Practice Exam - Future Plans and Ambitions

Cambridge IGCSE ESL 0510/0511 | Reading practice paper

Exercise 1

Read the article about a skills portfolio for students then answer the questions.

Building a skills portfolio

A college has introduced a skills portfolio to help students prepare for future study and work. The portfolio is not a list of grades. It is a folder where students collect evidence of skills such as teamwork, communication, problem-solving and reliability. Tutors say many students have useful experiences but forget them when writing applications. Tutors also ask students to include examples from ordinary responsibilities, because paid work is not the only evidence of maturity. Looking after a younger relative or organising travel can show planning too.

Students begin by choosing three examples from school, home or the community. One student might include organising a club event, helping a younger sibling with homework or volunteering at a sports tournament. The example must include evidence, such as a photograph, a short reflection or feedback from another person.

The portfolio also asks students to explain what they learned. Tutors discourage vague statements such as 'I became more confident'. Instead, students should describe a situation clearly: what was difficult, what action they took and what changed afterwards. This helps them prepare for interviews, where they may need to give specific examples.

Every term, students review the portfolio and add one new item. They also remove examples that no longer show their strongest skills. This keeps the folder manageable. A portfolio with twenty weak examples is less useful than one with six carefully explained examples.

The project has changed how some students think about ambition. Instead of seeing the future as one distant decision, they begin to notice small actions that build useful skills. Tutors say the portfolio does not choose a career for anyone, but it helps students talk about themselves with more evidence and less guesswork. Some students use the portfolio when applying for college courses, while others use it to prepare for part-time job interviews.

Students update the portfolio after real activities rather than inventing examples at the end of the year. A short note explains what happened, what skill was used and what evidence could prove it.

Teachers advise students not to include every activity. The strongest portfolios usually show a small number of clear examples, with enough detail for another person to understand what the student actually did.

Exercise 1 questions

Answer the questions using information from the article. Write short answers.

1 What is the portfolio not a list of? [1]

_____

2 What kind of skill is reliability an example of? [1]

_____

3 How many examples do students choose at first? [1]

_____

4 Who might a student help with homework? [1]

_____

5 What kind of evidence can be included apart from a photograph or reflection? [1]

_____

6 List three ways students review evidence in the skills portfolio. [3]

_____

_____

_____

Exercise 2

Read the article about four future-planning activities (A-D). Then answer Questions 9(a)-9(i).

A Course comparison grid

Students use a grid to compare different courses. They record entry requirements, travel time, costs and practical elements such as work placements. The grid helps students see differences clearly, but tutors remind them not to choose only the course with the easiest entry requirements. Students add personal notes after visits, because two courses can look similar until they see the facilities. Students record fees, travel time and entry requirements in the same place.

B Future interview practice

A careers adviser runs short practice interviews. Students answer common questions, then receive feedback on examples, clarity and body language. The practice is recorded only if students agree. Many students find the second attempt easier because they know what to expect. The adviser asks students to repeat unclear answers, but also points out strengths they did not notice. The adviser records only if students agree.

C Skills gap plan

A skills gap plan asks students to choose one ability they need to strengthen before applying for a course or job. The plan includes a realistic action, such as joining a club, completing an online module or asking for extra responsibility. It is reviewed after six weeks. A small action is chosen first so students can experience progress before setting a larger target. Advisers prefer actions that can be completed within a month.

D Work shadowing day

During a work shadowing day, students follow an employee and observe normal tasks. They do not do the job themselves, but they can ask questions at suitable times. The activity helps students notice routine parts of a career that may not appear in promotional videos. Students write down what surprised them, because routine tasks are often the most useful part of the day. They also record one question they would ask if they returned. Students write one question to ask before the visit begins.

The planning activities are meant to slow decisions down. Students compare evidence, practise talking about choices and test small steps before committing to a course, job or long-term goal.

The activities are meant to produce evidence, not just ideas. A student should finish with a note, recording, plan or question that can be used in a later decision.

Exercise 2 questions

For each statement, write the correct letter A, B, C or D on the line. Each letter may be used more than once.

No.	Which future-planning activity…	A-D
9(a)	helps students notice ordinary tasks in a job	.....
9(b)	compares costs and travel time	.....
9(c)	is checked again after six weeks	.....
9(d)	may be easier when repeated	.....
9(e)	should not be based only on low entry requirements	.....
9(f)	does not allow students to perform the job	.....
9(g)	may include completing an online module	.....
9(h)	gives feedback on body language	.....
9(i)	needs permission before recording	.....

Exercise 3

Read the article about setting realistic future goals then complete the notes.

Turning ambitions into steps

Future goals can feel exciting but too large to act on. A student may say they want to become a doctor, designer, engineer or business owner, but the ambition is not useful unless it is connected to steps. Teachers often ask students to separate long-term goals from short-term actions.

