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# 4800-011

# Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 1

## Chief Examiner’s report – October 2019

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## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4800-011 Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 1.

## 2 Overall Performance

This report covers the period from April 2019 to October 2019. However, centres are encouraged to review previous Chief Examiner's reports, as the comments and advice still apply.

There have been improvements in many areas and candidates are still performing particularly well in the writing section, showing good teaching, preparation and practice. However, some candidates do struggle due to the following main reasons:

In the reading section:

1. Being entered for the exam before sufficient learning has taken place / lack of exam preparation / unfamiliarity with the question types
2. Not reading questions carefully
3. Not reading source documents carefully enough to be able to provide detailed information
4. Not providing enough responses

In the writing section:

1. Poor spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Not structuring responses appropriately for the task set
3. Not providing details asked for in the question
4. Spending too much time on the first writing question, resulting in a rushed and much poorer response to the second question

Some unsuccessful candidates showed a strong performance in one section, but were unprepared for the other.

### Areas of good performance

In the reading section:

Successful candidates gained marks across all the assessment criteria (a-d), and they showed a familiarity with the different question types. In particular, candidates performed well when asked to identify layout techniques and organisational features in texts. They were able to understand and locate the main points of a document, including how these are presented to the reader, as well as pick out specific details from the text.

Crucially, successful candidates read questions carefully and noted the number of responses required. For example, if asked for two facts or pieces of evidence, they did not answer with only one. Many more candidates have been underlining key words in the questions, such as 'who', 'why' and 'how', as well as the number of responses required. It is encouraging to see that candidates who take this approach seem to interpret questions better and give an appropriate level of detail/number of responses in their answer.

In the writing section:

Many candidates performed significantly better in the writing section compared to the reading section. Successful candidates were able to write a logical, clear and coherent response that included all the relevant detail listed in the question. Strong candidates were familiar with the structure of different documents, including letters, emails, speeches and articles, and were able to use language appropriate for purpose and audience.

Successful candidates also had a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar. They were able to punctuate the beginnings and ends of sentences correctly. Where more complex words were included in the question brief, they spelled these correctly in their response.

Overall:

Successful candidates answered most or all of the questions on the paper. This suggests they were well prepared for the exam, including good time management techniques.

**Areas for development**

Overall:

1. Preparation for both sections

Some unsuccessful candidates appeared to have prepared for only the reading or writing section of the exam. They showed a strong performance in one area and a much weaker performance in the other, leading to an overall mark that was too low to pass. It is important to remember that even if full marks are achieved in one section of the paper, a candidate cannot pass without gaining marks in both sections.

2. Checking and proofreading answers

Most candidates would benefit from checking and proofreading their responses in both sections of the paper. In the case of some borderline but unsuccessful candidates, the extra two or three marks this may afford would mean the difference between a pass and fail.

In the reading section:

1. Familiarity with question types

Some unsuccessful candidates did not appear to be familiar with the types of questions they may be asked and the kinds of answers expected. It is essential to ensure that candidates are adequately prepared for the exam prior to being entered. Making use of the practice assessments on the City & Guilds website is strongly recommended. However, also see point 2 below.

2. Reading the question carefully

Many candidates simply did not read questions properly. In some cases, it appeared that candidates were expecting certain questions and answered accordingly, without taking the time to read and consider what that particular question was asking. While it is recommended that candidates become familiar with the question types, it is also important to ensure they do not expect questions to be asked in the exact ways they are presented on the practice papers, or to anticipate what the question will ask before fully reading it.

Not reading the question carefully can also result in candidates not giving enough responses or not providing relevant information in their answers. The number of responses required will always be stated in the question (e.g. Find **four**…) and so careful reading should avoid careless loss of marks, leading to a better performance on all questions.

Candidates may benefit from underlining important instructions in the question before attempting an answer, particularly key words such as ‘why’, ‘how’, ‘who’, and the number of responses required.

3. Reading the source documents carefully

Some candidates struggled with questions that require a more detailed reading of source documents. While candidates may pick up the main points and ideas in a text from one brief read or skim, questions that ask for specific details will require more careful reading. It should also be noted that not all answers to a question that asks for several responses will necessarily be contained in one section or within successive sentences of the source material. Answers are often spread throughout the document and may be located in subheadings, tabs, text boxes and other features that are not part of the main text.

4. Utilising information and identifying suitable responses (criteria c and d)

Some candidates had difficulty with questions that asked what the reader can or should do in response to the information provided in the source documents, such as who can be contacted and how, or how further information may be accessed. Teaching and preparation should ensure candidates can respond to texts by looking for details such as phone numbers and addresses, links and other ways to access additional information, as well as suggestions for further action.

5. Using the information provided in the source documents rather than own knowledge and experience

Some candidates answered questions on topics they were familiar with by drawing on their own knowledge rather than using the source documents. All questions in the reading section are based on the information provided in the source documents. Answers should be drawn from the text rather than from the candidate’s own experience of the subject. Even accurate information cannot be given marks if it is not found in the provided material.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Candidates should be aware that correct punctuation (as well as spelling and grammar) is required in all responses, including speeches and emails to friends.

