

Functional Skills English Reading level 1 and level 2 Chief examiner report

On-screen assessments March 2022

Overview

It is pleasing to see that most learners are engaging with the texts in the reading assessments at both levels and are able to demonstrate good comprehension skills in the main. Some learners are providing very generic responses to questions that fail to demonstrate that their answers are in reference to the text read – see detail below. The most successful learners, at both levels, appear to be well-prepared for the higher tariff questions at the end of each paper.

Level 1

I will comment on performance in questions for each subject content statement.

- **09 Identify the main points, ideas and details in texts**
These questions test basic comprehension. We would expect to see learners achieving well in this area. There are 5 marks available in each paper. In the main, learners find these questions very straightforward. Only the weakest learners appear to struggle with these questions.
- **10 Compare information, ideas and opinions in different texts**
This is the final question in our level 1 papers, where learners are asked to compare information between the 2 documents they have read. Learners should make clear which document they are referring to in their answers. Many weaker learners provide a basic overview of the content of the documents instead of making a comparison.
- **11 Identify meanings and distinguish fact from opinion**
These are objective test questions where the learner must decide whether a given statement is a fact or an opinion, or true or false. Most learners achieve at least half of the available marks in these questions.
- **12 Recognise that language and other textual features can be varied to suit different audiences and purposes**
These questions can be asked in different ways. Sometimes learners have to give 2 quotations where the writer uses a specific type of language. One paper asked for examples of emotive language – many struggled with this and cited odd adjectives instead of the correct answers.
- **13 Use reference materials and appropriate strategies for a range of purposes, including to find the meaning of words**
Centres must ensure that learners have access to dictionaries during the assessment – we have noticed several learners writing: ‘I didn’t have access to a dictionary’. It is important that learners take heed of how the word is used in context.
- **14 Understand organisational and structural features and use them to locate relevant information**
Weaker learners are giving generic answers that are not rooted in the text – they may give a definition of how, for example, bullet points are used, but do not link their answer to the specific information in the bullet points in the text they have read. Learners must use the information from the source documents to ensure they are accessing all the available marks. Learners find captions especially challenging.
- **15 Infer from images meaning not explicit in the accompanying text**
Learners must safeguard against describing the content of the image. They will be asked what the image suggests to the reader that is not mentioned in the text, so their answer needs to be a true

inference, not a description.

- **16 Recognise vocabulary typically associated with specific types and purposes of texts**
Learners may be asked to find specific examples of vocabulary used for different purposes, or to identify the purpose of a text. Learners are generally successful in finding examples of instructive or persuasive language, but less successful when asked for descriptive or explanatory language.
- **17 Read and understand a range of specialist words in context**
Learners should use the context in the document to work out the meaning of a specialist word relevant to the context of the given assessment. Learners should not use their general knowledge to answer these questions and need to ensure they take note of the overall context to work out their answer.
- **18 Use knowledge of punctuation to aid understanding of straightforward texts**
Learners continue to provide generic explanations of punctuation marks instead of giving answers that directly relate to how they have been used in the texts. To gain marks, answers to these questions must be specific to the text. So, for example, saying that brackets have been used to provide extra information would not be enough to score marks; learners would need to say: 'Brackets have been used to provide extra information about [...]'. Learners should take care when the answer is about abbreviations – they need to ensure that their answer is correct. For example, if the abbreviation is given in the brackets, they need to explain that brackets have been used to show the shortened form of a specific phrase or term from the text.

Level 2

I will comment on performance in questions for each subject content statement.

- **11 Identify the different situations when the main points are sufficient and when it is important to have specific details**
Some questions ask learners to comment on the use of statistics, and many learners are tempted into giving generic responses about statistics and not commenting on the specifics of the text read.
- **12 Compare information, ideas and opinions in different texts, including how they are conveyed**
Most learners concentrate on the views and do not mention how they are conveyed. Some learners focus entirely on the views. This is an exam technique issue. Learners must ensure they have read the question and compare the information as instructed.
- **13 Identify inferred and implied meanings in texts**
Few learners are gaining all available marks. Many simply restate the information provided in the question.
- **14 Understand the relationship between textual features and devices and how they can be used to shape meaning**
It would appear that many learners remain very unprepared for these questions and have a lack of understanding about textual and language features. They are expected to be able to identify or provide examples of features such as rule of 3, repetition, rhetorical questions, simile, metaphor, hyperbole and so on.

- **15 Use a range of reference materials and appropriate resources for different purposes**

Learners need to read these questions very carefully in the context of the document. All words used will have multiple meanings, so understanding of the context is essential. For example, if the word in the document is used as a verb, then the definition must also be a verb. In questions that ask learners to find a word to replace the word as used in a sentence in the text, the word provided by the learner must make sense in that context. Learners should not give lengthy descriptions to these questions, as examiners are expecting a one-word answer.

- **16 Understand organisational features and use them to locate relevant information in a range of straightforward and complex sources**

Most learners are able to explain what organisational features are, though some very weak learners struggle with this. However, they often give a very generic description that does not link the response to the document in question.

- **17 Analyse texts of varying levels of complexity, recognising their use of vocabulary and identifying levels of formality and bias**

Learners have to analyse all 3 documents and say which is the most biased or formal – many learners simply recount what is in each document and comment on its format, rather than give a true analysis for how the language has been used to influence bias or formality. Some learners confuse bias when discussing the forum document. Learners need to give real reasons here. Examiners need more than ‘Document 1 is formal because it uses formal language’ – answers like this do not tell the examiner that the learner really understands what formality means. Similarly, claims of levels of formality based on the use of facts and opinions are often incorrect.

- **18 Follow an argument, identifying different points of view and distinguishing fact from opinion**

Many learners continue to confuse fact and opinion. At level 2, they are likely to be asked to provide an example of a fact and an opinion from one of the documents. Facts are generally given correctly, but learners are sometimes tempted to give an ‘I statement’ sentence as a fact. For example, if Anna says, ‘I had a great time’, this is a fact not an opinion.

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

Learners still find these questions very challenging. They need to be taught the difference between tone and style. They will be required to give 1 or 2 words that could be used to identify the tone or style of a text. These questions are sometimes multiple-choice. Learners must also take care to give a word that is a style or tone and not a verb. We are expecting to see ‘persuasive/informative/instructive/descriptive’ – ‘persuade/inform/instruct/describe’ are not styles and would not gain marks.

Concluding comments

Learners should be encouraged to answer all the questions. It was disappointing to see that some learners did not answer some of the multiple-choice or objective text questions, which is a real shame with online papers as it is always worth a guess.

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