

ESOL Skills for Life 2024-5 Examiner's report

Introduction

This report has been compiled using feedback obtained from examiners and markers throughout the previous two academic years.

The ESOL Skills for Life exam is based on the National Standards for Adult Literacy and is required to assess all aspects of these, as detailed in the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. Teachers need to refer to the [specifications](#) for each level, available online via the individual level web page to see what is being assessed in each task and for guidance on which parts of the curriculum each of the assessment criteria covers.

Speaking and Listening

Assessment of speaking and listening is available either online by Trinity examiners conducting the exam over Zoom video conference software, or by Trinity examiners visiting centres and conducting the exam face to face. Both the online and the face-to-face variants of the exam use a photo bank of candidate images. Group discussions comprise two candidates. Examiners report that for the face-to-face sessions:

- ▶ Centres provide the correct timetable and paper marksheets
- ▶ Appropriate waiting facilities are in place for candidates and there is good supervision of candidates.

Examiners appreciate being taken to the exam room in good time so that they can prepare for the exam session.

Please note that for exams that are conducted online over Zoom, the examiner will be online fifteen minutes before the first candidate. Trinity would like to request that centres perform technical checks on the sound and video connection with the examiner **before** the exam start time for the first candidate.

In the majority of sessions, centre staff manage the exam session so that it flows smoothly:

- ▶ Timetables are generally built according to guidelines with no longer than two and a half hours examining before a scheduled break.
- ▶ Candidates are ready for their exams and there are no delays between candidates
- ▶ Most candidates know their picture number for Task 1 (Entry 1 to Level 1)
- ▶ Dummy candidates are only used for the group discussion where there are uneven numbers.

Overall, candidates have a good awareness of the order and structure of the exam they are taking and know what to expect in the tasks. In the following section, feedback from examiners has been summarised for each exam task, broken down into the level, where appropriate.

Task 1 (Candidate-led)

In Task 1 at Entry 1 to Level 1, the Trinity online photo bank of images is used. Candidates choose in advance a picture from the photo bank which represents the theme of what they wish to talk about in Task 1 and the examiner asks questions to elicit further information.

Overall, candidates are well prepared for Task 1 and use one of the Trinity-supplied images as a stimulus, making the link clearly between the photo bank image and their own account (Entry 1 to Entry 3) or process at Level 1. Some candidates do this by saying '*this picture reminds me of...*' Candidates at Entry 2 to Level 1 may bring a small object into the exam room as a stimulus to talk about their event/experience/process, instead of using an image from the Trinity photo bank if this would better represent what the candidate wishes to talk about. However, this small object cannot be a photograph. If a candidate uses a photograph for Task 1, it should be selected from the photo bank.

Occasionally, candidates do not know their picture numbers when entering the exam room. To prevent delays caused by searching for picture numbers during the exam, examiners ask that all candidates know their picture number and can say it clearly. Candidates are also welcome to enter the exam room with their picture number written on a piece of paper. Candidates do not need to have a printed copy of their picture because examiners have copies of all the images for Entry 1 to Level 1. Furthermore, mobile phones are not allowed in the exam room for the candidate to use to display a picture.

In some instances, candidates give long introductions to Task 1 (Entry 2 to Level 1) to set the scene. Please be reminded that the timing for Task 1 includes setting at ease and ID checks. To ensure there is sufficient time to complete this task, candidates should begin talking about the event/experience/process without a lengthy introduction. Candidates should also expect the examiner to ask questions in Task 1 at Entry 1 to Level 1. When preparing candidates for Task 1, please allow time for questions.

Candidates are assessed on their use of a wide range of language items at the level, assessment criteria 2.2 in Task 1 at all Skills for Life levels. Weaker performances in Task 1 are where candidates are using only a limited range of language items. In many cases at Entry 1 to Level 1, examiners model in their questions the language items they wish to elicit, but candidates often miss these cues to produce language items of the level. As Task 1 is a prepared task, candidates should be encouraged to include a wider range of language items and functions of the level in their accounts. When preparing candidates, centres should look carefully at the assessment criteria and amplification for Task 1. Encouraging candidates to include a wide range of language items expected for the task, will help them achieve higher marks.