A realistic goal begins with research. Students should find out which subjects, qualifications and experiences are usually needed. They should also check what the work is really like, not only what it looks like online. Talking to someone in the field, watching interviews or reading course descriptions can prevent unrealistic assumptions.

Short-term actions should be specific. Instead of writing 'get better at science', a student might plan to revise one biology topic each week or attend a lunchtime support session. Instead of 'be more confident', they might volunteer to introduce one group presentation. Small actions make progress easier to see. Students are encouraged to compare at least two routes into the same career, since one path may close while another remains possible.

Goals also need review. Interests change, and new information may affect a plan. Changing direction is not failure if the student has learned something. A useful plan gives students a next step, not a fixed script for the rest of their life. A plan should include who can help, such as a teacher, adviser, relative or older student with recent experience. This prevents students trying to manage every step alone.

Students also write down one obstacle that might interrupt the plan, such as transport, cost or confidence. Naming the obstacle early helps them choose a smaller first step instead of giving up.

At the end, students choose one person who can check their progress. This may be a teacher, relative or friend, but the role must be encouragement rather than pressure.

Students also write one thing they will not do yet. This keeps the plan realistic, because trying to change every habit at once can make a useful goal feel impossible.

The plan ends with a date for checking progress. Without a date, students often leave the first step as a good intention rather than an action.

Exercise 3 questions

Complete the notes using information from the article. Write short words or phrases.

Notes	Write short answers
10 Information students should research	- ..... - ..... - .....
11 Features of useful short-term planning	- ..... - ..... - ..... - .....

Exercise 4

Read the article about changing a future plan then answer the questions.

Not the plan I expected

For years, I said I wanted to study architecture. I liked drawing buildings, and people told me I was good at detail. When our school arranged a visit to an architecture studio, I expected the day to confirm my plan. I even imagined coming home with a clearer idea of my future.

The visit was interesting, but not in the way I expected. The architects spent much of the morning discussing planning rules, budgets and changes requested by clients. The drawings were important, but they were only one part of the job. I realised I had been attracted to the visible product, not the daily process.

At first, this worried me. If architecture was not right, I felt as if I had lost a piece of my identity. A careers adviser helped me look more closely at what I enjoyed: visual thinking, problem-solving and improving spaces. She suggested that these interests could connect to other areas, such as exhibition design, product design or urban planning.

I did more research and visited a college design show. There, I spoke to students who had changed direction during their courses. One said that choosing a field is not like locking a door; it is more like choosing a path where side paths appear later. That made the decision feel less frightening. The writer had confused enjoying a school subject with understanding the whole profession connected to it.

I have not abandoned architecture completely, but I no longer describe it as my only future. The studio visit did not ruin my ambition. It made it more honest. A plan is useful when it helps you explore, but dangerous when it stops you noticing what you have learned. He also realised that changing a plan can be evidence of thinking carefully, not evidence of giving up.

I kept the old architecture leaflet in my folder, not because I planned to use it, but because it reminded me that changing direction was not the same as wasting time.

I still felt embarrassed when people asked what I wanted to study. However, my answer became more honest, and that was more useful than sounding certain.

Exercise 4 questions

For each question, choose the correct answer, A, B or C.

12 Why did the writer expect architecture to suit him? [1]

A He liked drawing buildings and detail.

B His family owned a studio.

C He had already designed a house.

13 What surprised the writer at the studio? [1]

A how little drawing was done by computers

B how much time was spent on rules, budgets and clients

C how quickly buildings were finished

14 Why did the writer feel worried? [1]

A The architects criticised his drawings.

B The visit was cancelled early.

C His future plan felt less certain.

15 What did the careers adviser help him identify? [1]

A the easiest university course

B the interests behind his plan

C a way to avoid research

16 What idea made the decision less frightening? [1]

A A field can include side paths later.

B All design courses are the same.

C Changing direction is impossible.

17 What is the writer's final view of plans? [1]

A They should never change.

B They are useful only when chosen early.

C They should help exploration, not prevent learning.

ANSWER KEY

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Exercise 1

1. grades
2. a skill
3. three
4. a younger sibling
5. feedback from another person
6. students review the portfolio every term; six carefully explained examples may be more useful than twenty weak ones; the portfolio helps students use evidence instead of guesswork

Exercise 2

9(a) D; 9(b) A; 9(c) C; 9(d) B; 9(e) A; 9(f) D; 9(g) C; 9(h) B; 9(i) B

Exercise 3

10 Information students should research

- subjects
- qualifications
- experiences

11 Features of useful short-term planning

- specific actions
- progress easier to see
- review
- a next step

Exercise 4

12 A; 13 B; 14 C; 15 B; 16 A; 17 C

12 A - He liked drawing buildings and was good at detail.

13 B - The architects discussed rules, budgets and client changes.

14 C - He felt he had lost part of his identity.

15 B - She helped him identify visual thinking and problem-solving.

16 A - A student compared it to a path with side paths.

17 C - He says plans are dangerous when they stop you noticing learning.