

3850 Certificate in English

Chief Examiner's Report

June 2018

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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, 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, especially at the lower stages.

Time management may continue to be an issue for some candidates. The topic for this series lent itself to candidates being able to write about something they were interested in or someone they knew. Unfortunately at Stage 2 and Stage 3 some candidates 'lifted' text from the source documents and did not produce original work.

The majority of candidates seemed to engage with the source documents but some experienced difficulties understanding the requirements for some questions or which document the question was referring to, despite this being clear on the question paper.

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 in respect of skills development and at Stage 1 a number of candidates demonstrated skills usually seen at Stage 2 and even Stage 3.

Section 2 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Reading

At each stage candidates demonstrated an understanding of the source documents but answered many questions without reading the questions in detail and then referring back to the appropriate source document.

There has been an improvement in comprehension when a tick, circle or underline is required rather than rewriting the question and giving a long answer.

Purpose of a document continues to prove challenging and candidates need to be made aware of the different purposes of documents in relation to assessment criteria.

As mentioned below features of layout continue to be an area of difficulty.

**Stage 1
Reading**

There was an improvement in candidates able to arrange words in alphabetical order but no change in the number able to provide a dictionary definition, with evidence that some candidates did not have access to a dictionary during the assessment.

95% of candidates were able to complete the personal details on the form but lost marks in spelling, punctuation and grammar in respect of the one sentence they were required to write. Many candidates did not put a full stop at the end of the sentence and there was incorrect use of capitals at the start or in the middle of words. Grammar in this sentence appeared to be challenging for the same reason as in their written text (see below).

	<p>It is important, as stated below, that candidates know what punctuation is required at this level as many tried to insert semi colons, colons, commas and inverted commas in the punctuation question. If candidates have a clear understanding of the requirement at this level they will have a greater chance of gaining marks and not losing them from using punctuation not appropriate to the level.</p> <p>Candidates were asked to find a spelling error in the first and last sentence of document 2. Many candidates looked for spelling errors in the first paragraph or in the whole text. At Stage 1 candidates will always be given clear directions on where to look for such errors and they should be made aware of this.</p> <p>Stage 1 criteria require instructional, descriptive and explanatory texts to be used over the course of the series. Candidates should, therefore, be aware of the key features of such texts in order to successfully answer any questions relating to these.</p> <p>81% of candidates are now signing their name when requested to do so, after completing the form, but many are still losing a mark if asked to circle an instruction on the form and appear to be ignoring or are not understanding this question.</p>
Stage 2 Reading	<p>Candidates are still not able to recognise the different formats a text can take. Only 32% were able to recognise the correct answer of an article on the internet. The purpose of text, to which this type of question relates, is normally in multiple-choice format and it is important that candidates can recognise the different purposes of a written text.</p> <p>As in previous years candidates are losing three marks from a lack of understanding on the question about 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 of features in this series. 48% of candidates attempted the question and gave the wrong answer(s) or didn't attempt it at all, potentially losing a valuable three marks.</p> <p>It is important, as stated below, that candidates know what punctuation is required at this level as many tried to insert semi colons, colons, commas and inverted commas in the punctuation question. If candidates have a clear understanding of the requirement at this level they will have a greater chance of gaining marks and not losing them from using punctuation not appropriate to the level.</p> <p>The question relating to grammar was reasonably well answered, but many candidates did not seem aware of the grammar options (which were in bold) and circled nouns, verbs etc.</p> <p>There was an improvement this year in extracting specific information to answer a question and not copy out whole sentences or paragraphs but candidates often gave incorrect answers as they did not read the question carefully enough to ascertain what particular detail was required. This was reflected in the marks, for example, to identify main points where only 20.7% of candidates selected the three correct answers. A question that asked before an</p>

