

3850 Certificate in English

Chief Examiner's Report

June 2017

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Section 1 General Comments	
<p>The assessment covers Reading and Writing and candidates need to address both in order to gain a pass. At all stages, in the main, candidates performed better on the Reading section than the Writing section. On the whole, the majority of candidates completed or made an attempt to answer the Reading questions unlike the Writing section where a number of candidates made no attempt or wrote few words. Time management may continue to be an issue for some candidates. The topic for this series lent itself, though, to candidates being better equipped to talk about something they personally wanted and were able to do.</p> <p>The majority of candidates seemed to engage with the source documents but some experienced difficulties understanding the requirements for some questions, especially at Stage 2. It would appear that some candidates had been entered before their skills were sufficiently developed or were entered at an inappropriate stage; this seemed to be the case for a number of candidates at Stage 2.</p>	
Section 2 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Reading	
<p>Whilst candidates understood the source documents, at each stage, some candidates were challenged with specific types of questions. However, a reasonably high percentage of the Reading questions were answered correctly especially at Stage 1 and Stage 3.</p> <p>At all three stages candidates copied 'chunks' of text from the source documents to answer questions when a word, tick, phrase or simple sentence would have met the criteria. This resulted in candidates spending too much time on writing out answers to questions.</p> <p>At Stage 2 some candidates appeared to 'lift' text and put it in as an answer demonstrating a lack of understanding of the question. Unlike previous series this did not happen often at Stage 1 and Stage 3.</p>	
Stage 1 Reading	<p>Arranging words in alphabetical order is still proving difficult for some candidates where they are required to use first and second place letters to sequence the words correctly. However, when candidates were asked for a dictionary definition of a given word the majority were able to find the word and give a definition, correctly sequencing for this purpose.</p> <p>Candidates are required to complete a form and marks are awarded for Reading and Writing. Most candidates accurately wrote personal details on the form apart from their title, but found the punctuation and grammar challenging when writing the required sentence on the form.</p> <p>Candidates continue to find identifying errors of capitalisation and end of sentence punctuation challenging. As in previous years very few achieved full marks with a large percentage not receiving any marks for this question.</p> <p>Many candidates did not appear to be able to recognise or be aware of organisational features in a text. For example, title/heading, bullet points, paragraphs, different font size, bold font.</p> <p>Candidates were able to identify the two spelling errors with the majority of candidates writing the correct spellings.</p>

<p>Stage 2 Reading</p>	<p>Being able to recognise the formats of text is still proving to be a challenge for many candidates, for example, an article, a web page, report etc.</p> <p>This year, unlike previous series, candidates found identifying the main points a challenge which could be attributed to a lack of detailed reading skills; this is also reflected in other questions.</p> <p>Candidates were asked for a dictionary definition of a given word, most were able to find the word and give a definition, although some candidates still continue to make up their own definition.</p> <p>Most candidates were able to identify at least, two or three of the spelling errors and write them out correctly.</p> <p>Each year candidates are losing three marks from an inability to understand a question on organisational features/features of layout/features used etc. For example, title/heading/topic, bold text, colour, image and font size. Please refer to the mark scheme for more examples in this series. Many candidates did not attempt this question.</p> <p>The results for this series reflect a lack of understanding of some questions and the difficulty of then reading for detail and extracting relevant information. For example, question 4, 'What are the two advantages to employers of having dependable staff?' Question 13, 'According to the text, what does a covering letter give the writer an opportunity to do?' Question 14, 'What should be included in each part of a good covering letter?' These three questions, combined, attracted 7 marks. For each question less than 38% of candidates got the full marks.</p>
<p>Stage 3 Reading</p>	<p>Recognising opinions, providing a 'phrase', and identifying the correct information continue to prove challenging for some candidates.</p> <p>Candidates did not understand the terminology 'features of layout' and often referred to sentences or words used in the text rather than list organisational features.</p> <p>Candidates' performance in identifying spelling and grammatical options was good but few identified and corrected the punctuation errors with commas, apostrophes and end of sentence punctuation markers.</p> <p>It would appear that candidates skim or scan texts to find answers and have not read in detail, where appropriate, for some of the answers.</p> <p>A high percentage of candidates provided appropriate dictionary definitions but less had the skill to work out the appropriate synonym in context of the text.</p>
<p>Section 3 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Writing</p> <p>Candidate performance on the writing task varied from no response to well written text, albeit few made the required length at Stage 2 and Stage 3. At all three stages some candidates did not attempt the writing task or wrote very few words. In a few instances candidates wrote on different topics or did not follow the rubric. Some candidates produced well-written text and markers were impressed with the range of phrases and language used at Stage 3, which is reflected in the overall pass rate.</p>	

