

4800-021

Essential Skills Northern Ireland

**Communication Level 2 – Reading and Writing
External Assessment**

Chief Examiner's report – April 2017

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4800-021 Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 2 – Reading and Writing external assessment.

2 Overall Performance

This report covers the period from January 2017 to April 2017.

Pass rates for Communication are good, with strong performances often shown in the writing questions, though a significant number of candidates are failing due to the following main reasons:

In the reading section:

1. Being entered for the exam before sufficient learning has taken place.
2. Unfamiliarity with the type of questions that may be asked.
3. Not reading the questions properly.
4. Not providing enough information or responses in the answers.

In the writing section:

1. Poor use of spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Poor use of language, including language that is inappropriate for purpose and audience.
3. Lack of adequate format and structure, or use of format and structure that is inappropriate for purpose and audience.

Areas of good performance

In the reading section:

Successful candidates generally gained marks across all of the assessment criteria (a-e), demonstrating a clear understanding of the questions being asked and the types of responses expected. This suggests these candidates received good teaching and preparation before the assessment.

A common ability shown by most successful candidates was a recognition of the number of responses needed for each question. Questions generally state the number of responses expected, but where this is not the case, stronger candidates were able to provide a sufficient amount of responses by noting the number of marks available for the question. Stronger candidates were also able to summarise information adequately in order to fully answer the question.

In particular, strong candidates were able to distinguish between language and layout techniques. They could identify several language techniques in the source documents that had been used by the authors to communicate their message more effectively.

Strong candidates demonstrated a good understanding of bias and point of view.

Summarising information from different source documents and being able to compare and contrast the messages and points of view found within were also areas where stronger candidates performed well.

In the writing section:

Candidates generally responded well to the scenarios and writing tasks, with stronger candidates clearly demonstrating an ability to suit language, style, format and structure to purpose and audience. Strong candidates were able to write in a consistent tone that was appropriate for the task set, and they understood when different levels of formality were required.

Successful candidates showed an ability to write persuasively when needed, presenting information and arguments in a logical order and a clear and coherent style. Paragraphs were consistently used correctly, and a range of sentence structures were employed to communicate clearly and effectively.

Stronger candidates also demonstrated a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Overall:

Successful candidates answered most or all of the questions on the paper, suggesting good preparation and an ability to allocate the right amount of time to each question and for checking.

Areas for development

In the reading section:

1. Commenting on how meaning is conveyed

Weaker candidates had difficulty answering questions that asked for language or layout techniques. Often, candidates gave layout techniques when asked for language techniques, or vice versa. This may be due to unfamiliarity with this type of question, or a failure to read the question properly. Candidates also commonly provided explanations of the techniques when they were asked to provide examples from the document, and tended to give fewer responses than the question explicitly asked for.

Teaching and preparation should aim to ensure that candidates can identify examples of language techniques in different types of document, and that they have a clear understanding of the differences between language and layout.

2. Comparing and contrasting different ideas and points of view

Weaker candidates struggled to identify and to compare and/or contrast different points of view. Candidates often listed evidence from one or both sources but failed to compare or contrast these. Candidates that did attempt to compare or contrast the documents often summarised one of the arguments or points of view incorrectly, leading to an incorrect comparison.

Teaching and preparation should aim to ensure candidates can identify point of view and summarise ideas and arguments from different sources. Candidates should be able to find

similarities and differences in the ideas found in separate documents or within one document. A good response will make use of certain words that demonstrate an understanding of the requirement to compare or contrast information, such as 'whereas', 'on the one hand', 'in contrast', 'however', 'but', 'neither', 'both', 'similarly', etc.

3. Detecting biased statements

Weaker candidates often struggled to detect bias and to identify biased statements within a text. Candidates should be able to understand when a statement that may be presented as fact is actually only the author's opinion.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Weaker candidates often lost marks due to punctuation errors, with comma errors the most common. Teaching and preparation should cover when commas are needed in sentences and that they should not be used in place of full stops (comma splicing). Candidates should also take care with handwriting, as poorly formed letters may appear to be upper case when lower case is required, and vice versa.

2. Grammar and language

Candidates for whom English is a second language often made a greater number of grammar and language errors, typically including omitted words, incorrect use of language, omitted or incorrect use of pronouns, omitted articles, incorrect subject-verb agreement and general lack of clarity.

3. Inappropriate tone

Weaker candidates often wrote in a tone that was unsuited to audience and purpose. Candidates should pay attention to the task they have been set and be able to identify the correct tone and language to use when writing to/for a specific person or audience. Certain tasks will require formal writing, so candidates should be familiar with what this requires.

4. Losing the trail of a sentence

Candidates should be able to write using a variety of sentence lengths and structures, including complex sentences. Weaker candidates often attempted to use complex sentences but left the sentence unfinished. (E.g. If you could come to the charity event that we are organising, and bring cakes to sell.)

5. Format and structure

Weaker candidates often gave responses that had little or no structure, or that did not match format and layout to audience and purpose. Teaching and preparation should ensure candidates are familiar with the correct format and structure of different documents, including letters, emails, articles and speeches. Candidates should understand how to present information and arguments in a structured, logical sequence, 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 100-120 words on the 'short' question and 140-200 words on the 'long' question. Responses that are too short are penalised across certain categories. Many weaker candidates either did not write enough to demonstrate an ability to write well, or wrote too much and so ran out of time or made more errors. Very long answers often lost conciseness and coherence.

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.

8. Common errors

Certain errors were made more commonly than others; these include using 'of' instead of 'have' (e.g. should of, would of), 'attend to' when the candidate should have written 'attend' (e.g. I would like you to attend to a meeting), 'now a days' instead of 'nowadays', 'collage' instead of 'college', common homophone errors (their/they're/there, to/too/two, here/hear, etc), and 'yous' or 'use' instead of 'you'.

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, it is recommended that practice and preparation include time management techniques.
4. Most questions explicitly tell the candidate how many responses are required. Where this is not the case, candidates should always take note of the number of marks available for the question. If a question asks the candidate to identify biased phrases, for example, and there are five marks available, candidates should look for five biased phrases.
5. It is important that candidates are taught to read all questions fully and understand what is being asked of them before attempting to answer. Marks can easily be lost due to not reading questions carefully.
6. Many candidates would strongly benefit from checking and proof reading their finished responses.
7. As part of the learning process, candidates should be exposed to all types of source documents, including websites, articles, business reports, formal letters and emails, leaflets, promotional material and advertising, amongst others.

4 Additional information

Centres should be aware that pass marks may vary from paper to paper as a result of an awarding process undertaken by City & Guilds. Any difference in pass marks reflects the perceived and actual difference in demand of the exam papers, including the source materials and the questions themselves. Therefore, it is possible that two candidates with the same score may have different overall results (pass or fail) if they have taken different versions of papers.

For further information about the Level 2 coverage and range, please refer to the qualification specifications and assessment criteria (section 5 of our **Essential Skills qualifications handbook**). These criteria are common to all awarding organisations' Essential Skills qualifications, and were developed by CCEA Regulation.

Whilst the technical content and demand of the Essential Skills qualifications align with the **Department for the Economy (DfE) Essential Skills Standards and Curriculum**, it is important to bear in mind that the qualifications explicitly require candidates to demonstrate purposeful application of their literacy skills.

Our Essential Skills qualifications handbook and the DfE Essential Skills Standards and Curriculum document can both be accessed from our [Essential Skills \(4800\) qualification documents webpage](#).

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