

4800-011

**Essential Skills Northern Ireland
Communication Level 1**

Chief Examiner's report – April 2019

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City & Guilds

1 Giltspur Street

London EC1A 9DD

www.cityandguilds.com

Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Overall performance	3
3	Recommendations/Advice for centres	8

1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4800-011 Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 1.

2 Overall Performance

This report covers the period from October 2018 to April 2019. However, centres are encouraged to review previous Chief Examiner's reports, as the comments and advice still apply.

Many candidates are showing a strong performance in both reading and writing sections, clearly demonstrating good teaching, preparation and practice. However, some candidates do struggle due to the following main reasons:

In the reading section:

1. Being entered for the exam before sufficient learning has taken place / lack of exam preparation.
2. Not reading the questions carefully.
3. Not reading source documents carefully enough to be able to provide detailed information.
4. Not providing enough responses.

In the writing section:

1. Poor use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
2. Not structuring responses appropriately for the task set.
3. Poor use of language, including language that is inappropriate for purpose and audience.
4. Not providing details asked for in the question.
5. Spending too much time on the first writing question, resulting in a rushed and much poorer response to the second question.

In addition, some unsuccessful candidates were unprepared for either the reading or the writing section, showing a strong performance in one but a very weak performance in the other.

Areas of good performance

In the reading section:

Successful candidates gained marks across all the assessment criteria (a-d). They demonstrated good preparation and teaching, including a clear familiarity with the questions that might be asked and the types of responses expected. They showed good understanding of the main points and ideas contained in two source documents, as well as the different layout techniques used to present these to the reader. They were also able to answer questions that required more detailed reading of the text.

Importantly, successful candidates read questions carefully and noted the number of responses needed.

In the writing section:

Candidates continued to respond well to the scenarios and writing tasks, with many showing a particularly strong performance in the writing section. Successful candidates were able to write a logical, clear and coherent response that included all the relevant detail listed in the question. Strong candidates demonstrated a familiarity with the structure of different documents, including letters, emails, speeches and articles, and were able to use language appropriate for purpose and audience.

Successful candidates also had 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 for both sections, as well as an ability to allocate enough time to each question and for checking.

Areas for development

Overall:

1. Preparation for both sections

Some unsuccessful candidates appeared to have prepared for only the reading or writing section of the exam. They showed a strong performance in one area and a much weaker performance in the other, leading to an overall mark that was too low to pass. It is important to remember that even if full marks are achieved in one section of the paper, a candidate cannot pass without gaining marks in both sections.

2. Checking and proofreading answers

Most candidates would benefit from checking and proofreading their responses in both sections of the paper. In the case of some borderline but unsuccessful candidates, the extra two or three marks this may afford would mean the difference between a pass and fail.

In the reading section:

1. Familiarity with question types

Some unsuccessful candidates did not appear to be familiar with the types of questions they may be asked and the kinds of answers expected. It is essential to ensure that candidates are adequately prepared for the exam prior to being entered. Making use of the practice assessments on the City & Guilds website is strongly recommended.

2. Reading the question carefully

Many weaker candidates simply did not read questions properly. They either did not give enough responses or did not provide relevant information in their answer. The number of responses required will always be stated in the question and so careful reading should avoid careless loss of marks, leading to a better performance on all questions.

3. Reading the source documents carefully

Some candidates struggled with questions that require a more detailed reading of source documents rather than skimming for information. There also may have been an expectation that all the answers would be contained in one section or within successive sentences of the source material. This is not always the case; answers are often spread throughout the document and may be located in subheadings, tabs, text boxes and other features that are not part of the main text.

It is important for candidates to learn and practice the ability to locate key information in a text by scanning and skimming the document, but also to recognise when they need to read documents in greater depth if more detailed information is required.

Teaching and preparation should ensure that candidates are familiar with the types of source documents they may encounter and the ways in which information is conveyed in them.

4. Utilising information and identifying suitable responses (criteria c and d)

Some candidates had difficulty with questions that asked what the reader can or should do in response to the information provided in the source documents, such as who can be contacted and how, or how further information may be accessed. Teaching and preparation should ensure candidates can respond to texts by looking for details such as phone numbers and addresses, links and other ways to access additional information, as well as suggestions for further action.

