



Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills English: Reading

Series: 1 October-1 November 2019

Each learner's external assessment paper is marked by an Examiner and awarded a raw mark. During the awarding process, a combination of statistical analysis and professional judgement is used to establish the raw marks that represent the minimum required standard to achieve a Pass grade. As well as analysing performance on the assessment paper itself, performance standards and statistical outcomes in legacy qualifications and equivalent assessments (both within NCFE and, where available, across other awarding organisation) are considered to ensure Pass marks represent comparable standards.

Generic Overview

This qualification had only been live for four weeks before these learners took these papers. Given this very short preparation time it is not unsurprising that many learners found some of the subject criteria challenging.

Having said that, it was pleasing to note that the majority of learners seemed to engage with the texts and were able to use information in them to obtain relevant information.

At both levels good exam technique is vital. Learners should focus both on the text in the source documents as well as the specific wording of the instructions and questions. Many learners missed straightforward marks by not reading questions with sufficient care. Students should be reminded that this is a test of reading, and this includes the questions and instructions as well as the source documents.

Level 1

Successful learners gave complete and succinct answers using information found in the source documents. However, many learners were very unprepared for this assessment and they scored low marks.

There were some areas of concern with particular aspects of Reformed Functional Skills which are detailed below, together with specific advice for centres.

Learners failing or at borderline found questions based on higher order skills more challenging. Most learners were able to successfully answer questions based on these SoS statements:

- 9. Identify the main points, ideas and details in texts
- 11. Identify meanings in texts and distinguish between fact and opinion





- 13. Use reference materials and appropriate strategies for a range of purposes, including to find the meaning of words
- 16. Recognise vocabulary typically associated with specific types and purposes of texts
- 17. Read and understand a range of specialist words in context

However, questions based on these SoS statements were often answered incorrectly:

- 10. Compare information, ideas and opinions in different texts
- 12. Recognise that language and other textual features can be varied to suit different purposes and audience
- 14. Understand organisational and structural features and use them to locate relevant information
- 15. Infer from images meaning not explicit in the accompanying text
- 18. Use knowledge of punctuation to aid understanding of straightforward texts.

Advice to centres for Level 1 Reading

SoS 10

Learners must read the question carefully to ensure they are comparing information from the documents they are told to. In their answers they should make clear to which document they are referring. They should also consider information from all the documents the question requires of them. Comparison should be explicit. Learners scoring higher marks on these questions are able to compare both information and ideas backed up with evidence from the relevant texts.

SoS 12

It was apparent that many learners had not been taught about language features. At Level 1, learners can be expected to identify these in texts and to explain their effect on the reader. Language features might include: rule of three, rhetorical questions, irony, exaggeration and so on.

SoS 14

Answers to these questions were very mixed. Some learners simply did not understand what organisational features were. Others were able to identify but not explain why they had been used in the text. For example, when explaining why bullet points have been used in a document, the answer must directly relate to the text. So: *to list things* would not gain marks, whereas *'to list the instructions so the reader knows how to find the office'* would be awardable. Organisational features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on.

SoS 15

Many learners simply stated what the picture was in answer to these questions, which is incorrect. They need to relate the image to the text and answer the specific question asked.





SoS 18

Again, answers to these questions should be directly related to the texts and not a generic explanation of the use of punctuation marks. For example, in an explanation of the use of brackets: *To give extra detail that isn't needed*, would not gain a mark; whereas *To give additional information about the office opening hours* would be awardable.

Level 2

Successful learners gave complete and succinct answers using information found in the source documents. However, many learners were very unprepared for this assessment and they scored low marks. There are some more challenging requirements at RFS Reading Level 2 that will take some time to teach.

Most learners at Level 2 were able to use information in the texts to obtain some relevant information. However, there was a trend for weaker learners to use generic comments about organisational and textual features. Learners need to know what organisational features and to explain why the writer used them in direct relation to the text. Generic responses, such as: *'pictures make it stand out'*, or *'subheadings put things in sections'* won't gain marks. Learners should be able to explain why a particular image aids meaning in the context of the text they have read. Subheadings will have been used to allow the reader to find the sections (and these should be specified) quickly.

Learners failing or at borderline found questions based on higher order skills more challenging. Most learners were able to successfully answer questions based on these SoS statements:

- 11. Identify the different situations when the main points are sufficient and when it is important to have specific details.
- 13. Identify inferred and implied meanings in texts
- 15. Use a range of reference materials and appropriate resources for difference purpose
- 18. Follow an argument, identifying different points of view and distinguishing fact from opinion

However, questions based on the following SoS statements were often answered incorrectly or with less detail by those at borderline or failing:

- 12. Compare information, ideas and opinions in different texts, including how they are conveyed
- 14. Understand the relationship between textual features and devices and how they can be used to shape meaning
- 16. Understand organisational features and use them to locate relevant information in a range of straightforward and complex sources
- 17. Analyse texts, of varying levels of complexity, recognizing their use of vocabulary and identifying levels of formality and bias





- 19. Identify different styles of writing and writer's voice.

Advice to centres for Level 2 Reading

SoS 12

Learners must read the question carefully to ensure they are comparing information from the documents they are told to. In their answers they should make clear to which document they are referring. They should also consider information from all the documents the question requires of them. Comparison should be explicit. Learners scoring higher marks on these questions are able to compare both information and ideas backed up with evidence from the relevant texts.

SoS 14

Learners need to understand what textual features and devices and to explain how they are used specifically in the text they have read. Learners should be taught to tackle this in different ways. For example, they may be asked to identify two techniques used by a writer to: persuade/argue/ explain etc., or they may be given a section of text and asked to identify the textual feature or device. They might also be presented with a section of text and be asked why it has been used.

SoS 16

Most learners were able to say what organisational features were. Some were able to identify but not explain why they had been used in the text. For example, when explaining why bullet points have been used in a document, the answer must directly relate to the text. So: *to list things* would not gain marks, whereas *'to list the instructions so the reader knows how to find the office'* would be awardable. Organisational features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on.

SoS 17

This SoS is a new demand at RFS Level 2. Learners will usually be asked to analyse all three documents for a specific purpose: to say which is the least formal, most biased and so on. Learners must make a choice supported with information from the texts. For high marks, answers should give a detailed consideration of all three documents with examples. Many learners are simply outlining the content of each document in answer to this question. These sorts of responses are unlikely to contain any awardable content and are unlikely to gain marks.

SoS 19

This SoS is also a new demand at RFS Level 2. Learners need to be taught about styles of writing and should be able to use this information to identify different styles of writing.

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