



Functional Skills Principal Assessor Report

Principal Assessor	Brenda Soar
Subject	English Reading and Writing
Level	1 and 2
Date	14.1.15

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future assessments. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

On the whole, candidates appear to remain engaged with the subject areas and topics covered in Reading at levels 1 and 2.

Centres appear to be preparing candidates for the reading assessments by giving them appropriate exam technique preparation. This has been evidenced by candidates leaving fewer blank questions in assessments.

Overall, candidates have a clear understanding of the national standards for Reading.

Candidates are performing well in both Reading and Writing.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates demonstrated effective use of source materials in the reading and writing tasks.

Successful candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the text and what was being asked of them in the questions. The stronger candidates were able to pick out salient parts of the documents and were able to use their own words to describe the meaning of the text. However, this is still an area which requires improvement with weaker candidates.

In the writing tasks at both levels 1 and 2, candidates demonstrated improvement in formatting letters and generally remembered to add in two addresses — sender and recipient — as well as the date.

Generally in the writing tasks, candidates were consistent in terms of ensuring that the length of their written work was appropriate.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading

Areas where candidates should be provided with more guidance:

- 1 **Meaning of text:** Teaching needs to continue to be given to candidates around this specific area, as performance can be weak at both levels. Generally, candidates do not think about how the text is conveyed and why. Some learners struggle to convey the meaning of text and language in their own words. Centres can support learners through more focused teaching and learning, practice and re-enforcement in this area.
- 2 **Exam technique:** Candidates should be taught to read and answer the questions. Sometimes candidates are losing marks for giving irrelevant information in their answers or for not answering questions at all. Candidate performance could be improved by providing formative reading assessments in conditions that match the summative

assessment. By doing this, learners will become more familiar with the SQA system and formats. Sample assessments can be found on the SQA website.

Writing

- 1 **Spelling, punctuation and grammar:** This is still an issue with weaker candidates. Incorrect use of commas, apostrophes and full stops is common. Frequent errors include: 'i' instead of 'l'; lack of capital letters for names of places; lack of capital letters in names of people; incorrect use of tense. Candidates should be encouraged to carry out a spell-check before completing their assessments as well as to proofread their responses. Correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar are an important part of the exam — they constitute a significant proportion of the allocated marks. It is important, therefore, that focused teaching takes place around spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- 2 **Headings, sub-headings and paragraphs:** there should be appropriate use of headings, sub-headings and paragraphs as necessary and required of the writing task. This is particularly pertinent in the most recent versions of papers where candidates are asked to write articles or reports. If writing an article or report, headings and sub-headings should be used, especially at level 2 where the use of sub-headings would be expected.
- 3 **Formatting:** This is still an issue with weaker candidates at levels 1 and 2. Examples of this include omitting the use of salutation and close: no close on emails; incorrect use of yours sincerely/yours faithfully. This is something that candidates can be taught whilst going through the learning process.
- 4 **Task brief:** Candidates need to read the task brief fully, ensuring that all parts of it are covered in their own writing, including the use of persuasion at level 2. Generally, and specifically with the more recent versions of papers, candidates have failed to use persuasion fully, if at all, in their writing. Centres can provide support by ensuring that persuasive writing is taught and that candidates get the opportunity to practise writing persuasively as much as possible.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Preparation and learning is still a priority for candidates undertaking English Reading and Writing tasks. It would seem that weaker candidates are not being prepared fully for the level being undertaken, or for the exam.

Candidates should be encouraged to practise writing effectively and to meet the task brief. They should be taught, and have ample opportunity to practise, correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Candidates should develop the habit of checking their work for accuracy by proofreading and using a spell-check facility. Candidates should undertake as many formative assessments as possible to bring them to the required level for presentation for summative assessment. There are sample assessments on the SQA website.

Candidates should also be familiar with using technology prior to the assessment taking place.