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Part I

What is cima?
Introduction

**cima** in Arabic, stands for « Certificat International de Maîtrise en Arabe », International Certificate for proficiency in Arabic. **cima** has been designed by the Arab World Institute (« Institut du monde arabe » in French) to assess proficiency in modern standard Arabic. In Arabic, سمة is a polysemous word conveying notions of quality, distinction, stamping, cachet…

This guide contains a detailed presentation of the exam. You will find practical information on how the exam takes place as well as on registering and sitting the exam.

This guide is an essential tool for familiarizing yourself with the procedures for registering and completing **cima**.

**cima** guarantee of quality

**cima** was designed with the utmost methodological rigor. It is standardized and calibrated. The results of the exam are all comparable regardless of the center in which they take place, and ensure a reliable evaluation of the candidate’s proficiency on a scale of six levels, established by the European Council’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), from “beginner” (A1) to C2 “proficiency”.

**cima**, the Arab World Institute’s certificate, is the very first tool available to those who want to validate their level of modern standard Arabic.

A private-law foundation, the Arab World Institute (IMA for “Institut du monde arabe” in French) is the result of a partnership between France and the countries of the Arab League. Its purpose is to introduce French and European audiences to the contributions the Arab world has made to global culture, to improve their knowledge in this regard, and to promote dialogue between the Arab world and the West.

The language that is certified is modern standard Arabic. This is the common language of all Arab nations and is also taught throughout the world to non-Arabic speakers. It is one of the official languages of the United Nations as well as the language used by the press and media. It is this, the language of international communication, which is tested through **cima**.

The Arab World Institute, a partner of France’s national education ministry since 1987, welcomes 1500 students per year. In 2015, IMA created *Ahdâf* (أهداف), the first action-oriented method for teaching Arabic (for levels A1 and A2). This method has been adopted elsewhere, notably by France’s CNED (the National Center for Distance Learning) and Science Po (the Paris Institute of Political Studies) and in many other countries including Switzerland and Germany. In 2016, IMA, along with the International Center for Pedagogical Studies, developed Ev@lang, the first fully online Arabic adaptive placement test.

The Arab World Institute coordinates **cima** and manages all administrative and pedagogical aspects.

**cima** is developed by the Arab World Institute in close partnership with the International Center for Pedagogical Studies (CIEP). The CIEP is a public institution of the French Education Ministry in charge of international cooperation. It is especially responsible for the Diploma in French Language Studies, the DELF and the French language proficiency test, the TCF, which is required to obtain French citizenship or as part of immigration procedures to Quebec.
cima: the public

cima is intended for anyone over the age of 15 – students, future students, interns, employees or potential employees – who, for either academic, professional or personal reasons, is seeking a reliable and recognized validation of their knowledge and competence in modern standard Arabic.

cima: general overview

cima comes into two variations:
- cima♦1 assesses the first 3 levels of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL): A1, A2 and B1,
- cima♦2 assesses the next 3 levels: B2, C1 and C2.
Candidates register to either variation depending on their expected level. The two variations have the same number of tests, the only difference lies of course within their difficulty.

cima assesses four key areas of competence required for anyone wishing to interact with today's Arab world. The test is therefore made up of four mandatory modules totaling two hours and a half in all. These include:

- listening comprehension
- reading comprehension
- writing
- speaking

A certificate, valid for three years, is issued upon completion of the exam.

All the tests take place in exam centers authorized by IMA and at dates agreed with IMA.

The listening and reading comprehension portions are group tests using a booklet containing the questionnaires and an answer sheet. The writing portion is a group test using a booklet with a list of subjects, also called tasks, in which the candidates write their texts.
The speaking test takes place individually, without any prior preparation, with an examiner from the exam center, at a time set up by the center.

In future, an electronic version of the group tests, using computers, may be available at certain specially equipped centers.
• Group tests

Group tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Questions/Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening comprehension</td>
<td>2h30</td>
<td>35 questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>35 questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>4 tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The entire examination, including the breaks, can be completed in about 2h30.

• Individual test

Individual test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>4 tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reading and listening comprehension tests are presented in the format of a Multiple-Choice Questionnaire (MCQ). Each MCQ contains 35 questions. For each question, the candidate is given a choice of 3 possible answers and must choose one single answer.

