

# **3850 Certificate in English**

**Chief Examiner's Report**

**June 2019**

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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, although there was evidence of a greater length of writing across all stages, even though less than 50% of candidates achieved the minimum required length at Stage 2 and Stage 3. On the whole, more candidates this year completed or made an attempt to answer the Reading questions unlike the Writing section where a number of candidates still made no attempt or wrote few words, especially at the lower stages.

There was, however, a noticeable improvement in the teaching and learning at Stage 3 with more candidates achieving a merit than a pass for this paper.

It is suggested that time management continues to be an issue for candidates across all three stages. Simple errors in the Reading section are often due to the question not being read carefully to extract the correct answers.

The topic for this series enabled candidates to write about something they wanted to do, which engaged the candidates and significantly reduced the copying of text from source documents, producing original work, which enabled a fair assessment of writing skills.

Overall, candidates appeared to be entered for the appropriate level, although there was still a cohort of candidates at Stage 1 who demonstrated skills above this level.

**Section 2 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Reading**

At each stage candidates demonstrated an understanding of and were engaged with the source documents. There was a considerable improvement in referring to the appropriate document to answer the questions.

Candidates continue to recognise that there is no need to copy out whole paragraphs or sentences to answer Reading questions, which will assist in time management.

At Stage 1 and Stage 2 there was little improvement in understanding the purpose of the documents, further teaching and learning is required. Stage 3 showed a marked improvement but possibly through greater understanding of the answers and distractors in relation to the document.

As mentioned in previous reports, features of layout continue to lose candidates significant marks, especially at Stage 2 and Stage 3. It would appear that teaching and learning have taken place in respect of organisational and language features but candidates need to be clear about organisational features to meet this criteria. A number of candidates give features that they have possibly been taught, without relating to the source document and the correct answers.

**Stage 1  
Reading**

Approximately 50% of candidates were able to answer most of the questions, correctly and achieve at least one mark where multiple marks were available. This is an improvement on previous years.

	<p>96% of candidates achieved the full three marks for completing their personal details and an additional 11%, to last year, recognised the request to circle an instruction on the form. However, the sentence on the form continues to be challenging with lack of end of sentence punctuation, inappropriate capitals at the start of or in a word, and the sentence not making grammatical sense. Candidates are no longer putting in punctuation not assessed at this level but they need to be clear of the expectations at Stage 1.</p> <p>Candidates were asked to find a spelling error in the first and the last paragraph of the source document. This was clearly signposted in the question and the format of this question was on the sample paper. Whilst there was an improvement by 10% of candidates finding the first spelling error and correcting it, there was a slight decrease in the number of candidates finding the correct spelling in the last paragraph. Unfortunately, some candidates selected the wrong word and others wrote out the wrong spelling again on their assessment paper.</p> <p>Candidates need to be familiar with the term 'end of sentence punctuation markers'.</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. Only 40% of candidates were able to recognise that Source Document 1 was an instructional text.</p> <p>In respect of the question to relate an image to print, the image is now placed alongside the question stem to ensure candidates are looking at the appropriate image. This resulted in 55% achieving this mark compared to 56% last year. This reinforces the need for candidates to be able to differentiate between an instructional, descriptive and explanatory text.</p>
<p><b>Stage 2 Reading</b></p>	<p>Candidates continue to find it difficult to recognise the different formats of a text. 37% appropriately responded that Source Document 1 was intended to persuade. 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, particularly by the language used.</p> <p>As mentioned above, organisational features continue to be challenging. 17% achieved the full three marks and 41% failed to achieve any marks. Centres need to become more familiar with the Marking Guidance. There are normally at least 12 options and within each option a choice of wording, for example, subheadings/subtitles/sub topics. The answers will to a point vary slightly each series, depending on the document.</p> <p>There were some candidates who were writing out the subheadings, rather than giving the answer 'subheadings'. The way to approach this question is an important teaching and learning issue. It has now appeared in the same or similar format for five years, but candidates continue to lose a valuable three marks through a lack of understanding of what is required.</p>

