMAL), SPEAKING TASK 7

Complaints and problems

The most common formal Task 1 is a complaint. A high band answer is firm and specific without being rude, which is a vocabulary problem before it is a grammar problem.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
I am writing to report phrase	the standard formal opening for a problem	I am writing to report a recurring issue with the heating.
on several occasions phrase	more than once, stated formally	On several occasions the lift has been out of service.
considerable inconvenience phrase	significant disruption	This has caused considerable inconvenience to my family.
unacceptable adj	not good enough, stated firmly	A three-week delay for a safety repair is unacceptable.
to no avail phrase	without success	I have called twice, to no avail.
prompt attention phrase	quick action	I would appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.
rectify verb	to put right, formal	Please let me know how you intend to rectify this.
at your earliest convenience phrase	as soon as you reasonably can	Kindly respond at your earliest convenience.
compensation noun	money or credit to make up for a loss	I am seeking compensation for the damaged cabinet.
escalate verb	to take the matter to a higher authority	I would prefer not to escalate this further.
under warranty phrase	still covered by the seller's guarantee	The appliance is still under warranty.
a satisfactory resolution phrase	an outcome you would accept	I trust we can reach a satisfactory resolution.

WRITING TASK 1, SPEAKING TASK 7

Requests and politeness

Task 1 tells you who you are writing to. Getting the register wrong costs marks even when the content is complete, so keep a formal and an informal version of every request.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
I would be grateful if phrase	a formal, polite request	I would be grateful if you could confirm the date.
could you possibly phrase	a softened request	Could you possibly move the appointment to Friday?
would it be possible to phrase	asks whether something can be arranged	Would it be possible to collect the keys early?
I was wondering whether phrase	an indirect, very polite opener	I was wondering whether you still had space on the course.
at your convenience phrase	whenever suits you	Please call me back at your convenience.
I appreciate that phrase	acknowledges the other side before asking	I appreciate that you are busy, but this cannot wait.
do let me know phrase	a warm invitation to reply	Do let me know if that time does not work.
any chance you could phrase	the informal equivalent, for friends	Any chance you could bring the folding chairs?
it would mean a lot phrase	signals the request matters to you	It would mean a lot if you could make it.
no pressure phrase	makes an informal request easy to decline	Come if you can, but no pressure at all.
on the off chance phrase	in case it happens to be possible	I am asking on the off chance you are free Saturday.
much obliged phrase	a formal thank you	I would be much obliged for your help with this.

ALL FOUR SECTIONS

Work and employment

Workplace situations appear in every CELPIP section, because the test is built around the English an adult actually uses in Canada.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
take on phrasal verb	to accept extra work or responsibility	I offered to take on the scheduling while she was away.
workload noun	the amount of work assigned to someone	My workload doubled after two people left.
shift noun	a scheduled period of work	I picked up an extra shift on Saturday.
deadline noun	the time by which work must be finished	We moved the deadline back by a week.
cover for phrasal verb	to do someone's job while they are absent	Could you cover for me on Thursday morning?
probation period noun	the trial months at the start of a job	The probation period here is three months.
raise noun	an increase in pay	I asked for a raise at my annual review.
hands-on adj	involving practical work rather than theory	The training was hands-on from the first day.
burn out phrasal verb	to become exhausted by prolonged stress	Two of the nurses burned out over the winter.
work-life balance noun	the split between working hours and personal time	The four-day week improved everyone's work-life balance.
hand in phrasal verb	to submit, often a resignation	I handed in my notice at the end of the month.
reference noun	a statement from a former employer	She agreed to be a reference for me.

WRITING TASK 1, READING PART 1

Housing and neighbourhood

Landlords, repairs, leases and neighbours are the single most common Task 1 setting, and they turn up in Reading correspondence too.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
lease noun	the rental contract	Our lease runs until the end of August.
tenant noun	the person renting the property	The previous tenant left the place spotless.
landlord noun	the owner who rents it out	I emailed the landlord about the leak.
utilities noun	electricity, water, heating and similar services	Rent is \$1,450 with utilities included.
deposit noun	money held against damage	We got the full deposit back.
wear and tear phrase	normal damage from ordinary use	Scuffed floors are fair wear and tear.
move-in ready adj	needing no work before you live there	The apartment was move-in ready.
amenities noun	shared facilities in a building or area	The building's amenities include a gym and a bike room.
within walking distance phrase	close enough to walk to	The school is within walking distance.
run-down adj	in poor condition through neglect	The block looked run-down from the street.
notice period noun	how far ahead you must tell them you are leaving	There is a sixty-day notice period.
sublet verb	to rent your place to someone else	The lease does not allow us to sublet.