The examination questions were designed by drafting teams authorized by IMA and were tested before publication.

• Group test in listening comprehension

This test takes between 30 and 35 minutes and includes 35 questions that the candidate will hear only once. For each question, the candidate must choose only one of three possible answers.

These questions test the candidate’s capacity to understand modern standard Arabic as it is spoken, and in particular:
- familiar words and common expressions used in routine communication (dialogues, interviews, discussions, telephone conversations);
- the gist of clear and simple messages and announcements;
- information regarding people, facts or events in radio or television news programs or on personal or professional topics;
- presentations dealing with concrete or abstract topics;
- any type of speech delivered at a relatively slow and clear pace.

**Group test in reading comprehension**

This test takes 45 minutes and includes 35 questions that the candidate must read. For each question, the candidate must choose only one of three possible answers.

These questions test the candidate’s capacity to understand:
- familiar names, very simple words and phrases used in communicating in different situations, such as friendly or administrative messages and letters;
- information contained in everyday documents such as small ads, flyers, menus, timetables, etc;
- information relating to people, facts or events (personal letters);
- texts in everyday language relating to daily life or to work.

In line with media usage, texts are not vocalized (النصوص غير مشكلة).

**Group test in writing**

This test takes 60 minutes and is made up of 3 tasks. Candidates must complete tasks in the requested order: first task 1, then task 2, and at last task 3. They organize their time between the different tasks as they wish. The tasks include:

- **Task 1**: writing creatively based on one or two images.
  Aim of the task: candidates must demonstrate their ability to tell a story, a series of chronological facts.
  30 to 50 words expected.

- **Task 2**: reacting to a mail, a publication, a letter, a text message
  Aim of the task: candidates must demonstrate their ability to interact in writing
  40 to 80 words expected. Example: please react to the following text message:
  "Hello Lina,
  Yesterday, you had sports for the first time. Tell me how it went"

- **Task 3**: describing or commenting a picture or a sentence raising a daily life issue.
  Aim of the task: candidates must demonstrate their ability to express a feeling, to react.
  40 to 80 words expected.
  Example: “Do you agree that having no assigned desk at work helps communication with your colleagues?”

In this test, candidates are evaluated on their capacity to:
- communicate a message in a clear way;
- provide information asked for;
- describe, recount, explain;
- justify a choice, a position, a decision;
- develop their ideas and express them coherently;
- express a viewpoint;
- express an opinion and provide arguments to back it;
- use vocabulary and sentence structure suited to the required task;
- synthesize and reformulate.

Is counted as a word every set of signs located between two spaces. For instance:
- كريم وجميلة is counted as 2 words,
- بمفتاح البيت is also counted as 2 words.

The candidates are not expected to vocalize their essays.

- **Individual speaking test**

  This test is taken with an examiner. It lasts 10 minutes **maximum** and is made up of 3 tasks that must all be completed. Each task is to be completed for a length of time monitored by the examiner. The examiner presents the tasks orally and records the candidate’s entire delivery.

  - **Task 1 – Directed interview without preparation**
    Length of dialogue: 2 minutes maximum
    Aim of the task: candidates must demonstrate their ability to introduce themselves or to talk about personal matters.

  - **Task 2 – Oral interaction (role-playing game) with preparation**
    Length of preparation: 2 minutes in front of the examiner
    Length of dialogue: 3 minutes maximum
    Aim of the task: candidates must demonstrate their ability to interact in daily life situations.
    Example: “You want to rent an apartment, you ask me questions to know the place (surface, price, surroundings…”)

  - **Task 3 - Monologue without preparation**
    Length of dialogue: 3 minutes maximum
    Aim of the task: candidates must demonstrate their ability to express a preference, give an opinion, motivate.
    Example: “To you, what is a country pleasant to live in?”