Entry 1

Candidates should use the picture as a stimulus and personalise it to talk about themselves and their current daily life. Weaker candidates describe the picture or talk about the theme in a very general way, so they have trouble answering the examiner's questions. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Entry 1 for examples of questions which the examiner may ask during this task. Some candidates do not always demonstrate the language of the level during Task 1. For example, the modal verb 'can' is regularly not demonstrated and candidates do not always take the opportunity to use adjectives with 'be' when giving a description.

Entry 2

Stronger candidates are generally well prepared to talk about a past event using a picture from the photo bank and they use a range of past simple verbs accurately. Assessment criterion 2.2 (Language) is where weaker candidates tend to do less well: past simple is used less accurately

and the pronunciation of regular past simple verb endings does not always make it clear to examiners that the past is being referred to. There are also instances where present tenses are used when past simple is required. Use of modal verbs is not always demonstrated when prompted. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Entry 2 for examples of questions which the examiner may ask during this task.

Entry 3

Stronger candidates are prepared to talk about a specific experience and include the narrative aspect of their experience, which allows them to use a wide range of Entry 3 tenses, including past simple, past continuous, 'used to' etc which is a focus of this task. In weaker performances, the narrative element can be missing from the account, with candidates tending to use only the past simple and give a description. This means that candidates do not demonstrate a wide range of Entry 3 language items. As a result, their accounts are less well structured, without a clear introduction, development and ending, which can be indicated by the different tenses and time markers. Centres could refamiliarise candidates with the full range of Entry 3 tenses and encourage them to incorporate these forms into their narrative. In addition, some candidates tend not to include opinion and comparison in their narrative, which is required in the amplification for assessment criteria 3.2. Candidates then find it difficult to respond to questions from the examiner that are designed to elicit these functions. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Entry 3 for examples of questions which the examiner may ask during this task.

Level 1

Candidates can generally respond well to questions, thus demonstrating many of the functions required in this task. Although specialist lexis is used well overall, many processes begin with a lengthy list of ingredients or tools required. While this may at times allow them to demonstrate some less common lexis, it often results in a narrower range of structures being used and candidates may not have time to finish their process once the examiner has asked questions. Candidates should start talking about the process itself straightaway. When preparing candidates, Centres should bear in mind that sequence words and discourse markers are assessed in assessment criterion 3.1. Weaker performances either omit sequencing words or over rely on simple connectors such as '*Firstly..., then... and then...*' to structure processes. Stronger performances in Task 1 tend to use a range of Level 1 language (present simple/past simple passive, conditional with 'would', modals, reported speech, etc). Weaker performances often use below level language (imperatives, can) and lack attempts to use Level 1 items. Candidates may miss the language cues from the examiner which aim to elicit some of the Level 1 language items, meaning candidates score less well in assessment criterion 2.2 (Language). Candidates should be encouraged to integrate a wider range of Level 1 language items into the process task as part of their preparation. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Level 1 for examples of questions the examiner may ask during this task.

Level 2

Overall, candidates prepare presentations on interesting and topical issues for Task 1. However, centres/candidates should remember that the focus of the presentation is to persuade, by highlighting the pros and cons of the topic. In some cases, the presentation is overly descriptive, and so candidates score less well in assessment criterion 3.1 and are also less able to demonstrate the use of a wide range of grammatical forms. Presentations which do not include discussion of pros and cons can also make it difficult to discuss the topic in Task 2 and for the examiner to put forward an opposing view. Candidates should be encouraged to exploit their topic in a way that helps them to meet the requirements of the task.