	<p>event had answers that were after an event, as the question had not been read carefully.</p>
<p>Stage 3 Reading</p>	<p>It appears candidates are still struggling to understand organisational features/features of layout/features and they frequently wrote sentences and paragraphs from the text as an answer to this question. Candidates are losing three marks on this question. Examples of features are, title/heading/topic, bold text, colour, image and font size. Please refer to the mark scheme for more examples, in this series. 36.6% of candidates attempted the question and gave the wrong answer(s) or didn't attempt it at all, potentially losing a valuable three marks.</p> <p>There was an improvement this year in extracting specific information to answer a question and not copy out whole sentences or paragraphs (apart from the question pertaining to features) but candidates often gave incorrect answers as they did not read the question carefully enough to ascertain what particular detail was required. This was reflected in the marks, for example, to identify main points, where only 20.4% of candidates selected the three correct answers. A question that asked before an event had answers that were after an event, as the question had not been read carefully.</p> <p>It would appear that candidates continue to skim or scan texts to find answers and have not read in detail, where appropriate, for some of the answers.</p> <p>Candidates appeared to have difficulty with the dictionary definitions with only 16.4% gaining the full three marks and 20.5% achieving zero. There was evidence to suggest candidates did not have access to a dictionary.</p> <p>Both the grammar and punctuation questions challenged more candidates than in previous years. It is important that candidates understand the range of punctuation assessed at this level (see below) and have an understanding of the level of grammar required for this stage.</p> <p>Recognition of phrases proved difficult with only 27.4% of candidates correctly identifying the two phrases and 36.5% not attempting, or getting this question wrong.</p>
<p>Section 3 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Writing</p>	
<p>There was a noticeable improvement in the number of candidates who produced a text of the required length at each stage and some candidates made notes as to the amount of words they were writing.</p> <p>Marks are still lost due to a lack of planning or not being aware of the difference between a plan and a draft.</p> <p>At all stages, sequencing of writing, overall, was good, with many candidates achieving maximum marks. The inclusion of a plan would further improve marks for those candidates who found sequencing challenging.</p>	

Many candidates lost a mark for Format and Structure, at Stage 2 and Stage 3 as a result of not giving their article a title/heading.

The absence of paragraphs, across all three stages, led to a mark being lost for most candidates.

Spelling and particular, punctuation and grammar are still areas of poor performance especially at Stage 2 and Stage 3. See below.

Many candidates who have written text still fail to sign their paper at the end of the writing section, missing a mark that could mean the difference between a pass and fail.

Stage 1 Writing	Plan	As in previous years very few candidates attempted a plan (only 34.5% received the mark for an acceptable plan) and when they did it was often a repeat of the bullet points, which does not warrant the mark. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates should be aware that they need to address the plan by providing some detail in relation to each bullet point. This can be, for example, simple phrases or sentences in a list, a spider diagram or something equivalent. • A number of candidates used the planning box to write a rough draft of text, losing time and not gaining a mark.
	Length 75 words	67% of the candidates who attempted the writing met the minimum word count of 75. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that candidates write at sufficient length to potentially attract the maximum marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar.
	Content	There was a marked improvement in candidates attempting to address all three of the bullet points in their writing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates who had planned their writing were more likely to cover all three points and stay on topic.
	Legible writing	There has been another very slight improvement in legibility but some candidates writing was difficult to read. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that candidates use a black or blue pen, not pencil or crayon, to aid in legibility.
	Paragraphs	Candidates are still not structuring their writing in paragraphs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this level only an appropriate, simple break in the writing to form a new paragraph is required.
	Sequenced/chronological order	Despite the absence of planning, most candidates were able to write in a sequenced and chronological order.
	Spelling	There was a slight reduction in the number of candidates who received full marks for spelling of words appropriate for the level.
	Punctuation	Poor punctuation resulted in few candidates receiving maximum marks and nearly 40% with no marks. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of sentence full stops or question marks, capital letters at the start of a sentence and for proper nouns is the requirement for this level. It is important that candidates are aware of this. Other punctuation, used incorrectly, is not penalised at Stage 1 unless the

		<p>punctuation for the level has not been used where appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many candidates use capital letters at the start of a word or in a word, which results in them being penalised for improper use of upper case. This is most usually seen with the letters, 'S', 'C', 'P', 'F' and 'W' although other letters are also incorrectly capitalised. • Many candidates still use the lower case 'i' for the pronoun 'I', which is penalised up to a maximum of four times in the written text.
	Grammar	<p>A slight improvement was seen, but over 40% of candidates received no marks for grammar.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main issues appear to be subject verb agreement, inconsistent use of tenses, both singular and plural e.g. 'have', 'has' and 'had' and the incorrect use of 'a' and 'an'. • Candidates interchange gender from 'his' and 'her'. • This year it was notable that a number of candidates used 'is' for 'his', 'as' for 'has'.
Stage 2 Writing	Plan	<p>As in previous years very few candidates attempted a plan and when they did it was often a repeat of the bullet points, which does not attract the marks, (only 15.4% received the full two marks and 20.1%, one mark for an acceptable plan).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates should be aware that they need to address the plan by providing some detail in relation to each bullet point. This can be, for example, simple phrases or sentences in a list, a spider diagram or something equivalent. • A number of candidates used the planning box to write a rough draft of text, losing time and not gaining a mark.
	Length 200 words	<p>There has been a considerable improvement on the amount of written text with 42% writing at least 200 words. Of the remaining 58% many candidates demonstrated good writing skills but failed to access full marks purely because of the word count, but more candidates did attempt the writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts of less than 200 words have an effect on marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. • Some candidates wrote considerably more than 200 words, which resulted in many cases of 'rambling' and additional errors. • Requests for additional paper were not always met.
	Content	<p>Nearly 20% more candidates, this year, than in previous years, received the full three marks for content and most found the topic accessible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of candidates lost marks for content and other marking categories as they 'lifted' large chunks of text from source documents or changed