	<p>The positioning of the image alongside the question appears to have helped candidates with 81% achieving the mark compared to 64% last year.</p> <p>There was a marked improvement in candidates being able to identify the main points with 54% achieving the full three marks. It is important that candidates read the whole document before answering this question.</p> <p>Reading questions carefully is equally as important. 48% of candidates achieved no marks for Q5 as they read the question as 'to be', and not 'to do'. Likewise, with Q9, where candidates gave answers as to why the family run the project not why they 'started' the project. Only 14% achieved the full two marks for Q9. Attention to detail and extracting the right information was also key for Q12. Many candidates identified answers but simply put views or subscribers and not the detail from the source document, required to meet the criteria.</p> <p>Candidates continue to find the language question a challenge and as a teaching and learning point need to be made aware of the type of language used in different types of text.</p> <p>There has been a significant improvement on candidates answering the question and not copying out sentences or paragraphs where these are never required. This will help with the time spent on the Reading section and potentially give more time to address the writing.</p> <p>Candidates continue to find the grammar question challenging and whilst 89% achieved one mark, the verbs have/had/has were usually incorrectly identified. However, candidates significantly improved on the punctuation question in the Reading section with 58% achieving the full two marks.</p>
<p><b>Stage 3 Reading</b></p>	<p>There was a significant number of candidates who were able to identify the main purpose of the document with 69% ticking the correct answer as opposed to 17% last year.</p> <p>As mentioned above organisational features continue to be challenging. 16% achieved the full three marks and 44% failed to achieve any marks. Centres need to become more familiar with the Marking Guidance. There are normally at least 12 options and within each option a choice of wording, for example, subheadings/subtitles/sub topics. The answers will to a point vary slightly each series, depending on the document. A number of candidates wrote out the text of the subheadings rather than just giving the feature 'subheadings'.</p> <p>74% of candidates were able to identify points of view within an argument. A credible 80% this series, as opposed to 27% last year, were able to explain how choices of vocabulary contribute to different types of text.</p> <p>More candidates identified specific detail and main points than in previous series. The format of the question relating to main points was changed in the sample paper from the previous year to reflect this series and only 10% of candidates gained none of the three marks compared to 25% last year.</p> <p>There was an improvement in the number of candidates who were able to recognise a synonym and provide dictionary definitions. It is suggested that</p>

	<p>candidates are made aware that they are being assessed on their ability to use a dictionary, for example, for a noun, adjective, verb and adverb and that the definition should relate to this and not be just any definition.</p> <p>There was a significant improvement in the number of candidates who correctly identified the three grammar options, likewise recognition of the correct punctuation to insert in a piece of writing improved.</p> <p>The number of candidates who could relate an image to print to inform understanding doubled, although it appeared that 35% did not read the question carefully.</p> <p>Overall there has been a noticeable change where candidates now understand that they just need to answer the question and not write whole paragraphs or sentences to provide an answer. It is important that candidates are aware that spelling, punctuation and grammar are not assessed in the Reading section.</p>
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### Section 3 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Writing