Stage 1 Writing	Plan	Very few candidates attempted a plan and when they did it was often a repeat of the bullet points with no expansion or additional detail.
	Detail	A large number of candidates followed the instructions and wrote about some bullet points but lost marks by not covering all three. The majority of the candidates wrote about the topic.
	Legible writing	There has been a very slight improvement in legibility but some candidates' writing was difficult to read.
	Length 75 words	Many of the candidates who attempted the writing met the minimum word count of 75. It is important that candidates write at sufficient length to demonstrate the skills at the appropriate stage.
	Paragraphs	Only a small percentage of candidates structured writing into paragraphs.
	Sequenced/chronological order	Despite the absence of a plan candidates were, on the whole, able to sequence writing.
	Spelling	Nearly half of the candidates were awarded full marks with the majority receiving at least 1 mark.
	Punctuation	Most candidates found end of sentence punctuation and capital letters a challenge. Many candidates used inappropriate capital letters in their writing.
	Grammar	The majority of candidates found grammar very challenging especially subject verb agreement with half the candidates being awarded 0 marks.
Stage 2 Writing		
Stage 2 Writing	Plan	Less than half the candidates who attempted the Writing section did not do a plan. In many instances where a plan was attempted, the bullet points were repeated with no expansion or additional detail.
	Detail	Candidates found this topic less challenging than in previous series but only a third achieved full marks for covering the three bullet points.
	Legible writing	In the main, writing is legible but some candidates' writing was difficult to read.
	Length 200 words	Even less candidates than previous years achieved the minimum word count of 200. This series 18% wrote 200 plus words as compared to 37% in 2016. Many candidates demonstrated good writing skills but failed to access full marks purely because of the word count. This subsequently had an effect on marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar.
	Paragraphs	Approximately half of the candidates organised writing in paragraphs.
	Format and structure	Candidates did extremely well with the letter format and structure. A mark was lost if the candidate ran out of time and was unable to write a valediction.
	Language	The tone was generally appropriate and the range of vocabulary, when used in the candidates' own words, was quite good.
	Logical sequence	Despite the lack of planning the majority of the candidates were able to put their writing in logical sequence.
	Sentence structure	The use of simple and compound sentences for just over half the candidates was reasonable but it was apparent that a high proportion of candidates this year did not have the requisite skills.