5. Using the information provided in the source documents rather than own knowledge and experience on a topic

Some candidates answered questions on topics they were familiar with by drawing on their own knowledge rather than using the source documents. All questions in the reading section are based on the information provided in the source documents. This may involve finding specific details in the documents, or it may require the candidate's response to this material, such as identifying the best person to contact for further information. In all cases, answers should be drawn from the text rather than from the candidate's own experience of the subject. Even accurate knowledge cannot be rewarded if it is not found in the provided material.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Candidates should be aware that correct punctuation (as well as spelling and grammar) is required in all responses, including speeches and emails to friends.

Weaker candidates often misused or completely omitted full stops. Capital letters were also used incorrectly, including confusion over common and proper nouns. Correct use of uppercase and lowercase letters is required at both levels. Candidates who write their whole answer in capital letters, or who fail to distinguish between capital and lowercase letters with their handwriting, will lose a significant number of punctuation marks.

2. Poor use of language

Many unsuccessful candidates struggled with language, including unfamiliarity with the meanings of certain words, using common expressions incorrectly, use of inappropriate slang,

excessive use of 'and' and 'also' within one sentence or paragraph, clumsy or confusing phrasing, and general lack of clarity.

Some candidates demonstrated an inability to use language appropriate for intended audience. For example, a formal letter or email should not begin with 'Hi John'. As at least one of the writing tasks requires a formal response, candidates should be prepared for writing with a formal tone.

3. Common spelling and grammar errors

Certain common errors continued to be seen regularly. These included 'alot', 'writting', 'aswell', 'collage' instead of 'college', using 'of' instead of 'have' (could of, would of, etc), and 'yous'/'you'se'/'use' instead of 'you'. Common homophone errors were also seen often, including here/hear, there/they're/their, to/too/two, were/where, etc.

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

4. Relevant detail

Many candidates omitted important information or did not address all the points they were asked to cover in the task. At level 1, the required detail is listed in bullet points. For example, a candidate may be asked to explain why they are suited for a specific role and what they will do in this role. Only covering why they feel they are suited for the role would not be addressing this task in full. Writing an application for an entirely different job would also be ignoring the task that has been set. Both of these omissions would not allow the candidate to access the full amount of marks for this writing task.

Candidates should read questions carefully to ensure they are aware of all the information they need to include in their response. They should also consider the purpose of the text they have been asked to produce; for example, if they are writing an email asking people to attend an event, they should include details of when and where that event will take place.

5. Format and structure

This is an area that still represents a problem for weaker candidates. Some unsuccessful candidates wrote responses that had little or no structure, such as letters without addresses or opening and closing salutations. It is important candidates are familiar with the correct format and structure of letters, emails, speeches and articles. Candidates should understand how to present their responses in a structured, logical sequence, making use of paragraphs, 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 80-120 words on the 'short' question and 120-140 words on the 'long' question. Responses that are too short are penalised across certain categories. Many weaker candidates either did not provide a long enough response to demonstrate an ability to write well, or wrote too much and consequently ran out of time or made a greater number of errors. Very long answers tended to lose coherence. Very short answers did not provide adequate detail.

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. It is encouraging to see that more candidates are starting to take this approach when running out of time, as this sometimes means the difference between a pass and a fail.

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, practice and preparation should include time management techniques.
4. Candidates should be aware that in the **reading** section they do not need to answer in complete sentences or to repeat the stem of the question in their answer (although answers do need to be legible). This can help with managing time during the exam.
5. It is essential that candidates are taught to read all questions fully and consider what is being asked of them before attempting to answer. This may involve underlining important instructions on the question paper, particularly key words such as 'why', 'how', 'who', and any detail required in the writing tasks. Marks are easily lost due to not reading questions carefully.
6. Many candidates would strongly benefit from checking their finished responses in both the reading and writing sections.
7. As part of the learning process, candidates should be exposed to all types of source documents, including websites, articles, formal letters and emails, leaflets, promotional material and advertising, amongst others. Any of these may be encountered as source documents in the reading section.

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