Candidates should be able to punctuate the beginnings and ends of sentences correctly. Weaker candidates often misused or completely omitted full stops. Capital letters were also used incorrectly, including confusion over common and proper nouns. Correct use of uppercase and lowercase letters is required at both levels. Candidates who write their whole answer in capital letters, or who fail to distinguish between capital and lowercase letters with their handwriting, will lose a significant number of punctuation marks.

2. Poor use of language

Many unsuccessful candidates struggled with language, including unfamiliarity with the meanings of certain words, using common expressions incorrectly, use of inappropriate slang, excessive use of ‘and’ and ‘also’ within one sentence or paragraph, clumsy or confusing phrasing, and general lack of clarity.

Some candidates demonstrated an inability to use language appropriate for intended audience. For example, a formal letter or email should not begin with ‘Hi John’. As at least one of the writing tasks requires a formal response, candidates should be prepared for writing with a formal tone.

3. Common spelling and grammar errors

Certain common errors continued to be seen regularly. These included ‘alot’, ‘writting’, ‘aswell’, ‘collage’ instead of ‘college’, using ‘of’ instead of ‘have’ (could of, would of, etc), and ‘yous’/‘you’se’/‘use’ instead of ‘you’. Common homophone errors were also seen often, including here/hear, there/they’re/their, to/too/two, were/where, etc. Learning and preparation that takes into account these common issues should help candidates to avoid repeated mistakes throughout their response that can result in lost marks. Dedicating time at the end to checking answers is another strategy that may help with these common errors.

4. Relevant detail

Many candidates omitted important information or did not address all the points they were asked to cover in the task. At level 1, the required detail is listed in bullet points. For example, a candidate may be asked to explain why they are suited for a specific role and what they will do in this role. Only covering why they feel they are suited for the role would not be addressing this task in full. Writing an application for an entirely different job would also be ignoring the task that has been set. Both of these omissions would not allow the candidate to access the full amount of marks for this writing task.

Candidates should read questions carefully to ensure they are aware of all the information they need to include in their response. They should also consider the purpose of the text they have been asked to produce; for example, if they are writing an email asking people to attend an event, they should include details of when and where that event will take place. If they are asking for a reply, they should include contact details for this. N.B. Candidates should be aware that they do not have to include their own name, address, email or any other personal details in their response, but can include fake details instead, e.g. John Smith, Fake Street, Fake Town, FT6 1FT.

5. Format and structure

Some candidates still struggled to format and structure their responses correctly. Some simply wrote a block of text for their answer, with little or no attempt to structure the response with paragraphs or a beginning, middle and end. Others produced responses that barely looked like the document they were asked to write, such as letters without addresses or opening and closing salutations. It is important candidates are familiar with the correct format and structure of letters, emails, speeches and articles. Candidates should understand how to present their responses in a structured, logical sequence, making use of paragraphs, with a clear beginning, middle and conclusion where appropriate.

6. Writing too much or too little

There are two writing questions on the paper, one worth 6 marks and one worth 9 marks. Candidates should aim to write 80-120 words on the ‘short’ question and 120-140 words on the ‘long’ question. Responses that are too short are penalised across certain categories. Many weaker candidates either did not provide a long enough response to demonstrate an ability to write well, or wrote too much and consequently ran out of time or made a greater number of errors. Very long answers tended to lose coherence. Very short answers did not provide adequate detail.

7. Only answering one of the writing questions

Candidates who only answer one writing question cannot gain any marks on the unanswered question, and they are also penalised across spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is therefore extremely difficult to pass if only one writing question is attempted. Teaching and preparation should ensure that candidates can write two responses in the set amount of time. Candidates should be advised that if they are running out of time, a brief summary or bullet point answer is preferable to no answer at all. This can mean the difference between a pass and a fail.

## 3 Recommendations/Advice for centres

1. Candidates should not be entered for the exam before adequate learning and practice has taken place.

2. Familiarity with the question types is essential. Making use of the sample papers on the City & Guilds website is strongly recommended.

3. As the assessment contains both reading and writing sections and involves a substantial amount of reading of source documents and questions, practice and preparation should include time management techniques.

4. Candidates should be aware that in the **reading** section they do not need to answer in complete sentences or to repeat the stem of the question in their answer (although answers do need to be legible). This can help with managing time during the exam.

5. It is essential that candidates read all questions fully and consider what is being asked of them before attempting to answer. This may involve underlining important instructions on the question paper, particularly key words such as ‘why’, ‘how’, ‘who’, and any detail required in the writing tasks. It is encouraging to see more candidates taking this approach, and most who do are able to interpret the question better.

6. Many candidates would strongly benefit from checking their finished responses in both the reading and writing sections.

7. As part of the learning process, candidates should be exposed to all types of source documents, including websites, articles, formal letters and emails, leaflets, promotional material and advertising, amongst others. Any of these may be encountered as source documents in the reading section.

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