	Spelling	Many candidates achieved the level with some having spelling ability beyond the level.
	Punctuation	Candidates found end of sentence punctuation and capital letters a challenge. Many candidates used inappropriate capital letters in their writing. Fewer candidates achieved marks for punctuation than in 2016.
	Grammar	As in previous years the grammar was poor with the same common errors. These included frequent use of 's' at the end of words; incorrect subject verb agreement and use of tenses; omission of subject pronouns; omission of articles; omission of 'd' for past simple e.g. 'use to' for 'used to' and plurals.
	Proof reading	Candidates must confirm that they have proof read their writing by signing their name or indicating that they have proof read their work. Writing less than one page and not turning over meant that candidates did not read to the end of the paper thus missing the signature line. As a consequence a mark was lost, which may have made the difference between a pass and a fail. A lower percentage of candidates signed as compared to last year.
Stage 3 Writing	Plan	A quarter of candidates achieved the full two marks and more than half did not attempt or had little understanding of the requirements for a plan. This is reflected in the marks for logical sequence.
	Detail	This year 20% more candidates achieved the full three marks.
	Legible writing	Virtually every candidate's writing was legible. This is a great improvement since the first series.
	Length 300 words	Only 8% of candidates wrote 300 plus words compared to 18% in 2016. Many candidates demonstrated good writing skills but failed to access full marks purely because of the word count. This subsequently had an effect on marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar.
	Paragraphs	Paragraphs were evident in the majority of texts but less so than last year.
	Format and Structure	Candidates did extremely well with the letter format and structure. A mark was lost if the candidate ran out of time and was unable to write a valediction. However, there was a significant increase in the number of candidates who achieved the full 2 marks.
	Language	The use of language and the range of phrases have improved since last year.
	Clear and coherent	Generally the texts were clear and coherent and fit for purpose and a significant number of candidates were awarded the full three marks as compared to last year.
	Logical sequence	If candidates produced a plan and followed the bullet points, writing was sequenced logically.
	Sentence structures	More candidates attempted complex sentences in their writing with varying degrees of success. However, more candidates achieved the full three marks than in previous years.
	Spelling	Most candidates achieved at least one mark for spelling but fewer achieved two or three marks than in 2016.
	Punctuation	The lack of use of capitals for proper nouns and inappropriate use of capitals in other parts of the text meant lower marks for punctuation. Commas and apostrophes also affected the

		marks for punctuation. Overall the results for this strand were poorer than in 2016.
	Grammar	Grammar still remains a weak area with the same common errors. These included frequent use of `s' at the end of words; incorrect subject verb agreement and use of tenses; omission of subject pronouns; omission of articles; omission of `d' for past simple e.g. `use to' for `used to' and plurals.
	Proof reading	A high percentage of candidates did sign their name but fewer than 2016. If a candidate runs out of time, and despite the reminder to turn the page over, doesn't do this then they do not see the request for a signature. A simple mark to forfeit.

Section 4 Areas of good performance

Those candidates who achieved a pass typically wrote at sufficient length (not necessarily the instructed length) and demonstrated:

- the skills to select the appropriate words, phrases or sentence(s) without writing out the question again or 'lifting' large pieces of text
- understood the main purpose of the text
- identified the correct format of a text
- considered formatting and structuring of documents
- an appropriate use of language
- the ability to cover the relevant detail required
- reasonably accurate spelling for the level at each level
- legibility of hand writing

Section 5 Areas for development

1. Candidates need to be aware of how to identify the main points, main events of a text, when to use skimming, scanning and detailed reading to locate answers and to be able to understand and recognise organisational features/features of layout/features in texts.
2. Candidates need to be aware of how to plan their writing, to achieve the mark(s) for the plan and how this can help with the logical sequencing of their writing. Candidates should be encouraged to make use of the space provided for this.
3. All candidates could achieve more marks by including in their writing all the bullet points in the question brief.
4. Candidates should be secure in their knowledge of grammar and use of punctuation at the appropriate stage before being entered into the exam. Correct grammar and punctuation are required irrespective of the type of document being written.
5. Proof-reading of documents, in the Writing section, would help many candidates achieve higher marks and this could make the difference between a pass and a fail.
6. Time management appeared to be an issue for candidates who wrote little text but completed the majority of the reading questions. Many candidates copied paragraphs or sentences from source documents or reiterated the question before giving an answer in the Reading section. The majority of the time a word, words, phrase or one sentence is sufficient to achieve the mark(s).

Section 6 Recommendations and advice for centres

1. Preparation of candidates is essential. Candidates should be given the opportunity to complete practice papers or centre-devised exercises that replicate the demands of the live examination

materials. Candidates need to be familiar with the requirements of the Reading paper and the length of written text.

2. Teachers should be familiar with the demands of all three stages as all lower stages are subsumed into the stage above. It is important that candidates are entered at the stage appropriate to their level of skills.

3. Candidates should have access to a dictionary and additional writing paper when requested.

4. Candidates need to be aware that writing the whole text, in the Writing section, in capital letters will be penalised in punctuation.

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