READING PART 2, SPEAKING TASK 1

Money and cost

The Apply a Diagram part almost always compares prices or plans, so the comparison language for money is worth having ready.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
upfront adj	paid at the start	There is a \$200 upfront fee.
ongoing cost noun	what you keep paying over time	The ongoing cost is what makes the difference.
affordable adj	cheap enough to manage	It is the only genuinely affordable option here.
pricey adj	expensive, informal	The annual pass is pricey but it pays off.
pay off phrasal verb	to become worth the cost	The pass pays off after about nine trips.
cut back on phrasal verb	to reduce spending on	We cut back on eating out for a few months.
set aside phrasal verb	to save money for a purpose	I set aside a little each payday.
out of pocket phrase	having lost money on something	I was forty dollars out of pocket.
a one-off noun	a single, non-repeating payment	The installation is a one-off, not a monthly charge.
flat rate noun	the same price regardless of use	They charge a flat rate for all zones.
surcharge noun	an extra fee added on	There is a surcharge for travelling into zone 3.
non-refundable adj	you cannot get the money back	The booking fee is non-refundable.

LISTENING PARTS 1 AND 2, SPEAKING TASK 1

Health and daily life

The Listening test opens on ordinary conversations, and appointments, symptoms and routines dominate them.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
book an appointment phrase	to arrange a time to be seen	I booked an appointment for Tuesday morning.
walk-in clinic noun	a clinic taking patients without appointments	The walk-in clinic on Bank Street is open until eight.
come down with phrasal verb	to start having an illness	I think I am coming down with something.
under the weather idiom	slightly unwell	She has been under the weather all week.
get over phrasal verb	to recover from	It took me ten days to get over it.
prescription noun	a doctor's written order for medicine	I need to pick up a prescription.
cut down on phrasal verb	to consume less of	I have cut down on coffee.
keep on top of phrase	to stay in control of something ongoing	It is hard to keep on top of the housework.
run-down adj	tired and lacking energy	I felt run-down after the long shift.
in good shape phrase	physically fit and healthy	For seventy, he is in remarkable shape.
put off phrasal verb	to postpone	I keep putting off the dentist.
make time for phrase	to deliberately create space in a schedule	I try to make time for a walk every day.

READING PART 2, LISTENING PART 1

Transport and getting around

Commuter passes, delays and routes are staple CELPIP material, and the Apply a Diagram passages often compare transit options.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
commute noun/verb	the regular journey to work	My commute is forty minutes each way.
transfer noun	a change between vehicles on one fare	The fare includes free transfers for ninety minutes.
fare noun	the price of a journey	The fare went up in January.
peak hours noun	the busiest travel times	Avoid peak hours if you can.
run late phrase	to be behind schedule	The bus was running late again.
detour noun	a longer route around an obstruction	There is a detour because of the construction.
park and ride noun	a car park at a transit station	I use the park and ride at the edge of town.
carpool verb/noun	to share a car journey regularly	Three of us carpool on alternate weeks.
get stuck in traffic phrase	to be delayed by congestion	I got stuck in traffic on the bridge.
within reach phrase	close enough to get to easily	Everything we need is within reach on foot.
off-peak adj	outside the busiest times, usually cheaper	Off-peak tickets are a third cheaper.
reliable adj	consistently on time and dependable	The train is slower but far more reliable.

READING PART 4, WRITING TASK 2

Community and environment

Reading for Viewpoints and the Task 2 survey both lean on civic topics: what a town should build, fund or change.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
residents noun	people who live in a place	Residents were surveyed before the vote.
green space noun	parks and undeveloped land in a town	The plan removes the last green space downtown.
sustainable adj	able to continue without damaging the future	It is a more sustainable use of the land.
infrastructure noun	the basic physical systems of a place	The town's infrastructure has not kept up.
footfall noun	the number of people passing through a place	A market would bring footfall to the high street.
vibrant adj	lively and full of activity	It has turned into a vibrant part of the city.
at the expense of phrase	with a cost to something else	Growth came at the expense of the wetlands.
long-term benefit noun	an advantage that lasts	The long-term benefit outweighs the disruption.
cut emissions phrase	to reduce polluting gases	The plan would cut emissions across the region.
accessible adj	able to be used by everyone, including disabled people	The new entrance is fully accessible.
underserved adj	not provided with enough of a service	The north end has been underserved for years.
give back to phrase	to contribute to a community that helped you	Volunteering is how I give back to the neighbourhood.

SPEAKING TASKS 7 AND 8

Difficult situations

The unusual-situation and difficult-situation tasks reward the language of hedging, explaining and repairing, not dramatic vocabulary.