---

### **cima: assessing levels**

**cima** measures proficiency levels in modern standard Arabic based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe (Language Policy unit, Strasbour 2000; published by Editions Didier, Paris, 2001). In the interest of clarity, the designation for each level has been simplified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Proficiency</strong>&lt;br&gt;Excellent command of the language. Can understand with ease virtually everything read or heard. Can summarize information coherently. Speaks very fluently differentiating finer shades of meaning on complex matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Advanced</strong>&lt;br&gt;Good command of the language. Can understand a wide range of long and demanding texts, recognizing implicit meaning. Can express ideas in a fluent and well-structured manner on social, professional or academic areas of life or on complex topics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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![cima logo](image)
Upper intermediate
General command of the language. Can interact with a degree of spontaneity. Can understand the main ideas in a complex text. Can express ideas on general or professional topics in a clear and detailed manner and explain a viewpoint.

Intermediate
Effective but limited use of the language. Can understand clear, standard input on familiar topics. Can deal with situations arising while travelling. Can speak on topics of personal interest and briefly explain plans and opinions.

Elementary
Elementary language skills. Can understand isolated sentences on basic personal topics. Can communicate in everyday situations and speak in simple terms on matters of immediate concern.

Basic
Basic Arabic. Can understand simple sentences dealing with concrete aspects of everyday life. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly.

**cima** assesses all six levels of this reference framework. However, to optimize the candidate experience and maximize the accuracy of the assessment, **cima** comes into two variations:
- **cima♦1** assesses levels A1, A2 and B1,
- **cima♦2** assesses levels B2, C1 and C2.
Candidates must register to either variation depending on their estimated level.

For your information, about 120 hours of collective courses are needed to acquire level A1, 270 for level A2 and 390 for level B1.

**cima: the results**

All the candidates that have taken the exam receive their results. Candidates that have taken the 4 tests and obtained:
- for **cima♦1** at least A1 level,
- for **cima♦2** at least B2 level,
are given in addition a paper certificate that mentions:
- their global level on the six-level scale of the Council of Europe
- for each skill, their level and their score expressed as a %.
For instance, a certificate will mention:
- Global level of the candidate as per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: B1
- Results at the exam:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening comprehension</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level B1 for that skill, 80% of reading questions are correctly answered. Which level B1 for that skill, 78% of listening questions are correctly answered. Level B1 for that skill. Level A2 for that skill.

For **cima1**:  
- If the candidate did not reach A1 level for a given skill, the certificate will mention « A1 non atteint » (A1 not reached),  
- If the candidate reached a level above B1, the certificate will mention “B2 ou plus” (B2 or more)

For **cima2**, if the candidate did not reach level B2 level for a given skill, the certificate will mention « B2 non atteint » (B2 not reached).

A mock-up of the certificate can be found in the appendix.

**Results are communicated to exam centers.**
**No result will be sent individually.**
**Candidates must retrieve their certificates at their exam centers.**

• **Marking the tests**

The tests in reading and listening comprehension are marked after the answer sheets have been scanned and digitized.

The writing and speaking tests are graded by examiners trained and authorized by IMA, using a standardized grid. Each writing test and each recording of the speaking test are checked twice. If the two assessments differ significantly, the test is evaluated a third time.

• **Request for re-correcting of the writing and speaking tests**

A candidate may ask the exam center that the writing and speaking tests be marked over again. This request must be made in writing. The exam center will transfer the request to IMA. However, to be admissible, the request must be made within one month after the exam center has sent out the certificate. A candidate who wishes to have a test re-marked must check with the exam center to find out the deadline for the written request. Depending on the request and on its urgency, the exam center may charge for this service. The candidate is notified if the grade has been changed and is issued a new certificate. The certificate is transferred to the exam center that presents it to the candidate upon proof of identification and in exchange for the former certificate, which is destroyed. The candidate is also notified by email if the grade has not been changed.
• **Calculating the score**

The certificate shows:
1. the global level obtained,
2. the level and score for each skill.

The score noted on the certificate for the comprehension tests of **cima** are determined from the number of correct answers.

Each correct answer is given 1 point. Zero points are given for each incorrect answer or if no answer is given.

As questions can vary in difficulty from one test to another and from one part of the exam to another, a marking scheme allows to convert this number of correct answers into a calibrated score (0 to 100 points), as per the UCON process, so as to ensure an accurate assessment of the levels of the candidates, whatever the version of **cima**.

This conversion takes into consideration the difficulty of the questions and allows to position the candidates within one of the six levels defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The global level mentioned on the certificate is a weighted average of the levels obtained for each skill, weighting is done in line with **cima** assessment objectives.

