

English for Business Communications (EBC) (8959)

Chief Examiner report (2021)

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For external use



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Contents

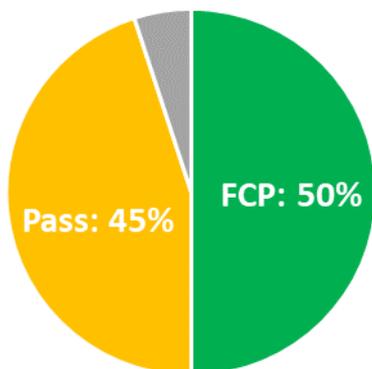
1. General Observations.....	2
1.1. Areas of good performance	3
1.2. Areas for development.....	4
1.3. Recommendations.....	4
1.4. Tips.....	6
1.5. Additional comments	7
1.6. Overall Descriptors	7

1. General Observations

It was pleasing to see an overall improvement in performance this year, especially at Level 1, in which 95% of candidates passed. The statistics for Level 2 remained similar, although again there was an increase in passes (65%) and at Level 3, whilst no candidates achieved First Class Pass, 42% passed, a marked improvement on the previous two years.

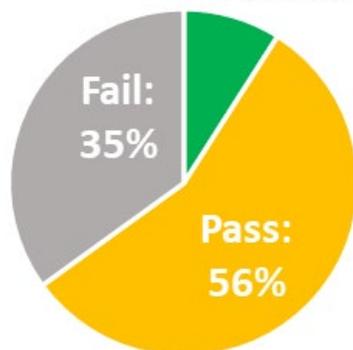
EBC Level 1 2021

Fail: 5%

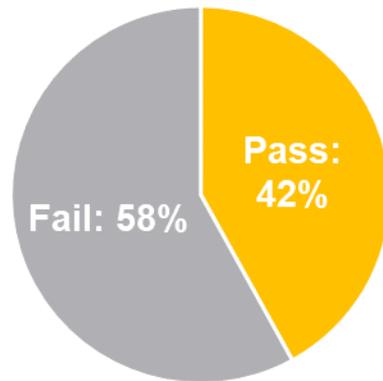


EBC Level 2 2021

FCP: 9%



EBC Level 3 2021



1.1. Areas of good performance

At all three levels, the letters and memoranda continue to achieve the highest marks, and most candidates are able to demonstrate that they understand about the layout of these methods of communication, although many continue to omit a reference. Checking that the salutations and complimentary closes are consistent, and following the instructions given, would also often increase the marks awarded for layout. The majority of Level 1 candidates use the standard letter form provided for Task 4 in a competent manner, and high marks are often also achieved on this task.

Spelling and punctuation tends to be good across all three levels, and has improved over the last few years. The candidates who pass include the majority of the information requested, and attempt to do so in a logical order.

Most candidates complete the whole paper, demonstrating good time management skills

1.2. Areas for development

Most candidates seem to have practised for the exams and understand the conventions of business communications, but this year those who failed at Levels 2 and 3 tended to do so because their command of English language was not sufficiently developed. Some scripts contained several grammatical errors that impeded comprehension. It was disappointing to note fewer word-processed entries again this year. As this is a business exam, candidates should be encouraged to use as much information technology as is available to them. Candidates are permitted to use Grammar and Spellcheck facilities and online dictionaries, etc, which could help them present better pieces of business communication.

At Levels 2 and 3, it is also expected that consideration be given to tone, yet some candidates continued to write, 'Loads of love' or something similar as a complimentary close. Candidates must show an awareness of the intended audience and tailor the information they are using appropriately, using suitable business language. It should be noted that at Level 3, it is necessary to glean information from previous tasks. Invitations frequently continue to omit a venue, time or date, although these are readily available in other parts of the paper and candidates are expected to accumulate information as they work through the tasks and include relevant information where appropriate. Candidates are also permitted to use calendars in the examination and should ensure that they give correct dates e.g. 'next Thursday' is not acceptable as a date.

At Level 3, an Analytical Report is expected, and this may well require certain calculations before the necessary information can be obtained from the prompts. This is why candidates are allowed the use of a calculator, and they should take full advantage of this. Analytical skills are being tested in this task and candidates are therefore expected to demonstrate their analytical, in addition to their language, skills by commenting on the figures, as requested by the prompts. The final tasks, especially the Level 3 report, often appear to have been rushed. Greater attention to word limits and time management could improve the grades of a considerable number of candidates at Level 3.

Candidates should ensure they allow sufficient time to read through each task after completing it and correct any errors they have made.

1.3. Recommendations

Centres should check their candidates' abilities against the descriptors below to ensure that they are being entered for the correct level of exam. For example, at Level 3, candidates need to be able to understand with ease virtually everything read, summarise information from different

sources to reconstruct arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. They need to express themselves spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning, even in more complex situations.