		<p>the name of the successful person and then just copied from the source document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates need to be made aware that the writing has to be their own original work, to demonstrate their writing skills and not copied from the source documents.
	Legible writing	<p>Overall most scripts were legible with some proving difficult to read.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that candidates use a black or blue pen, not pencil or crayon, to aid in legibility. • Typical poor formation of letters in respect of 'a', 'e' and 'w'.
	Paragraphs	<p>As in previous years approximately 50% of candidates organised their writing in paragraphs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an easy mark to gain if candidates just demonstrate a break in their writing at an appropriate place. At this level it is not assessed if a new paragraph has been used to demonstrate a change in Time, Place, Topic or Person. • Organising paragraphs around the three bullet points would help candidates to gain this mark.
	Format and structure	<p>An article is one of the least challenging forms of writing to attract the two marks for Format and Structure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mark is assigned to a heading/title/topic and the other to the article having a beginning, middle and ending. • Only 28% of candidates gained the full two marks, with the majority of the remaining candidates not putting a heading/title/topic at the beginning of their writing. • Some candidates wrote in letter format not understanding an article was required.
	Language	<p>The tone was generally appropriate and the range of vocabulary, when used in the candidates' own words, was reasonably good.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many candidates write as they speak which causes a number of language errors for clumsy expression, use of language etc.
	Logical sequence	<p>Over 80% candidates were able to put their writing in logical sequence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A brief plan can help with sequencing. • Focusing clearly on the bullet points to help sequence writing would potentially produce full marks.
	Sentence structure	<p>This is an area which candidates continue to find challenging each year. This year only 11.1% gained the full three marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this level only the use of simple and compound sentences are required and incorrect complex sentences are not penalised.

	Spelling	<p>A greater number of candidates achieved the full three marks this year. However, certain words still seem to prove challenging.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates should be aware that an incorrect spelling that appears in the source documents, at whatever level, will be penalised.
	Punctuation	<p>Poor punctuation resulted in few candidates receiving maximum marks and over 40% with no marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of sentence full stops, question or exclamation marks, capital letters at the start of a sentence and for proper nouns is the requirement for this level. It is important that candidates are aware of this. Other punctuation, used incorrectly, is not penalised at Stage 2 unless the punctuation for the level has not been used where appropriate. • Many candidates use capital letters at the start of a word or in a word, which results in them being penalised for improper use of upper case. This is most usually seen with the letters, 'S', 'C', 'P', 'F' and 'W', although other letters are also incorrectly capitalised. • Many candidates still use the lower case 'i' for the pronoun 'I', which is penalised up to a maximum of four times in the written text.
	Grammar	<p>There appeared to be a decline in grammar skills with 50% of candidates compared to 26%, last year, receiving no marks. 5.4% of candidates achieved the full three marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main issues appear to be subject verb agreement, inconsistent use of tenses, both singular and plural, e.g. 'have', 'has' and 'had' and the incorrect use of 'a' and 'an'. • Candidates interchange gender from 'his' and 'her'. • This year it was notable that a number of candidates used 'is' for 'his', 'as' for 'has'.
	Proof reading	<p>Only 56.4% of candidates signed their name at the end of the paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some candidates possibly do not provide a signature as they only write on the first page and do not turn over to the second page. The question paper clearly states 'see next page.' • A signature when no writing has taken place will not be awarded the mark for proof reading. • This one mark could make the difference between a pass or fail.
Stage 3 Writing	Plan	<p>Fewer candidates than in previous years obtained full marks for the plan with over 60% receiving no marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates should be aware that they need to address the plan by providing some detail in relation to each bullet point. This can be, for

