

4800-021

**Essential Skills Northern Ireland
Communication Level 2**

Chief Examiner's report – April 2019

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4800-021 Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 2.

2 Overall Performance

This report covers the period from October 2018 to April 2019. Reviewing previous Chief Examiner's reports is also recommended, 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 / unfamiliarity with the question types.
2. Careless reading of the questions.
3. Not providing enough information or responses.

In addition, candidates who achieve lower marks in the reading section often struggle with two areas of the criteria in particular: identifying language techniques, and comparing information and points of view in the source documents.

In the writing section:

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

Areas of good performance

In the reading section:

Successful candidates generally gained marks across all the assessment criteria (a-e). They demonstrated good preparation and teaching, including a clear familiarity with the question types and the kinds of responses expected. Importantly, successful candidates read questions carefully and provided relevant answers. They also paid attention to the number of responses needed.

Successful candidates demonstrated an ability to read source documents carefully. They were able to locate the main points and ideas of a text, and to read the text in depth when more detailed responses were required. Stronger candidates could compare and contrast the messages and points of view within the source documents, and they were able to recognise bias.

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 clearly and concisely, using language appropriate for purpose and audience. They showed a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Stronger candidates used paragraphs well and were able to employ a variety of sentence structures effectively, including complex sentences. They demonstrated a familiarity with the structure of different documents, including letters, emails, speeches and articles.

There has been a marked improvement in candidates' abilities to write persuasively, with most candidates now including persuasive techniques and language intended to appeal to and influence their audience. However, there are still areas for improvement with this, which are discussed in more detail below.

Overall:

Successful candidates answered most or all of the questions on the paper, demonstrating an ability to allocate the right amount of time to each question and for checking.

Areas for development

In the reading section:

1. Familiarity with question types

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.

Overall, performance on the writing section was much stronger than on the reading section. Some candidates appeared to have prepared and practiced for the writing section, achieving high marks in these tasks, but were unprepared for the reading section. They were not familiar with the question types and what was required of them, and in some cases left multiple answers blank. This led to a very poor performance on the reading questions and an overall mark that was too low to pass. It is important to remember that even if full marks are achieved in the writing section of the paper, a candidate cannot pass without gaining marks in the reading section as well.

2. Reading the question carefully

Some candidates achieved lower marks simply because they did not read questions properly. Marks are easily lost when candidates do not provide enough responses and/or when they do not provide relevant information in their answer, such as giving layout techniques when asked for language techniques, or explanations when asked for examples. In both cases, careful reading of the question should address this, leading to a better performance.

3. Identifying language techniques and providing examples from the source document

Some candidates are still struggling to identify language techniques used by the author to convey their message or appeal to the reader. This is a skill that is tested on every level 2 paper, so candidates who are prepared for this type of question will perform better. Language techniques may differ across source documents, so candidates should be familiar with a variety of techniques and how they might be used in different texts, and it is important that they are able to distinguish between language and layout techniques. Examples of possible

language techniques are rhetorical questions and use of humour. Examples of possible layout techniques are bold font and bullet points. A candidate should not give layout techniques when they have been asked for language techniques, and vice versa.

Weaker candidates learned certain key techniques and listed them, rather than looking for techniques actually used in the source document they were provided with. They also struggled to give examples from the source document. It is important that candidates are able to find and understand the use of language techniques in the specific document they have been given.

4. Comparing and contrasting different ideas and points of view

Some unsuccessful candidates struggled to identify and to compare and/or contrast different points of view. Simply listing evidence from one or both sources with only implied comparison will not allow a candidate to access as many marks as explicitly comparing the sources, using words such as 'whereas', 'on the one hand', 'in contrast', 'but', 'both', 'similarly', 'agree', 'disagree', etc. Other candidates summarised one or both of the arguments incorrectly, leading to an incorrect comparison.

