

ESOL Skills for Life (QCF)

2017 Examiners' report

Introduction

Examiners (Speaking & Listening) and markers (Writing) were consulted in the compilation of this report. General trends, issues and strengths are noted below.

Speaking and Listening

Task 1 – learner-led conversation

Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3

Candidates are generally well-prepared for the first task of the exam, and can have an authentic and communicative exchange with the examiner. Most photographs are appropriate and generate a personal and relevant exchange. From 1st December 2017, photographs must be printed – no mobile phones or technological aids are permitted in the exam room at all.

Weaker performances in this task are characterised by one or more of the following:

- ▶ not having the picture to hand
- ▶ the use of pre-fabricated, memorised utterances that do not relate to the examiner's questions
- ▶ listing who the people in the picture are, instead of describing them or the event that is pictured
- ▶ relying on the examiner asking questions, expecting a question-and-answer interaction rather than an interactive conversation
- ▶ a narrow range of language and vocabulary. For example, at Entry 2 and 3 learners should be able to talk about an event in the past, using the forms listed in the Specifications and based on the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum for these levels. To this end, pictures of events or experiences are most effective for generating the appropriate language for the level and the task.

Level 1

These are generally very well-presented, with interesting and engaging explanations. Many candidates choose to explain how to cook something. Whilst a recipe is not necessarily an undesirable topic, it can prove to be very limiting. For example, candidates who present a list of ingredients are denying themselves the opportunity to use a range of language and are taking up valuable time without fulfilling the assessment criteria. Learners should therefore be encouraged to consider a range of explanations and processes that they could discuss.

Sometimes candidates are preparing too much information and want to recite it, rather than explaining a process or procedure in a communicative manner, allowing the examiner to ask questions and clarify his/her understanding as the explanation proceeds.

Level 2

Good Level 2 presentations are clearly organised with good sign-posting, and the content is relevant and well-argued with examples and evidence. Candidates this year showed greater understanding of the requirement to be discursive, presenting a well-argued point of view. This task demands the use of formal language, and presents learners with the opportunity to demonstrate a wide range of language and functions. Less successful presentations are not formal enough for the level, and lack structure and sign-posting. It is vital that candidates practise enough to have a good idea of timing and how long their presentation takes, so they have time for an orderly conclusion.

It is important that candidates do not rely on PowerPoint (from 1st December any PowerPoint presentations will have to be printed off and brought in to the exam room as hard copies) or pictures – these need to be used when relevant and to contribute to the presentation, not be the presentation itself.

Candidates usually respond naturally and easily to the discussion element of their topic, particularly to detailed or extended questions, which require extended answers covering more than one point, ie answers that develop the conversation. From 1st December 2017, this part of the level 2 exam will be slightly longer than previously. Teachers can support candidates by helping them to prepare and predict possible questions.

Task 2 – interactive listening

Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3

There has been a lot of variation in how well candidates have responded to the examiner's dilemma at Entry 3: some have excellent comments and questions, while some do not produce much at all. Weaker candidates do not ask questions, or are too passive in this task. It is important that candidates do not interrupt with an inappropriate suggestion or solution too soon, indicating that they have not listened effectively.

Level 1

Again, there has been a lot of variation in how well candidates have responded to the examiner's past event at Level 1, with some excellent comments, questions and reactions, while some candidates do not evidence much active listening at all. At Level 1, the candidate should listen before interjecting with questions that are more appropriate for Entry 2 such as *'Did you enjoy it? Who did you go with?'* The opportunity to ask more appropriate questions for the level will come as the story progresses.