Task 2 (Examiner-led)

In Task 2, the examiner introduces the topic, and the candidate asks questions to elicit further information (apart from Level 2, which is a debate in which the examiner asks the questions based on the notes they have made during the presentation in Task 1).

Entry 1

Candidates are generally well-prepared to ask questions, but weaker candidates tend to ask questions which elicit a description of the picture and so only cover a limited range of language and functions required for the task. Candidates should listen carefully, and answer questions based on the examiner's responses.

Entry 2

At Entry 2, the focus of the task is on the Examiner's future plan. Candidates generally understand this well and ask a range of appropriate questions using future forms. Candidates should be encouraged to use Entry 2 future language forms (ie going to and present continuous) as listed in the specifications for this task.

Entry 3

Candidates are assessed on their listening skills and their ability to express views. Candidates should listen to the examiner's turns and respond appropriately, by giving their views and opinions and asking for more information as appropriate. In weaker performances, candidates either give advice straight away or focus only on asking a series of questions related to the examiner's choice. Stronger candidates can strike a balance between asking some questions in response to the examiner's turns and then giving their views and opinions towards the end of the task.

Level 1

In Task 2 at Level 1, candidates listen and respond to the examiner's story of a past event. Stronger candidates show their understanding of the details by correctly using phonological features, such as stress and intonation patterns in questions and/or to show surprise, interest, attention, etc. While candidates are often prepared to make comments and ask questions, these questions are often simple (*How did you feel?/What did you do next?*). Candidates would therefore benefit from more practice of asking a range of different types of questions, as required in the Level 1 specifications for assessment criterion 4.4, eg embedded, tag questions and statements. Weaker performances also occur when candidates are less able to follow the examiner's cues for turn taking (pausing to seek a comment or reaction). This can mean that candidates either do not make any comments or ask any questions during this task, or they save their questions and comments until the end, which affects the timing of the task.

Level 2

Candidates are generally able to express views and opinions, and to agree or disagree with the points made and the questions asked by the examiner. In weaker performances, candidates are less able to give extended turns. Their responses are shorter and not always developed to cover more than one point or to give an opinion on what they are being asked. This affects the scores awarded for assessment criteria 3.2 and 4.1. The examiner's language in Task 2 is graded appropriately for Level 2 and will use more complex language as required at this level. Candidates are therefore expected to be able to listen, understand and respond to this level of language in the discussion with the examiner. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Level 2 for examples of questions which the examiner may ask during this task. Weaker performances also occur when the

presentation in Task 1 is not focused on the pros and cons of the topic, as candidates are less well prepared to give an opinion and persuade the examiner.

Task 3 (Role play)

From Entry 2 upwards, there is a role play in which the examiner outlines an authentic situation in which the candidate may find themselves during daily life. The candidate does not need to play a role, but they do need to imagine themselves in that situation. Although this is usually well understood across the levels, at Entry 2 and Entry 3, some candidates require more exposure to the types of face-to-face contexts/scenarios in the role plays, eg buying tickets, going into shops. They may need more class-based practice of these common scenarios if it is not something they regularly do in their daily lives. This will give candidates the opportunity to think about how they would respond in these different scenarios, the questions they might ask and the language/functions they might use. In addition, candidates are assessed on their ability to ask questions in the role play to obtain more information from the examiner at Entry 2 and Entry 3. In weaker performances, candidates tend to finish the role play early without asking questions. In many cases, candidates also miss the examiner's cues which invite questions and so candidates do not therefore meet all the assessment criteria fully.

The role play at Level 1 is a collaborative task with the examiner, in which they share responsibility for completing the task. Better prepared candidates take a more proactive role by making suggestions and planning action to drive the interaction forward. Weaker performances in this task tend to involve the examiner taking the lead, with candidates less able to negotiate and make offers and suggestions of their own. Weaker performances are therefore less able to demonstrate the functional language requirements to meet the assessment criteria.

