

## Building solid foundations:

The effective use of Linguaskill and *Unlock* at the Foundation Institute, Nizwa University, Oman



'Combining the use of the Linguaskill test and the *Unlock* course has been of great benefit to our Institute. Through the Linguaskill test we make sure that our students are learning at the right level. The *Unlock* course then ensures they gain the skills they need for their future academic studies, with some students progressing up to three levels within the year of our foundation course.'

Dr Ahmed Hamed Al Rahbi,  
Foundation Institute, Nizwa University, Oman

The Foundation Institute at Nizwa University was established in 2010 to prepare students for their academic studies. The Institute uses Linguaskill and *Unlock*, provided by Cambridge, in their Intensive English Language Programme which is designed to ensure that students are ready to join their academic majors, many of which are delivered in English.

Linguaskill is used to assess the students' skills levels at the start and end of its foundation course. Students who join the foundation course use the *Unlock* coursebook series to develop the English language and critical thinking skills they need to be successful in their undergraduate degrees.

### An online test that supports students and teachers

The Linguaskill test is a digital, multi-level English language proficiency test developed by Cambridge. It is used twice during the Institute's foundation course to determine students' proficiency levels. At the start, Linguaskill scores are used to admit students onto the appropriate English language course. At the end, students take the test again to ensure they have achieved the required level of English proficiency to move into higher education.

Importantly, Linguaskill is computer adaptive. This means that content is tailored to a candidate's performance, with test questions becoming easier or more difficult depending on their previous answer. This gives a more accurate picture of their language ability.

### About Linguaskill

Linguaskill is a quick and convenient online test to help higher education institutions and employers check the English levels of individuals and groups of candidates. Supported by artificial intelligence technology, it provides fast, accurate results and clear individual and group reports. Results are aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the international standard for describing language ability.

[cambridgeenglish.org/linguaskill](https://cambridgeenglish.org/linguaskill)

### ▶▶ At a glance

**Institution:** Foundation Institute, Nizwa University

**Location:** Oman

**How Linguaskill and *Unlock* are used:** Linguaskill is used for admission to the foundation course, ensuring students are taught at the right level. *Unlock* is the main learning resource used during this course to improve English language and critical thinking skills. At the end of the course, Linguaskill is used again to ensure students are ready to move to the next stage of academic studies.



Find out more about how organisations around the world are using Linguaskill on our [website](#) or contact us [today](#) to find out more.

## About the Foundation Institute, Nizwa University

Established in 2010, the Foundation Institute, Nizwa University aims to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need for their tertiary education. It provides a transitional year before they start their academic degree programmes, delivering courses in the English language, mathematics, digital literacy, and life and study skills.

[unizwa.edu.om/index.php?contentid=632](http://unizwa.edu.om/index.php?contentid=632)

## About Cambridge University Press & Assessment

We are a not-for-profit department of the University of Cambridge. We produce the world's leading range of qualifications and tests for learners and teachers of English, including Cambridge English Qualifications, Linguaskill and IELTS. Taken by over 5 million people every year, these exams are backed by the work of the largest dedicated research team of any English language test provider.

[cambridgeenglish.org](http://cambridgeenglish.org)

As a result, teachers at the Foundation Institute believe that Linguaskill accurately assesses the students' levels. According to one teacher, "When we used Linguaskill as a placement test, it worked. It works very well and placed students in the Cambridge levels properly." The students are also very positive about the test, preferring the digital format to traditional paper-based exams. One student said, "It was the first time I took a computer exam, but that's a great experience because for me I think it's easier. Typing took less time than using paper. So, I found it easier in the writing test."

## A relevant and effective course

Once students begin the foundation course, they use the *Unlock* English Course. *Unlock* is a six-level, academic-light, paired skills course which will develop the skills they will need. One of its key features is its focus on developing students' ability to think critically in an academic context. Students say the course has helped them to improve their English and critical thinking skills, and they also found it a valuable resource in preparing for their exams.

Teachers agree that the *Unlock* coursebook provided good instructional material, seeing improvements in students' speaking and writing skills, and their ability to construct arguments. As one teacher said, "I really liked the *Unlock* books, the materials themselves. There's a lot to work with."

## Unlocking the power of critical thinking

The foundation course at Nizwa University places great emphasis on fostering critical thinking skills in new students to prepare them for a fulfilling undergraduate experience. The students also believe that these are vital skills: 78% believe that these skills are important for their university degrees and 77% believe that they are important for their future careers. They value the opportunity provided by the foundation course to enhance these skills, and having completed the course, they report a better understanding and application of critical thinking in their studies.

Teachers also appreciate the critical thinking sections of the *Unlock* coursework. They believe the tasks promote effective teamwork and improve the content that students produce. One teacher explained, "The students learned how to weigh the arguments: which are strong arguments, which are weak arguments, how to recognise them, and not to take anything at face value."

## Motivated and engaged students – with strong results

Students are providing positive feedback about the course. After taking the foundation course, students report improvements in their ability to express views and opinions in English, participate in group discussions and give presentations. Importantly, their overall enjoyment of speaking English has increased. Most students say they can now express their opinions in English and feel confident articulating agreement and disagreement. They also feel confident in their ability to understand conversations, broadcasts or lectures in English.

Their views are reinforced by the results from the Linguaskill test students took at the end of the foundation course. These results showed significant improvements in scores across the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels, with some students advancing by one, two, or even three levels.

