



3850 Certificate in English

Chief Examiners Report

June 2016

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Section 1 General Comments

The assessment covers Reading and Writing and candidates need to address both in order to gain a pass. At all stages 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 be an issue for some candidates and this will be addressed later in this report.

The majority of candidates seemed to engage with the source documents but some experienced difficulties understanding the requirements for some questions. It would appear that some candidates had been entered before their skills were sufficiently developed or were entered at an inappropriate stage.

Section 2 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Reading

Whilst candidates understood the source documents, at each stage, some candidates were challenged with specific types of questions. However, the majority answered a high percentage of the Reading questions correctly.

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 answering a number of questions.

**Stage 1
Reading**

Knowing the formats of text proved challenging for many candidates, for example, an article, a web page, etc. However, a large proportion of candidates were able to identify the main purpose of a text.

Arranging words in alphabetical order posed problems for some candidates because of the requirement to use first and second place letters to sequence the words correctly. However, candidates were asked for a dictionary definition of a given word and were able to find the word and give a definition, correctly sequencing for this purpose.

Candidates are required to complete a form and marks are awarded for Reading and Writing. Most candidates accurately wrote personal details on the form, in block capitals, as instructed, but found the punctuation and grammar challenging when writing the sentence.

On a few questions candidates found it challenging to extract information to answer the question and in some cases made up answers.

Candidates found identifying errors of capitalisation and end of sentence punctuation challenging. Very few achieved full marks with the majority not receiving any marks for this question.

Candidates were able to identify the two spelling errors with a large number of candidates writing the correct spellings.

**Stage 2
Reading**

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 made up their own definition.

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| | <p>Over half of the candidates were unable to identify punctuation that had been used in the subheadings of the text.</p> <p>Candidates found it challenging to recognise opinions from the text.</p> <p>Most candidates were unable to identify the three spelling errors or write all three correct spellings. A third of the candidates identified and spelled one incorrect spelling, correctly.</p> <p>Apart from the issues above, a high percentage of Stage 2 candidates answered most questions correctly.</p> |
| Stage 3 Reading | <p>Naming 'procedures', identifying 'key events', providing a 'phrase', giving reasons' and giving a 'solution' proved very challenging for candidates who demonstrated skills at a lower level.</p> <p>Many candidates wrote one or two words for a definition and then used one of the words for the synonym. Candidates found the words 'synonym' and in 'context' challenging. A large number of candidates did not attempt to find the synonyms thereby losing two marks.</p> <p>Candidates did not understand the terminology 'features of layout' and often referred to sentences or words used in the text.</p> <p>Candidates' performance in identifying spelling and grammatical options was good but few identified and corrected the punctuation errors with commas and end of sentence punctuation markers proving very challenging.</p> |

Section 3 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Writing

Candidate performance on the writing task varied from no response to well written text. 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 the quality of some of the writing was reflected in the achievement of merits and distinctions.

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| Stage 1 Writing | Plan | Less than half of the candidates attempted a plan. Planning 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. Some candidates ignored the rubric and wrote on a different topic |
| | Legible writing | In the main, writing is legible but some candidates' writing was difficult to read. |
| | Length 75 words | A large proportion of 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 and to produce a piece of text in a given format. |
| | Paragraphs | Very few candidates structured writing into paragraphs. |
| | Sequenced/chronological order | Despite the absence of a plan candidates were, on the whole, able to sequence writing. |

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| | 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. |
| | Grammar | The majority of candidates found grammar very challenging especially subject verb agreement. |
| Stage 2 Writing | | |
| Stage 2 Writing | Plan | Over half of the candidates who attempted the Writing section did not do a plan. This reflected in the logical sequence of the writing |
| | Detail | Many candidates did not read the rubric and spent time writing about more than one type of technology which impacted on logical sequence. However, over half of the candidates achieved higher end marks for detail. |
| | Legible writing | In the main, writing is legible but some candidates' writing was difficult to read. |
| | Length 200 words | A small proportion of candidates who attempted the writing met the minimum word count of 200. It is important that candidates write at sufficient length to demonstrate the skills at the appropriate stage and to produce a piece of text in a given format. |
| | Paragraphs | Approximately half of the candidates organised writing in paragraphs. |
| | Format and structure | A large proportion of candidates failed to put a title to the article and lost 1 of 2 marks. Many candidates did not format their writing with a beginning/middle/end. |
| | Language | The tone was generally appropriate but expression was frequently clumsy especially when trying to link different types of technology. The range of vocabulary, when used in the candidates' own words, was quite good. |
| | Logical sequence | The lack of planning by many candidates was reflected in the logical sequence of the text. Candidates who had planned or thought through their writing demonstrated a logical sequence. |
| | Sentence structure | The use of simple and compound sentences for a large proportion of the candidates was good. |
| | 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. |
| | Grammar | Grammar was poor with similar 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 |

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| | | consequence a mark was lost, which may have made the difference between a pass and a fail. A higher percentage of candidates did sign than last year. |
| Stage 3 Writing | Plan | A quarter of candidates achieved the full two marks and nearly half did not attempt or had little understanding of the requirements for a plan. |
| | Detail | A large number of candidates wrote in detail but did not always necessarily address all three bullet points. |
| | Legible writing | Most of the candidate's writing was legible. |
| | Length 300 words | Very few candidates wrote at least 300 words, many under 200 words. |
| | Paragraphs | Paragraphs were evident in most texts. |
| | Format and Structure | Very few candidates put a title. Some candidates had an introduction, middle and ending but lost a mark for not putting a title. Those that planned their writing and used the bullet points in the rubric had more structure to their writing. |
| | Language | The tone was generally appropriate but expression was frequently clumsy particularly when trying to link the bullet points together. The range of vocabulary was quite good. |
| | Clear and coherent | Generally the texts were clear and coherent and fit for purpose most of the time. |
| | Logical sequence | If candidates followed the bullet points, writing was sequenced logically. |
| | Sentence structures | Some candidates attempted complex sentences in their writing but with varying degrees of success. |
| | Spelling | Most candidates achieved a mark for spelling, some candidates demonstrated ability above the level. |
| | 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. |
| | Grammar | Grammar was poor with similar 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 as the writing was longer and many went on to write on the second page. |
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Section 4 Areas of good performance

Those candidates who achieved a pass typically wrote at sufficient length and demonstrated:

- considered formatting and structuring of documents
- an appropriate use of language
- the ability to include and expand upon the relevant detail required
- reasonably accurate spelling for the level

Section 5 Areas for development

1. Marks are awarded for planning writing. Candidates need to be aware of how to plan their writing and must be encouraged to make use of the space provided for this.
2. All candidates could achieve significant marks by including and expanding upon all the relevant detail listed in the bullet points in the question brief.
3. 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.
4. Appropriate structuring and formatting of documents is important. Candidates need to be familiar with different types of documents and how to produce them.
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.