At Level 2, candidates should be prepared to challenge the examiner's points and to defend their own actions in the role play to demonstrate their ability to 'offer and respond to critical opinion'. Candidates are performing much better in the role play, being able to respond to and offer criticism with some appropriate functional language and expressions to do so. In better performances, candidates are also able to move the discussion forward to reach a solution with the examiner. In weaker performances, candidates tend to offer too much criticism which means they are less able to compromise and agree the best solution. Achieving a balance between criticising and agreeing the solution together with the examiner is therefore key to a successful role play at Level 2.

Group discussion

The format of the group discussion is two candidates talking together about a topic provided by the examiner. This is the task in which candidates perform best across all Skills for Life levels.

At Entry 1 and Entry 2, better performances are where candidates are prepared for the interactive nature of the task and have a conversation with both participants being involved. Weaker performances are where the discussion is a series of questions and answers between candidates rather than a conversation between participants who listen carefully to one another and respond to what the other has said. In some cases, questions appear not to respond to the candidate's previous point and so the conversation lacks authenticity.

At Entry 3, candidates are required to plan something together. In weaker performances, candidates tend not to make offers/suggestions of their own, instead agreeing with those made by their partner. Candidates can disagree with the proposals made by their partner and make their own offers and suggestions, as this will enable candidates to perform better on assessment criteria 4.3 (plan action).

At Level 1, better performances are where candidates demonstrate turn-taking skills by asking questions and following up on comments made. These performances are also characterised by candidates using a range of functional language appropriate for the level to agree/disagree, make suggestions and give opinions. Better performances also cover all parts of the topic in the time available. In the case of stronger performances, candidates also have strategies in place to help them if they run out of ideas, eg summarising what has been said to then identify new information that can be discussed. In weaker performances, one candidate tends to take on the role of giving suggestions/advice to the other candidate, rather than it being a genuine conversation. This can mean that candidates are not able to demonstrate all the assessment criteria without support from the examiner.

At Level 2, stronger discussions are where candidates both agree and disagree with each other and give their own views, opinions and experiences of the topic which leads to an authentic discussion and supports candidates to meet a wide range of language/functions for the task. However, in weaker performances, candidates can run out of ideas and conclude the discussion prematurely. Sometimes this is because candidates miss the part of the task which requires them to give solutions to problems inherent in the topic. In other cases, candidates appear to lack ideas about how to discuss the topic in detail or offer solutions to problems. Even in better performances, candidates tend to miss opportunities to ask questions/make requests appropriate to the level, or use softeners as required in assessment criteria 4.3. Level 2 candidates would benefit from familiarising themselves with national/global issues by reading newspapers or online articles, watching the news and by practising group discussion topics in class.

Writing

Feedback here is given on the previous two academic years. Note that from September 2025, the format of some writing papers is changing. All levels will have three tasks and follow the same order. Task 1 remains the form task, Task 2 the email, and Task 3 the article report or review. Task 4, the informal email has been removed from Levels 1 and 2.

In general, answers are of a high standard, particularly at Entry 1, with many candidates demonstrating ability above the level. At Entry 2 and 3, many candidates show clear writing skills and at Levels 1 and 2, stronger candidates display a clear aptitude for writing with the sophistication required by the assessment criteria, producing texts which are a pleasure to read. In response to the set tasks, candidates provide insightful personal accounts, reflecting on their communities. However, at these higher levels, it is increasingly common to find candidates whose style is confident but basic with very few examples of grammar, functions and lexis required at the level. These candidates tend to produce overly conversational texts, particularly in Tasks 1 and 2 at Entry 3 and Tasks 1, 2 and 3 at Levels 1-2. They would benefit from learning how written language differs from spoken language and how to use more complex and varied structures into their writing.

The vast majority of candidates completed all parts of the exam. However, it is quite common to see one or two tasks significantly over length and one or two tasks significantly under developed or unfinished. Candidates would benefit from planning their time during the exam better to ensure they fully address all the tasks.