Word or phrase	What it means	Used in a sentence
awkward adj	socially uncomfortable	It was an awkward conversation to start.
put it delicately phrase	to say something carefully to avoid offence	How do I put this delicately?
no offence, but phrase	prefaces something that might upset the listener	No offence, but the timing is not great.
smooth things over idiom	to reduce tension after a disagreement	I called her to smooth things over.
get to the bottom of idiom	to find the real cause	I wanted to get to the bottom of it first.
meet halfway idiom	to compromise	We agreed to meet halfway on the price.
in fairness phrase	acknowledging the other side has a point	In fairness, nobody told him about the change.
own up to phrasal verb	to admit responsibility	I owned up to the mistake straight away.
let it slide idiom	to choose not to react	It was small, so I let it slide.
clear the air idiom	to resolve a misunderstanding by talking	One honest conversation cleared the air.
a misunderstanding noun	a failure to understand correctly	The whole thing was a misunderstanding.
make it up to phrase	to compensate someone for a wrong	Let me make it up to you next week.

WRITING TASK 1 · REGISTER

Informal to formal: the upgrade table

Writing Task 1 always tells you who you are writing to, and matching that register is worth real marks.

Paragon describes the expected tone as neither too formal nor too informal, which in practice means: work out the relationship first, then pick the column. Using the formal column in an email to a friend is exactly as costly as the reverse.

Everyday word	Formal alternative	When it matters
get	receive, obtain	'Get' is the single most overused verb in mid-band answers.
a lot of	a considerable number of, substantial	Use 'number' for countable things, 'amount' for uncountable.
big problem	significant issue, serious concern	'Big' rarely survives in a formal email.
ask for	request	One word instead of two reads as more controlled.
tell	inform, notify, advise	'Notify' is best when a deadline is involved.
fix	repair, rectify, resolve	'Rectify' suits a complaint; 'repair' suits an object.
buy	purchase, acquire	Keep 'buy' in informal Task 1 emails to a friend.
help	assist, support	'Assistance' is the noun you want in a request.
show	demonstrate, indicate	'Indicate' when evidence points at something.
so	therefore, consequently, as a result	Never start a formal sentence with 'So'.
but	however, nevertheless	'However' takes a comma; 'but' does not.
also	in addition, furthermore, moreover	Vary these; three 'furthermores' is worse than three 'alsos'.
kids	children	'Kids' is fine speaking, weak in a formal email.
stuff, things	items, belongings, materials	Naming the actual thing scores higher than either.
really bad	severe, unacceptable, substandard	Adverb plus adjective is usually beatable by one precise word.

Everyday word	Formal alternative	When it matters
find out	determine, establish, ascertain	'Ascertain' can sound stiff; 'establish' is safer.
put off	postpone, defer	Phrasal verbs are correct but read as informal.
check	verify, confirm	'Confirm' when you want a written reply.
sort out	resolve, address	'Address the issue' is the safest formal pairing.
give back	refund, reimburse, return	'Reimburse' for money you spent; 'refund' for money you paid them.

WRITING AND SPEAKING

Linking phrases, sorted by what they do

Coherence is half of one of the four rating criteria, and it is the cheapest one to improve. The trick is not to learn more linkers but to know which job each does, so you reach for a contrast marker when you are contrasting rather than dropping in whichever one you remember.

Job	Phrases you can use
Adding a point	in addition · furthermore · what is more · on top of that · not only that
Contrasting	however · on the other hand · whereas · even so · that said
Giving a reason	because of this · since · given that · owing to · the reason being
Showing a result	as a result · consequently · therefore · which means · so much so that
Giving an example	for instance · to give one example · such as · in particular · take X, for example
Sequencing	to begin with · after that · meanwhile · eventually · in the end
Conceding a point	admittedly · it is true that · granted · while it is fair to say · I can see why
Emphasising	above all · crucially · more importantly · what really matters is · the key point is
Concluding	all things considered · on balance · for these reasons · to sum up · which is why
Hedging	arguably · to some extent · it would seem · broadly speaking · more often than not

Collocations worth memorising whole

Raters notice when a common verb is paired with the wrong noun. These pairings are worth learning as single units rather than as two separate words.

Head word	Goes with
make	make a decision · make an effort · make progress · make arrangements · make a complaint · make time
take	take responsibility · take advantage of · take into account · take action · take a break · take part in

Head word	Goes with
have	have an impact on · have access to · have a say in · have difficulty with · have the opportunity to
do	do research · do damage · do your best · do the paperwork · do without
raise	raise an issue · raise awareness · raise concerns · raise standards · raise money
reach	reach an agreement · reach a decision · reach a compromise · reach out to · reach capacity
strong	a strong case · a strong preference · strong evidence · a strong argument · strong demand
heavily	heavily reliant on · heavily subsidised · heavily congested · heavily criticised

Words become marks when you use them

Reading a list changes nothing on its own. Producing the words under time pressure is what moves a band.

Practise one task type at a time on the free learning modules, then sit a full mock and see whether the vocabulary held up.

Free CELPIP practice tests Six full mocks, all four sections, exam timed	https://www.celpipmocks.com/mock-test/
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