		<p>example, simple phrases or sentences in a list, a spider diagram or something equivalent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of candidates used the planning box to write a rough draft of text, losing time and not gaining a mark.
	Length 300 words	<p>More candidates wrote at least 300 words, than in previous years, but this still only accounted for 21.6% of candidates. Of the remaining 78.4% many candidates demonstrated good writing skills but failed to access full marks purely because of the word count, but more candidates did attempt the writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts of less than 300 words have an effect on marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. • Some candidates wrote considerably more than 300 words, which resulted in many cases of 'rambling' and additional errors. • Requests for additional paper were not always met.
	Content	<p>The number of candidates who addressed all three bullet points, remains the same as in previous years. The topic appeared to be accessible and some candidates wrote some very interesting pieces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of candidates lost marks for content and other marking categories as they 'lifted' large chunks of text from source documents or changed the name of the successful person and then just copied from the source documents. • Candidates need to be made aware that the writing has to be their own original work, to demonstrate their writing skills and not copied from the source documents.
	Legible writing	<p>Most of the scripts were legible with a few proving difficult to read.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that candidates use a black or blue pen, not pencil or crayon, to aid in legibility. • Typical poor formation of letters in respect of 'a', 'e' and 'w'.
	Paragraphs	<p>Over half of the candidates demonstrated an understanding of the use of paragraphs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising paragraphs around the three bullet points would help candidates to gain this mark
	Format and Structure	<p>An article is one of the least challenging forms of writing to attract the two marks for Format and Structure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mark is assigned to a heading/title/topic and the other to the article having a beginning, middle and ending. • Only 27.6% of candidates gained the full two marks, with the majority of the remaining candidates not putting a heading/title/topic at the beginning of their writing.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some candidates wrote in letter format not understanding an article was required.
	Language	Over 90% of candidates gained at least one mark for language but those achieving the full three marks has declined.
	Clear and coherent	Generally the texts were clear and coherent and fit for purpose and 73.8% of candidates were awarded the full three marks.
	Logical sequence	<p>There was a great improvement in candidates being awarded the full three marks, 79.3% this year, compared to 57% last year. When candidates produce a plan and follow the bullet points, writing is sequenced logically.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A brief plan can help with sequencing. Focusing clearly on the bullet points to help sequence writing would potentially produce full marks for more candidates.
	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	<p>Slightly more candidates achieved the full four marks this year, but certain words still seem to prove challenging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates should be aware that an incorrect spelling that appears in the source documents, whatever the level, will be penalised.
	Punctuation	<p>Poor punctuation resulted in few candidates receiving maximum marks and nearly 40% with no marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> End of sentence full stops, question or exclamation marks, capital letters at the start of a sentence and for proper nouns, commas, apostrophes and inverted commas are the requirement for this level. Candidates are not assessed on semi-colons or colons. It is important that candidates are aware of the requirements. Many candidates use capital letters at the start of a word or in a word, which results in them being penalised for improper use of upper case. This is most usually seen with the letters, 'S', 'C', 'P', 'F' and 'W', although other letters are also incorrectly capitalised. Many candidates still use the lower case 'i' for the pronoun 'I', which is penalised up to a maximum of four times in the written text.
	Grammar	<p>There appeared to be a decline in grammar skills with 33% of candidates compared to 17%, last year, receiving no marks. 6% of candidates achieved the full four marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main issues appear to be subject verb agreement, inconsistent use of tenses, both singular and plural, e.g. 'have', 'has' and 'had' and the incorrect use of 'a' and 'an'. Candidates interchange gender from 'his' and 'her'.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This year it was notable that a number of candidates used 'is' for 'his', 'as' for 'has'.
	Proof reading	<p>Only 68.2% of candidates signed their name at the end of the paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some candidates possibly do not provide a signature as they only write on the first page and do not turn over to the second page. The question paper clearly states 'see next page.' Candidates who complete both sheets of paper and finish their writing just above the signature line are still failing to demonstrate proof reading by signing their name. A signature when no writing has taken place will not be awarded the mark for proof reading. This one mark could make the difference between a pass or fail.

Section 4 Areas of good performance

Candidates who achieved a merit or distinction demonstrated:

- the skills to read in detail to select correct answers
- a good understanding of the purpose of a document
- the skills to recognise appropriate synonyms
- the ability to obtain meaning from an image
- a good knowledge of punctuation and grammar
- an appropriate use of language
- a reasonably accurate level of spelling relevant to the stage
- the skill to write at the requisite length with good sentence structure, in a logical sequence, whilst being clear and coherent and covering all content points.

Section 5 Areas for development

There is room for development in the following areas:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Candidates need to be aware of differentiating capital letters appropriately.
- Proof-reading of documents, in the Writing section for Stage 2 and Stage 3.
- Candidates need to be aware of what is expected of them during the time given as time management continues to be an issue where candidates wrote little text in the writing section but completed the majority of the reading questions.
- Candidates need to be aware that to be assessed for writing their text needs to be original work and not lifted from the source documents.

8. Candidates should be encouraged to use a dictionary to look up words that they might not be familiar with, in questions, to aid understanding.

9. Candidates need to be familiar with what constitutes a phrase as opposed to a sentence.

Section 6 Recommendations and advice for centres

- Ensure candidates write in black or blue pen to enhance legibility
- Ensure there is access to a dictionary for all candidates in order that they are not disadvantaged; likewise ensure additional paper is available for the writing assessment.
- Encourage candidates to attend the sample paper sitting. This will then allow the opportunity to explore queries on question formation and what the assessment is looking to achieve.
- Be aware of the criteria for the stage so that candidates are not trying to work above the level, particularly with punctuation.