Candidates should be encouraged to make use of computers to Word process their answers, and should ensure that they are competent typists and can use the Spell Check and Grammar Check facilities effectively, in addition to online calendars, calculators, dictionaries etc.

Candidates need to understand some basic business conventions e.g. if asking for a quotation for printer paper, it would be poor business practice to state what the company is currently paying for printer paper. Candidates for these exams do need to have a basic understanding of business procedures and practices, in addition to being able to write in an appropriate style, varying this to suit different pieces of correspondence.

Candidates should use the reading time at the beginning to full advantage and ensure that they understand the scenario and are fully aware of their 'role' in the company. They should also take time to read each task before starting to write. It is important to understand who is sending each piece of communication, to whom it is being sent, and why, and then to write what is required, bearing in mind any word restrictions and adopting an appropriate tone. These examinations test comprehension as well as writing, and it is imperative that candidates understand the purpose and intended audience of each piece of communication. Candidates should make a note of all relevant points to be included and put them into a sensible order before attempting a task.

When candidates are practising for these examinations, it would be helpful to use similar 'Scenarios'. It may also be beneficial to teach some typical business phrases e.g. 'In response to your letter of...', 'We await your early reply...' etc and discuss when phrases are appropriate, and how to decide on the tone of a piece of communication before starting to write. Short, simple, concise sentences are ideal for business correspondence and avoid candidates making unnecessary grammatical errors. It would also be helpful to candidates if, when practising, they were given a maximum number of words to use. This might help them concentrate on being precise and including only necessary, relevant information in a logical order. It would also be helpful to ensure candidates can use either physical or online calendars, calculators and dictionaries.

Time management is an important element of these examinations and so candidates should ensure they allow sufficient time for each task. Learning to write concisely is also useful in this respect.

Obviously, all candidates should allow sufficient time to read over each task to ensure it makes sense, is grammatically correct and to correct any spelling and/or punctuation errors.

1.4. Tips

- If possible, use a word processor and take full advantage of the grammar and spell check facilities.
- Improve your knowledge of the business world and the types of communication used. Make sure you understand different types of business correspondence (e.g. orders, quotations, delivery notes, graphs and charts) and cannot only read the information they contain but also, at Level 3, analyse and comment on it. Practise doing this before the exam.
- Ensure that you have access (either physical or online) to a:
 - calendar
 - dictionary
 - calculator
- Read the whole paper very carefully before starting to write.
- Use your dictionary to check any vocabulary of which you are unsure.
- Make yourself a rough 'name plate' before starting to write, to remind yourself of your position within the company, the name of the company, what the company does, and who your 'boss' is. Keep this in front of you throughout the examination and keep referring to it, bearing in mind how it will affect the tone you adopt, especially at Levels 2 and 3.
- Read each question very carefully, and then write your answer as concisely as possible, keeping to any word limits.
- Write clearly, so that your answer can be understood by the person marking it. Leave left and right-hand margins.
- Do the tasks in order and make sure you allow sufficient time to finish the paper.
- Start each task on a new page of the answer booklet.
- Write full sentences and check tenses are consistent.
- Try to use phrases you know are up-to-date and appropriate in modern business correspondence, and are appropriate to the tone of the task.
- Check grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- It is not necessary to leave more than two or three lines between the complimentary close and designation.
- It is not necessary to draw the company's logo or decorate correspondence in any way.
- Check all numbers and monetary values e.g. do not confuse £ with \$. Also check the axis labels on graphs e.g. if values given in thousands, make sure you take this into account.
- Re-read all work at the end of the examination and check that it makes sense.

1.5. Additional comments

The candidates who obtain the highest marks are often those who write the least but include all the necessary information in a concise and business-like manner.

Sample papers are available on the City & Guilds website and should be used for practice before the examinations. The Qualification Handbook also includes sample 'answers', which provide guidance on what is expected for each task: www.cityandguilds.com/qualifications-and-apprenticeships/international-english/business-english/8959-english-for-business-communications-ebc#tab=documents

1.6. Overall Descriptors

Level 1	<p>Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance such as basic personal and business information, shopping, local geography, employment, education, training and social roles.</p> <p>Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a direct exchange of information, feelings and opinions on familiar and routine matters.</p> <p>Can engage in discussion to establish shared understanding about familiar topics.</p> <p>Can read, understand and obtain information from short documents, familiar sources, signs and symbols.</p> <p>Can write to communicate with some awareness of the intended audience.</p>
Level 2	<p>Can understand the main ideas of complex communication on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation.</p> <p>Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.</p> <p>Can adapt to take account of the reader(s), the context and the medium.</p> <p>Can engage in discussion in familiar and unfamiliar situations making clear and relevant contributions.</p> <p>Can obtain information from different sources.</p>

	<p>Can communicate clearly and in detail on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options, varying length, format and style appropriate to purpose and audience.</p>
<p>Level 3</p>	<p>Can understand with ease virtually everything read.</p> <p>Can summarise information from different sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.</p> <p>Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.</p>

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