



Functional Skills External Assessment Report

Principal Assessor	Brenda Soar
Subject	English Reading and Writing
Level	1 and 2
Date	June 2014

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

The performance of candidates has been relatively consistent over the last three months within the reading assessments. Candidates would appear to engage well with the assessments, particularly at level 1.

Overall candidate performance in the writing task is weaker than the reading task, although the tasks and topics are accessible for the level.

New assessments for both reading and writing have been introduced over the last three months and these appear to be engaging to candidates and performing well.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates have effectively ascertained concerns, conclusions and given suggestions using the source materials within the writing tasks.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading

A number of candidates find the following areas demanding:

- ◆ Identifying meaning of text - this is an area of weakness at both levels. Generally, candidates do not consider how the text is conveyed and why.
- ◆ Another area that learners seem struggle with mastering is when asked to write about a piece of text in their own words to convey the meaning of an excerpt.
- ◆ Candidates sometimes misunderstand questions around presentation. Candidates can identify the use of bullet points or short sentences in given texts but then have difficulty in explaining how the features help the reader to understand the information being presented.
- ◆ Sometimes, learners lose marks because they draw on their own experience, rather than using the text to answer the question.
- ◆ Questions not attempted - some candidates put themselves at more of a disadvantage by not attempting questions.

Writing

- ◆ Spelling, punctuation and grammar errors are most commonly seen in weaker candidates. Errors with capital letters are also common, eg 'i' instead of 'I' as well as

lack of capital letters within names of places and people. This could be resolved to some extent by candidates proof reading their work before completing the assessment. Centres should encourage candidates to proof read as a matter of routine, and check responses carefully against the instructions of the question. Spelling, punctuation and grammar is an important part of the assessment as it carries a significant proportion of the allocated marks.

- ◆ Candidates often fail to use headings, sub headings and paragraphs as necessary, dependant on the type of writing task. If writing an article or report then headings and sub headings should be used. Generally sub headings are not used by candidates.
- ◆ Incorrect formatting – weaker candidates often fail to layout letters and emails appropriately. However, over the past three months there has been an improvement in this.
- ◆ Some candidates have difficulty ensuring their writing flows, eg failing to write a conclusion to their document when asked for advantages / concerns / disadvantages.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Writing

In preparation for the writing assessment learners need to understand the purpose of different types of functional tasks (e.g. formal letter, report, email) and should be given opportunities to practise writing in different forms for specific audiences and purposes. It is important that candidates are familiar with correct formatting and structure for these tasks, as well as appropriate tone.

Preparation and learning is hugely important for learners undertaking writing tasks and it would seem that some learners are not prepared fully for the level being undertaken in some cases. Centres should ensure that candidates have reached the required level of knowledge and skill before being entered for examinations. Spelling and grammar need to be of sufficient accuracy so that meaning is not impaired. Learners need to ensure that they avoid lapses in the use of appropriate punctuation. Common errors include missing possessive apostrophes and apostrophes used in plural nouns. Learners need to understand how to punctuate first person pronoun, I.

Candidates should be prepared for some of the formal elements of writing, such as the format of a letter and appropriate use of headings and sub-headings.

For level 2 writing, learners are expected to paragraph their response appropriately in order to demonstrate functionality and this is something which candidates should be prepared for.

Candidates need to remember to use their own words and not lift large quotations from the text. The text is intended as a reference point and candidates should be encouraged to use their own words as far as they can.

Candidates must read the task brief fully ensuring that all parts of it are covered within their own writing, including the appropriate number of words. Sometimes learners do not fulfil this requirement - their tasks are too brief and this does not allow markers to make a full assessment of the skills demonstrated, and therefore does not allow candidates to achieve all available marks.

Candidates need to ensure that the supporting text for the task is opened and read for reference. Some candidates fail to open the text and misread what is being asked in the question.

Reading

For reading, it is important that candidates read the questions carefully during assessments to ascertain exactly what is required of them. Marks are often lost for giving irrelevant information in their answers; for not giving the correct number of points; for not using their own words; or for forgetting to quote from the text. Candidates should be advised to pay attention to the number of marks available for a question, and therefore the length of response or number of points they are expected to provide.

Where the answer mechanism is multiple choice, learners should read each possible answer carefully, returning to the text to confirm their answers.

Where learners are asked to identify features of a text which show it is a particular text type, they must ensure that they do not simply produce generic responses that do not refer to the text in the reading assessment. It is important that they understand what is meant by features of a text.

When dealing with questions relating to the purpose of texts, learners need to link the purpose with the content of the text.

Learners need to understand different features of text, including language and layout features and make some reference to how the feature supports the meaning of the text. For example, if an image is used the learner needs to identify what the picture does.

Learners are advised to look at the actual text and identify features in that text. Answers must be precise. If learners are asked for examples, they should identify them in the text.

Candidates must also be made aware of the amount of time they will have to complete the assessment and time management can be enhanced through practice assessments. Candidates should be advised of the importance of time management, and the need to attempt all questions. Centres are strongly encouraged to utilise the practice assessments available on the SQA website on a formative basis, prior to candidates undertaking the final summative examination. Sample assessments also allow for learners to become familiar with the SQA online system and assessment formats.