Teaching and preparation should aim to ensure candidates can identify point of view and summarise ideas and arguments from different sources. Candidates should be able to find similarities and differences in the ideas found in separate documents or within one document.

5. Reading the source documents carefully to obtain and utilise information

Some candidates struggled to select and carefully read source documents to obtain and utilise relevant information. Candidates should be able to choose the relevant source document or section of the source document to answer the question (for example, if they are asked to provide evidence from a specific person), and they should be able to read source documents carefully to show detailed understanding of the points and ideas within.

Some candidates may expect all answers relating to one question to 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.

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 within them.

6. Answering with information found in the source documents rather than drawing from own knowledge

Some candidates used their own knowledge and experience to answer questions rather than looking for the answers in the source documents. All questions in the reading section are based on the information provided in the source documents. Even accurate knowledge cannot be rewarded if it is not found in the provided text.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Many candidates lost a significant amount of marks due to comma errors. Teaching and preparation should cover when commas are needed in sentences and that they should not be

used in place of full stops (comma splicing). Some candidates also struggled to use apostrophes correctly.

Candidates should be aware that correct punctuation (as well as spelling and grammar) is required in all responses, regardless of the task and intended audience, including speeches and informal emails.

It is also important to remember that 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 weaker candidates struggled with language use, including unfamiliarity with the meanings of certain words, 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'.

3. Common spelling and grammar errors

Certain common errors continued to be seen regularly. These included 'alot', 'writting', 'aswell', 'collage' instead of 'college', '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. Including relevant detail

Many candidates omitted important information or did not address all the points they were asked to cover in the task. At level 2, the required detail is not always listed in bullet points but may be contained within the task itself. 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 article to persuade people to attend a meeting, they will need to provide details such as what the meeting is about and where and when it will take place.

5. Writing persuasively

In one task, candidates will be directed to persuade or convince their intended audience. Some candidates were not able to do this effectively, instead simply stating information without any attempt to persuade. Many more candidates were able to include some attempts

at persuasive language, but the most successful candidates could employ a range of different techniques.

Teaching and preparation should ensure that candidates know how to employ a range of persuasive techniques, such as rhetorical questions, inclusive language, direct appeals, positive language, confident language, exaggeration, use of humour where appropriate, etc. For example, 'I like dancing' is not very persuasive. 'I am passionate about dancing' is more persuasive. 'I am sure that you will find my passion for dancing inspires the students' is very persuasive.

Candidates should be aware of the intended purpose and audience of their text and be able to use persuasive writing to achieve a desired response or convince readers of their point of view.

6. Format and structure, including use of paragraphs

This is an area that has seen improvement but still represents a problem for some candidates. In some cases, candidates produced responses with little or no structure, including letters without addresses or opening and closing salutations. There were also a number of candidates writing responses without paragraphs or who used paragraphs in a haphazard fashion.

It is important candidates are familiar with the correct format and structure of different documents, including letters, emails, speeches and articles. Candidates should understand how to present their responses in a structured, logical sequence, with a clear beginning, middle and conclusion where appropriate.

7. Using complex sentences correctly

Candidates should be able to write using a variety of sentence lengths and structures, including complex sentences. Many weaker candidates did not use any complex sentences in their responses. Some candidates attempted to use complex sentences but either left their sentences unfinished or used punctuation incorrectly.

8. 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 100-120 words on the 'short' question and 140-200 words on the 'long' question. Responses that are too short are penalised across certain categories. Many weaker candidates either did not provide long enough responses 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 conciseness and coherence. Very short answers did not provide adequate detail.

9. 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. Exam 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, it is recommended that preparation includes 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', 'language', 'layout', 'compare', 'biased', 'persuade', etc. 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, business reports, formal letters and emails, leaflets, promotional material and advertising, amongst others. Any of these may be encountered as source documents in the reading section. In addition, candidates should be shown documents with similar or different points of view and should become familiar with the process of comparing and contrasting these.

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