<b>Stage 1 Writing</b>	Plan	<p>37% of candidates produced an appropriate plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates need to be aware that they address each of the bullet points and do not just copy the bullet points, from the paper, in the space allocated for their plan.</li> <li>• The plan can just be one word, a phrase or a sentence.</li> <li>• In this year’s paper, for example, they needed to address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ what – run a fundraiser</li> <li>▪ who – homeless</li> <li>▪ how – wouldn’t be hungry</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There is no set format for the plan but candidates must demonstrate the ability to plan.</li> <li>• A number of candidates use the plan box to write a rough draft. This does not achieve any marks.</li> </ul>
	Length 75 words	<p>66% of candidates who produced a piece of writing met the minimum word count of at least 75 words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important that candidates write at sufficient length to potentially attract the maximum marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar.</li> <li>• Equally, it is important to remember that writing more than 75 words can lead to additional errors. Stage 1 candidates should practise their ability to write at least 75 words.</li> </ul>
	Content	<p>There was a slight improvement in the number of candidates who addressed all three bullet points in their writing.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates who had planned their writing were more likely to cover all three points and stay on topic.</li> <li>• Candidates need to be aware that writing fewer than 99 words will have a marked effect of their logical sequence, language and SPaG marks.</li> </ul>
	Legible writing	<p>Legibility remained very good with 82% of scripts being legible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is extremely important that candidates use a black or blue pen. If a candidate is only able to write in pencil or crayon, special arrangements should be put in place.</li> </ul>
	Paragraphs	<p>Only 27% of candidates structured their writing using paragraphs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At this stage a minimum of two paragraphs need to be seen. This is a valuable mark and candidates should be made aware of the need for paragraphs in their writing.</li> </ul>
	Sequenced/ chronological order	<p>77% of candidates produced writing in a sequenced and chronological order.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning the bullet points assist with the order.</li> </ul>
	Spelling	<p>There was a reduction on the number of candidates who achieved marks for spelling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whilst less 'text speak' was seen, there are an increasing number of American spellings that do not conform to a Standard English assessment e.g. <i>center</i>.</li> <li>• Of note was the word <i>keep</i> instead of hold or have.</li> <li>• <i>alot</i> and <i>writting</i> continue to be constant spelling errors.</li> </ul>
	Punctuation	<p>Punctuation remains poor. Candidates need to understand the need for a capital letter at the start of the sentence and a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark at the end.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates need to be aware of the punctuation assessed at this level.</li> <li>• Many candidates continue to 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, A, C, F, H, K, S, P, V and W, although other letters are frequently incorrectly capitalised.</li> <li>• If a candidate uses appropriate punctuation throughout their writing in respect of the start and end of the sentence they could still lose all the marks for punctuation, as a result of the above.</li> </ul>
	Grammar	<p>No improvement seen in grammar with a very slight reduction in candidates receiving no marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main issues continue to be subject verb agreement, inconsistent use of tenses, both singular and plural, for example, <i>have</i>, <i>has</i> and <i>had</i>, and the incorrect use of <i>a</i> and <i>an</i>.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definite and indefinite articles also appear to be a challenge.</li> <li>• <i>dem</i> was often used for <i>them</i></li> </ul>
<b>Stage 2 Writing</b>	Plan	<p>68% of candidates did not attempt a plan which lost a valuable two marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates need to make sure that they address each of the bullet points and do not just copy the bullet points, on the paper, in the space allocated for their plan.</li> <li>• The plan can just be one word, a phrase or a sentence.</li> <li>• In this year's paper, for example, they needed to address <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ what they would like to do - run a homework club</li> <li>▪ who could help – local teachers</li> <li>▪ how it would make a difference – more children gain qualifications.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There is no set format for the plan but candidates must demonstrate the ability to plan.</li> <li>• A number of candidates use the plan box to write a rough draft. This does not achieve any marks.</li> </ul>
	Length 200 words	<p>43% of candidates achieved the minimum word requirement of 200 words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texts of fewer than 200 words have an effect on marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar.</li> <li>• Some candidates wrote more than 200 words, which resulted in many cases of 'rambling' and additional errors.</li> <li>• Candidates need to be aware that writing fewer than 99 words will have a marked effect on their logical sequence, language and SPaG marks.</li> <li>• Requests for additional paper were not always met.</li> </ul>
	Content	<p>62% of candidates achieved the full three marks for content compared to 55% last year which is an ongoing improvement. Candidates need to be aware that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They only have to address the three bullet points with a sentence and do not need to expand on the detail.</li> <li>• If candidates chose not to write a letter as requested for Series 5, they were still able to gain the marks for content but were penalised in Format and Structure.</li> <li>• Candidates who did a plan were more likely to achieve the content marks.</li> </ul>
	Legible Writing	An improvement again in legibility with more candidates using a black or blue pen.
	Paragraphs	A slight improvement on the number of candidates using paragraphs to structure their writing.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>Organising paragraphs around the three bullet points would help candidates to gain this mark.</li> </ul>
	Format and Structure	Candidates appear to respond more favourably to a letter format rather than an article and 53% of candidates met the criteria for a letter for the full two marks. It is, however, important that candidates are aware of the Format and Structure for a letter, email, article and report for future series.
	Language	The use of tone, vocabulary and expression improved this year but there are still many non-Standard English expressions used and to a point, slang and/or colloquialisms that are not acceptable in this assessment. For example, <i>dem, gonna, cause, keep for hold, an for and</i> . There were fewer instances of 'text speak'.
	Logical Sequence	85% of candidates achieved one or two marks for logical sequence. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A brief plan can help with sequencing.</li> <li>Focusing clearly on the bullet points to help sequence writing would potentially produce full marks.</li> </ul>
	Sentence Structure	There was a marked improvement in respect of Sentence Structure with 20% of candidates achieving the full three marks and 50% two marks. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At this level only the use of simple and compound sentences are required and incorrect complex sentences are not penalised.</li> </ul>
	Spelling	There was little change in the achievement for spelling. As mentioned above too many American spellings are being used which are not acceptable in a Standard English assessment e.g. center. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Candidates should be aware that an incorrect spelling of a word that appears in the source documents, even if it is above the level, will be penalised. There were many spellings of <i>difference</i>, which were penalised.</li> <li><i>alot</i> and <i>writting</i> continue to be constant spelling errors.</li> </ul>
	Punctuation	There was a slight improvement in punctuation with only 25% not receiving any marks compared to 39% last year. As advised last year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>



