Besides the past papers on the SQA website, where can I find older/other past papers?

SQA hold past exam papers from 2018 to 2023 for both National 5 and Higher ESOL here: https://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/findpastpaper.htm

In addition, there are specimen exam papers for National 5 ESOL here: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/47411.html

and Higher ESOL here: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/47905.html

We do not recommend using past papers from earlier than 2018 because the format of the exams has changed through the years and there are other differences in the content of the earlier papers that may potentially confuse candidates.

Regarding the importance of spelling in the reading paper, does wrong spelling automatically mean no marks are awarded?

It depends on the severity of the error and the difficulty of the question/vocabulary. Such errors are looked at on a case-by-case basis but spelling errors in the reading paper are marked more severely than in the listening paper, because candidates are often copying words directly from the text in the reading paper. Similarly, spelling may be looked at slightly more leniently at National 5 level than Higher level.

With the writing task for Higher Candidate 2 (in the Jan 2024 webinar), could you have lived with an '8' if a marker awarded it?

Although markers work within a tolerance of +/- 1 mark, this is an example of a response that markers would be directed to restrict to a mark of '7' due to profound weaknesses in grammar and spelling.

Can you clarify what 'some of the points' means when it says 'you may use some of the points below' in the question? Would that mean using 3 or 4 of them is sufficient?

Yes. There are even cases in which using two bullet points would be sufficient, it all depends on the level of detail and how well the task is answered within the points used. Candidates should practise answering questions (using past papers) to familiarise themselves with this style of question and should also be encouraged to add their own ideas where appropriate.

Do you deduct marks if a candidate goes well over the word count?

No, marks are not automatically deducted. Marks are not deducted from a writing task that goes over the suggested length if there is nothing redundant in it. The word count is a recommendation within which an answer could be well developed and cover everything required in detail. Writing significantly under the word count usually means the answer has not covered the required points. In the case of some candidates, writing excessive amounts can result in more errors occurring. Equally, some high scoring candidates write more than the recommended word count and it can all be relevant.

Are salutations/closings important in the email task?

If there is nothing at all at the start or end of the main body of text, then this would be considered when marking (under features of layout and style). Please note that candidates do not need to write to/from lines before they begin their email, nor are they expected to write subject headings/titles for their email.

A candidate in one of your example writing scripts added percentages and other statistics. Is this needed in an essay or report since the candidates are not able to do research?

This is not required in any of the SQA writing tasks. Statistics are not provided in the questions so there is no need for the candidate to invent them. It can often be an unnecessary distraction and will not result in the candidate gaining any additional marks.

What happens if a candidate misunderstands the essay question/report and writes about a different topic?

If it's a completely different topic the candidate will be awarded no more than '7' marks, and likely substantially below this – candidates cannot be allowed to memorise writing tasks on other topics and simply reproduce them; evidence of relevant engagement with the provided topic is required. If there is some engagement with the question with some tangential material, marks would be awarded for the parts that were relevant.