Task 3 – role play

Entry 2 – Level 2

Examiners report that learners were generally well-prepared for the role-play task. Strong performances were characterised by candidates

- ▶ asking questions
- ▶ making suggestions
- ▶ taking a logical approach to the situation and asking 'wh-' questions
- ▶ taking some responsibility for maintaining the interaction at lower levels, and all the responsibility at higher levels
- ▶ immersing themselves in the role at Level 2 and defending their actions with conviction while using a good range of language and functions

Group discussion

Entry 1 – Level 2

The majority of candidates continue to produce a good level of communicative language in the group discussion. Strong candidates can take responsibility for maintaining the discussion, interacting naturally with their classmates, whereas weaker candidates rely on the examiner prompting and supporting the conversation. It is important that one student does not dominate the discussion, so students should practise asking each other more questions to avoid this problem. Interaction, turn-taking and responding to others is critically important at all levels.

At Entry 3 it is not enough to list a number of ideas and then allocate tasks. Candidates need to more genuinely plan something by eliminating some ideas, giving reasons and pulling together the best ideas in the shape of a plan.

Weaker performances at Level 2 are characterised by language below the level, and not demonstrating the ability to debate global/national issues at a standard appropriate for Level 2.

Writing

Candidates should take note of the word counts, as many write more than is required.

Task 1 – the form

Entry 1 – Level 2

The form causes little difficulty to candidates, with most completing it well.

Candidates need to read the information that is required carefully. It cannot be assumed that the form is always asking for a date of birth – it may require the date that a course began, or today's date, for example.

At lower levels, candidates should understand and be able to use common instructions on forms, eg 'circle', 'tick', 'delete'.

Candidates are expected to use paragraphs from Entry 3 onwards, and these are lacking in weaker performances.

At Level 1 and 2, weaker performances do not demonstrate command of formality, and are written in too casual a style to be appropriate for a form. It is also important for learners to use a range of language and functions at these levels – weaker performances are characterised by the use of Entry level language and lexis.

At Level 2, strong candidates demonstrate a wide range of language and use all the information provided in the notes to the task.

Task 2

Entry 1 – email

This is generally achieved well, with appropriate register and relevant content.

Entry 2 and Entry 3

These tasks are usually in the form of an article for your teacher, so to prepare for this task learners can practise writing texts to be read by their teacher, for class projects, wall displays etc.

At Entry 2, this is often an account of a trip or visit to a place, e.g. a visit to a café, so should be more than a description of the place – it is an opportunity to write about a past event with an appropriate accuracy and range of language and functions, as well as describe the place, person, activities etc. Good descriptions include a range of adjectives, and similarly, weaker performances lack any adjectives or use only a bare minimum.

Level 1 – report or article

Strong performances of this task are those that address all parts of the question, and keep to length.

Level 1 – review or article

This task is generally very well achieved. Weaker candidates choose the incorrect format for a review, especially confusing features of a review with an advertisement, eg using excessive numbers of rhetorical questions and sensationalised adjectives and exclamation marks.

Task 3

Entry 1 – article for your teacher

This task is not an email, but an article or text like those written by learners for wall projects or homework tasks. The teacher is the specified audience, as in a homework task marked by the teacher.

Entry 2 and Entry 3 – informal correspondence

Most candidates complete this task to a high standard. Weaker candidates do not address the question, eg they write about what they do during a whole day instead of about a visit to one shop/café etc.

Level 1 and Level 2 – formal email or message

This is essentially formal in nature, and contracted forms and colloquialisms should be avoided – there is an opportunity to demonstrate control of less formal language in task 4.

Task 4

Level 1 and Level 2 – informal email

These tasks are opportunities for learners to show they can write informally and succinctly. Strong performances of this task are those that address all parts of the question, and keep to length.

Weaker performances are:

- too long
- too formal

Plans

Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2

This is not well achieved when plans do not relate to the task or are not evident at all. Quite often, a lack of planning is then reflected in poor structure and relevance to the written task. The planning requirement is an opportunity for teachers to develop good practice in learners' processes of composition, planning, drafting, writing and reviewing, and it is good to see plans that are evidently part of this process.

Conclusion

The vast majority of candidates have done well this year, and it is hoped that the move away from work-focussed tasks and the need to achieve every criterion will be of benefit to teachers to learners.