Each question has been tested and been subjected to in-depth psychometric analysis which eliminates any bias. Each question is then calibrated in order to evaluate the candidate’s linguistic and language skills at a correct level. **cima** is therefore a highly reliable measuring instrument.
Part II

How to take cima?
CIMA: The Exam Centers

CIMA can be taken at any of the authorized centers located around the world. Today, the existing centers include:
- The Arab World Institute, Paris, France
- IFAGE, Genève, Suisse
- Lycée Descartes, Rabat, Maroc
- Lycée Paul Valéry, Meknès, Maroc
- Lycée Lyautey, Casablanca, Maroc
- Lycée français d'Agadir, Agadir, Maroc
- Lycée Bonaparte, Doha, Qatar
- Lycée franco-qatarien Voltaire, Doha, Qatar
- Lycée Pierre-Mendès France, Tunis, Tunisie
- Lycée français de Barhein, Muharraq, Barhein
- Lycée français de Djeddah, Djeddah, Arabie Saoudite
- L'Institut français de Jordanie, Amman, Jordanie

Authorizations are regularly granted to new centers. By going to http://www.imarabe.org, you will get the full list.

The authorized center closest to your home can give you information on:
- Exam dates,
- The exam venue,
- How to register,
- The cost.

CIMA: The Registration Procedure

CIMA is designed for young adults (15 years of age and older) and adults. No prior diplomas or training are required to take CIMA.

To register to a CIMA session, contact your nearest exam center to find out the schedule for exam sessions. To register, you will need to provide a valid identity document.

You may take CIMA as many times as you like as long as there is a 60-day waiting period between each exam session.

In the event of circumstances beyond the candidate’s control, such as:
- Sickness or serious accident,
- Death of a close relation – spouse, partner, common-law spouse, parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, brother, sister, parent-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, half-brother, half-sister,
- Public transport strike,
- Change in dates of paid holiday imposed by the employer,
- Court summons, the registration fee is fully refunded provided the candidate presents a valid supporting document that the exam center will transfer to IMA.

**cima: candidates with disabilities**

The person in charge of the exam session is given clear instructions regarding the nature of every disability and will take the necessary measures to allow the candidate to sit the exam in the best possible conditions.

**cima: sitting the exam**

- **The group tests in listening and reading comprehension**

  On the day of the exam, you will be met by a supervisor who will ask for your ID and your exam notification, and have you sign the attendance sheet. He will ask you to leave your personal belongings, notably your phone, at the entrance of the room or at the cloakroom.

  When all the candidates are present in the test room, the supervisor will go over certain points such as:
  - the nature and format of the tests;
  - the total length of the tests;
  - the date results will be made available;
  - the penalties imposed in the case of irregularities;
  - the instructions on taking the tests.

  The supervisor will hand over your booklet and answer sheet and explain how to use it.

**ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

For best results during the comprehension tests:
- the tests are timed, so be careful to manage your time. The supervisor will give regular reminders on how much time is left till the end of the test;
- listen carefully to the audio part and to the questions, as you will hear them only once;
- read the questions carefully and use the time available to think about your answers, do not answer at random;
- do not spend too much time on a question if you are unsure of the answer; go on to the following question;
- be careful to the way the answer sheet must be filled in and follow closely the order of the questions;
- reply to the question directly on the answer sheet; do not write anything in the booklet.
• if you want to change your answer, use the 2nd line to mark your new answer:

![Marking new answer]

• **The group test in writing**

The test in listening and writing comprehension are followed by a break, after which the group test in writing will take place. When all the candidates are present in the test room, the supervisor will hand over the booklets and draft sheets. He will then explain that:

- your text must be written in the space provided on the booklet; rough drafts will not be marked;
- you must complete the exercises in the requested order: start with task 1, then go to task 2, and finish with task 3;
- grammar books and dictionaries, including electronic dictionaries, are not allowed.

• **The individual speaking test**

Before beginning the interview, the examiner will explain the test procedure and will remind you of the important points, including:

- that the interview is recorded in order to ensure the compulsory two assessments at IMA;
- the interview lasts 10 minutes maximum and is divided into 3 tasks, each of which is timed;
- tasks 1 and 3 are performed with no prior preparation, task 2 is performed with prior preparation while staying in front of the examiner.
- the examiner may interrupt you if the time has run out.

