



Certificate in ESOL for Work at NQF Level 1

Reading Sample Assessment

Outcome 1: Use different reading strategies to find and obtain information from work-related sources

Health and Safety: Back Pain

Read the text below and answer the questions on the pages that follow. You have 40 minutes to complete the task. You may use a monolingual dictionary.

Introduction

Back pain affects all industries, not just a few high-risk sectors. In 2003/04 an estimated 4.9 million working days (full day equivalent) were lost due to back pain caused or made worse by work.

- 1** Most of us have back pain at some time. Usually the pain is not due to anything serious. If treated correctly it can disappear within a matter of days or weeks. Many people manage the problem themselves without seeing their doctor. But those who experience severe pain, those worried about their back pain or those for whom the pain persists or suddenly gets worse, should see a doctor. When the back is painful, activity may be limited for a short time but that does not necessarily mean that continuing to stay active, or at work, will do any harm.
- 2** Most back pain does not have an identifiable cause. Worrying about back pain may make it worse and hold back recovery. It is natural to worry about the pain you are experiencing, but you should be assured that in most cases, pain is not due to anything serious and can be overcome by following simple advice.
- 3** Back pain can arise in many work situations. The exact cause is often unclear, but back pain is more common in tasks that involve: heavy manual labour, and handling tasks in heavy industry; manual handling in awkward places, like delivery work; repetitive tasks, such as manual packing of goods; sitting at a workstation for a long period of time if the workstation is not correctly arranged to fit the person; driving long distances or driving over rough ground. In addition, operating heavy equipment, such as an excavator, can lead to excessive jolting and jarring.

4 Physical activities that can aggravate back pain, or at least be more difficult when you have back pain include: bending over or crouching, including work at PCs (poor posture); lifting objects which are too heavy or bulky; pushing, pulling or dragging excessive loads; working beyond normal abilities and limits, and when physically overtired; using poor lifting techniques; stretching, twisting and reaching; remaining for prolonged periods in one position. As with many ill health conditions, some people are more susceptible to back pain than others.

5 In the past, the accepted response to back pain was bed rest. Evidence now shows that rest does not help recovery. Trying to reduce the pain by avoiding activity can lead to a much longer recovery time and possibly long-term back pain. It is much better to keep to normal levels of day-to-day activity, using simple pain relief if needed. Manipulative treatment can help in some cases. In particular, having a painful back need not necessarily stop anyone going to work. In fact, the longer someone is off work because of back pain the less likely they are to ever go back. A gradual return to work, with modified tasks, will often help recovery.

Adapted from Health & Safety Executive
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/backpain/index.htm>

Outcome 1

Section 1

Questions 1 – 5

Match the correct heading below with paragraphs 1 – 5 from the text. Write the paragraph number in the right-hand column. Two of the headings will not be used.

Causes of back pain in the workplace	
Resting your back	
Regaining health	
When to seek medical advice	
Things back pain sufferers should avoid	
The effects of heavy manual work	
Anxiety about back pain	

Section 2

Questions 6 – 10

Complete the gaps below, using no more than three words in each sentence.

6. It is not normally necessary to _____ if you have back pain.

7. Back pain is not only caused by heavy or awkward manual tasks, but also by performing _____.
8. Working with a computer can be bad for the back unless the screen, seat, etc. are adjusted to _____.
9. Back pain sufferers should try to avoid standing in _____ for a long time.
10. _____ can be counter-productive; it can actually prolong back pain.

Section 3

Questions 11 – 12

Choose the best answer and circle the letter.

11. The writer emphasises that back pain sufferers:
 - (a) should take time off work to make a full recovery
 - (b) are less likely to keep their jobs in the long term
 - (c) may not find it necessary or helpful to take time off
 - (d) should stick to their normal routine, even if painful
12. The writer's advice to a worker with back pain would be:
 - (a) find out what caused the back pain and avoid that activity altogether
 - (b) you should gradually go back to work, but don't overexert yourself
 - (c) avoid all physical activity till you know what caused the back pain
 - (d) back pain is usually not too serious, so you should return to work