		<p>at Stage 2 unless the punctuation for the level has not been used where appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many candidates use capital letters inappropriately 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, A, C, F, H, K, S, P, V and W, although other letters are also incorrectly capitalised.</li> <li>• Many candidates still use the lower case <i>i</i> for the pronoun <i>I</i>, which is penalised up to a maximum of four times in the written text.</li> </ul>
	Grammar	<p>Grammar skills have definitely improved with only 27% achieving no marks compared to 50% last year. 41% achieved two or three marks compared to 24% last year. Some of the same issues occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject verb agreement, inconsistent use of tenses, both singular and plural, for example, <i>have, has</i> and <i>had</i>, and the incorrect use of <i>a</i> and <i>an</i>.</li> <li>• This year it was notable that a number of candidates still use <i>is</i> for <i>his</i>, <i>as</i> for <i>has</i> and <i>an</i> for <i>a</i>.</li> <li>• Candidates need to be more aware of definite and indefinite articles.</li> </ul>
	Proof reading	<p>Fewer candidates signed to say they had proof read their work. This might be due to candidates producing short pieces of writing and so move to the next page to sign, or candidates don't proof read their writing so do not sign.</p>
<b>Stage 3 Writing</b>	Plan	<p>23% of candidates achieved the full two marks for the plan and 60% gained no marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates need to make sure that they address each of the bullet points and do not just copy the bullet points, from the paper, in the space allocated for their plan.</li> <li>• The plan can just be one word, a phrase or a sentence.</li> <li>• In this year's paper, for example, they needed to address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ what they would like to do and why - run a homework club for children who need help</li> <li>▪ what help they needed – local teachers</li> <li>▪ what difference it would make – more children gain qualifications</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There is no set format for the plan but candidates must demonstrate the ability to plan.</li> <li>• A number of candidates use the plan box to write a rough draft. This does not achieve any marks.</li> </ul>

	Length 300 words	<p>Whilst it appeared that many candidates wrote significantly more than in previous years, only 25% were awarded the mark for a minimum of 300 words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates need to be aware that writing fewer than 99 words will have a marked effect on their logical sequence, clear and coherent, language and SPaG marks.</li> </ul>
	Content	<p>75% of candidates achieved the full three marks for content. Candidates need to be aware that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They only have to address the three bullet points with a sentence and do not need to expand on the detail.</li> <li>• If candidates chose not to write a letter as requested for Series 5, they were still able to gain the marks for content but were penalised in Format and Structure.</li> <li>• Candidates who did a plan were more likely to achieve the content marks.</li> </ul>
	Legible Writing	<p>An improvement again in legibility with more candidates using a black or blue pen.</p>
	Paragraphs	<p>An improvement on the number of candidates using paragraphs to structure their writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Organising paragraphs around the three bullet points would help candidates to gain this mark.</li> </ul>
	Format and Structure	<p>Candidates appear to respond more favourably to a letter format rather than an article, and 62% of candidates met the criteria for a letter for the full two marks. It is, however, important that candidates are aware of the Format and Structure for a letter, email, article and report for future series.</p>
	Language	<p>The use of tone, vocabulary and expression remained the same this year and there are still many non-Standard English expressions used and to a point, slang and/or colloquialisms that are not acceptable in this assessment. For example, <i>dem</i>, <i>gonna</i>, <i>cause</i>, <i>keep</i> for <i>hold</i>, <i>an</i> for <i>and</i>. There were fewer instances of 'text speak'.</p>
	Clear and coherent	<p>81% of candidates gained the full three marks which is an increase on 79% last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some candidates ramble and repeat themselves in an attempt to reach the 300 words.</li> </ul>
	Logical sequence	<p>83% of candidates achieved the full three marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A brief plan can help with sequencing.</li> <li>• Focusing clearly on the bullet points to help sequence writing would potentially produce full marks.</li> </ul>