**cima: preparing for the exam**

Various types of works may help you in the future to make yourself familiar with the type of questions used in the exam. They respect the definitive form of the test that you will encounter on the day of the exam.

**cima: sample test questions**

These sample questions are of course not included in the exam.
• **Listening test**

**Example 1: instruction**

انظر إلى الصورة واختر الإجابة الصحيحة

Listen to the three suggestions. Select the one that corresponds to the picture and check the box on the answer sheet.

In the booklet you see: ________________________________

You hear: ________________________________

Check the box on the answer sheet:

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Q3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Example 2: instruction**

اسمع واختر الإجابة الصحيحة

Listen to the three suggestions. Select the one that corresponds to the question, and check the box on the answer sheet.

In the booklet you see: ________________________________

You hear: ________________________________

Check the box on the answer sheet:

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q13</td>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>Q15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>Q18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Reading test

Example 3: instruction
اقرأ النص ثم اختر الإجابة الصحيحة
Read the text. For each question, select the correct answer and check the box on the answer sheet.

In the booklet you read:

ماذا يربح المشترك؟
1. تذكرة حفلة
2. تذكرة سفر
3. تذكرة متحف

Example 4: instruction
اقرأ النص ثم اختر الإجابة الصحيحة
Read the text. For each question, select the correct answer and check the box on the answer sheet.

In the booklet you read:

ما هو موضوع الإعلان ؟
1. الزواج
2. السياحة
3. العمل
• Writing test

Sample task 1: writing creatively, starting from one or two images.

Sample task 2: reacting to a mail, a publication, a letter, a text message

أجب على الرسالة (SMS)
"مرحبا ريم، كيف كان أول يوم لك في العمل؟
احكي لي؟"

Sample task 3: describing or commenting a picture or a sentence that raises a daily life issue

"يمكننا أن نعيش بدون أن نأكل اللحوم، هذا ممكن وأفضل للصحة"
ما رأيك؟
• Speaking test

Sample task 2: interacting in daily life situations

Recommendations:
- The candidate plays a role
- Preparation time: 2 minutes
- The candidate is allowed to take notes during the preparation

الأستاذ ( ): موظف في مكتب تنظيم رحلات سفر
( المرشح ) : يريد أن يسافر إلى بلد عربي في عطلة لمدة شهر
(أسئلة حول الرحلة، السعر، السكن، نشاطات الرحلة...)

Sample task 3: expressing a preference and giving an opinion:

لا لزوم للدراسات الطويلة والشهادات العليا فالخبرة هي الأهم في العمل. ما رأيك؟

cima: frequently asked questions

Please refer to the FAQ in the cima pages of the IMA website:
https://www.imarabe.org/fr/activites/cours-arabe/cima

Penalties for fraud and falsification

IMA’s disciplinary commission imposes penalties on any candidate caught engaging in fraud, falsifying the exam or disrupting the normal functioning of the exam session. Depending on the type of fraud or falsification, the candidate’s exam or certificate, if issued, could be invalidated or the candidate could be barred from sitting the exam for 2 years.

Any candidate accused of cheating will be notified at home of the decision taken by IMA’s disciplinary commission.

Moreover, the misuse or reproduction of test booklets, answer sheets and audio material will result in legal proceedings as provided by the law (article L 122-4 of the intellectual property code – Intellectual property code of July 1, 1992). Non-observance of this clause constitutes a counterfeiting offense (article L 335-2 Intellectual property code).

The misuse or the reproduction of test material exposes the candidate to criminal or civil penalties.
Appendices

- The exam booklets of cima 1

- Listening and reading comprehension booklet
- Writing test booklet
- Speaking test instructions
- Speaking test tasks
• The answer sheet

Compréhension orale / Listening

Compréhension écrite / Reading

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Further information

- Contact IMA: cima@imarabe.org
- Visit our website: http://www.imarabe.org
  https://www.imarabe.org/fr/activites/cours-arabe/cima
- Contact your authorized center: http://www.imarabe.org

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