	Sentence structures	63% of candidates achieved the full three marks, which required at least one complex sentence within the writing and 87% achieved two of the three marks.
	Spelling	<p>There was a slight improvement in candidates gaining two of the four marks but 13% received no marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As mentioned above too many American spellings are being used which are not acceptable in a Standard English assessment e.g. <i>center</i>.</li> <li>• Candidates should be aware that an incorrect spelling of a word that appears in the source documents, even if it is above the level, will be penalised. There were many spellings of <i>difference</i>, within the piece of writing, which were penalised.</li> <li>• <i>alot</i> and <i>writting</i> continue to be constant spelling errors.</li> </ul>
	Punctuation	<p>There was no improvement in punctuation. As advised last year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End of sentence full stops, question or exclamation marks, capital letters, at the start of a sentence and for proper nouns, commas and apostrophes are the requirement for this level. It is important that candidates are aware of this. Other punctuation, used incorrectly, for example, colons, semi-colons and hyphens are not penalised at this level.</li> <li>• Many candidates use capital letters inappropriately, 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, A, C, F, H, K, S, P, V and W, although other letters are also incorrectly capitalised.</li> <li>• Many candidates still use the lower case <i>i</i> for the pronoun <i>I</i>, which is penalised up to a maximum of four times in the written text.</li> </ul>
	Grammar	<p>Grammar skills have improved with only 24% achieving no marks compared to 33% last year. 47% achieved two or three marks compared to 24% last year and 8% full marks. Some of the same issues occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject verb agreement, inconsistent use of tenses, both singular and plural, for example, have, has and had, and the incorrect use of <i>a</i> and <i>an</i>.</li> <li>• This year it was notable that a number of candidates still use <i>is</i> for <i>his</i>, <i>as</i> for <i>has</i> and <i>an</i> for <i>a</i>.</li> <li>• Candidates need to be more aware of definite and indefinite articles.</li> </ul>
	Proof reading	Fewer candidates signed to say they had proof read their work. This might be due to short pieces of writing and candidates don't move to the next page or candidates don't proof read their writing so do not sign.

#### **Section 4 Areas of good performance**

Candidates who achieved a merit or distinction demonstrated:

- an understanding of the main purpose of a document
- 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
- the skill to read the questions carefully
- the ability to relate an image to print and gain understanding
- knowledge of grammar and punctuation in the reading section
- skills to find an appropriate dictionary definition and synonyms
- the use of Standard English

#### **Section 5 Areas for development**

1. Candidates need to be aware of how to identify the main points and main events of a text, and to be able to understand and recognise organisational features/features of layout/features in texts.
2. Candidates need to be aware of how to plan their writing and what is required in a plan, to achieve the mark(s) for the plan and how this can help with the logical sequencing of their writing and covering all the content.
3. Candidates should be advised that writing a draft or a rough copy of their text takes up time and is not a requirement for this qualification.
4. 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. Of particular note is the use of *their*, *there* and *they're*.
5. Candidates should be aware of when s is required at the end of a word.
6. Working with candidates on differentiating when capital letters are appropriate.
7. Proof-reading of documents in the Writing section for Stage 2 and Stage 3.
8. Time management continues to be an issue for candidates who wrote little text but completed the majority of the reading questions.
9. Candidates need to be aware that to be assessed for writing, their text needs to be original work and not copied from the source documents.
10. Encouraging candidates to use a dictionary to look up words that they might not be familiar with, in questions, to aid understanding.
11. Candidates need to be familiar with the difference between a phrase and a word.
12. Candidates need to read questions carefully, especially where a phrase, a word or, for example, three words are in the question stem.
13. Candidates should be aware that writing a sentence or words in capital letters for emphasis means they will be penalised for the incorrect use of capital letters.

#### **Section 6 Recommendations and advice for centres**

- Ensure candidates write in black or blue pen to enhance legibility. Pencil and crayon are at times too faint for legibility.

- Advise candidates that there is no need to write a rough draft. Requirements are for a plan and a piece of writing.
- Ensure there is access to a dictionary for all candidates in order that they are not disadvantaged and that candidates are aware of the definition required e.g. noun, adjective etc. where appropriate.
- Ensure additional paper is available for the writing assessment.
- Give candidates the opportunity to do at least one sample paper to explore queries on question formation and what the assessment is looking to achieve. Remind candidates they are not required, for most questions, to write out complete sentences or paragraphs or repeat the question stem in the answer.
- Remind candidates to look at the number of marks per question so that they can achieve maximum marks by giving the requisite number of answers.
- Be aware of the criteria for the stage so that candidates are not trying to work above the level, particularly with punctuation.