Most candidates use a black pen to produce their response. It is rare to see a candidate's response written in pencil or with a correction fluid, but erasable pens have been used more often than in the previous year. Centres should remind candidates that these are not allowed in the exam.

Below is a summary of marker feedback in relation to each of the assessment criteria for Entry 1 and Entry 2. For Entry 3 to Level 2, comments are often relevant to all three levels and therefore we have conflated these, specifying those which only relate to one level.

Entry 1

Most candidates at Entry 1 are entered at the correct level for their ability. However, this year there was a slight increase in the number of candidates who confidently and accurately produced language above level. While it is always acceptable for a candidate to use all the language that they know, in a small minority of cases, this resulted in candidates not producing the target language for the task and assessment criterion (eg candidates wrote the postcard using past tense, rather than writing about what they are doing using the present continuous).

Candidates mostly attempt all the tasks. However, some candidates produce responses significantly above recommended length in Task 2 and are left with little time to complete Task 3, with a small minority sometimes missing Task 3 completely. This is possibly because they run out of time and fail to fully complete the final task. Overall, candidates tend to perform better in Task 2 than Task 3.

1.1 Construct simple sentences correctly for an intended audience

Candidates who achieve maximum marks in this criterion tend to write in short, simple sentences using correct word order: subject-verb-object, subject-verb-adverb, subject-verb-adjective and subject-verb-prepositional phrase, and there is/are+ noun+ prepositional phrase, using both present simple and continuous tenses as required by the task.

Answers which do not meet this criterion tend to be written as an incorrect text type, more commonly in Task 3. For example, in Task 3, candidates write a note directly addressing the audience, rather than an article for a teacher (eg starting with *Hi Teacher...*). Some candidates also attempt to write using compound sentences with simple connectors and or but (an above-level skill, which is required at Entry 2). Candidates are welcome to use any of their writing skills when completing these tasks. However, some candidates using these connectors are unable to control word order, which can affect how well they perform in this criterion. This is particularly common when attempting to use the present continuous tense. A small minority of candidates complete Task 2 writing about what they did rather than what they are doing, which is the focus of this task. In some responses, candidates write using one structure in a repetitive way (eg *I like my college. I like my teacher. I like my friends.*) and therefore only demonstrate an acceptable range of grammatical items and functions in the specification.

1.2 Use full stops correctly

This criterion is often fulfilled correctly, with most candidates being aware that full stops are used to indicate the end of sentences. A minority of candidates use a comma instead of a full stop to mark the end of the sentence or do not use any punctuation marks at all.

1.3 Use capitalisation correctly

While almost all candidates are aware of the correct use of the capital 'I' to refer to themselves, capitalisation of the first letter of a sentence is not always evident. This is often the case when candidates do not use full stops correctly to mark the end of sentences. Additionally, a small number of candidates capitalise a specific letter in all instances, wherever it appears in a word, or capitalise the first letter in each word.

1.4 Spell words correctly

This criterion is generally well achieved at Entry 1, with the majority of candidates showing a good knowledge of vocabulary relating to familiar contexts and often demonstrating a wide range of lexis and good control over spelling. In most cases, spelling errors that do occur, do not impede communication. In a small number of responses, where issues with spelling arise, they are often linked to poor handwriting or candidates attempting more ambitious vocabulary, sometimes above

the level. Spelling errors are most often found to relate to the vowel sounds (eg in homophones *red/read*) or not doubling letters when adding 'ing' (eg *get>getting*).

2.1 Record personal details in a simple form correctly

Most candidates perform well, with almost all candidates completing all or almost all of the form correctly. Where errors or omissions occur, these are in most cases related to the address, for example missing out fields completely (particularly the postcode or telephone number) or incorrectly completing key information (eg date of birth instead of today's date, or nationality or language instead of name of country).

Entry 2

1.1 Present information in an appropriate format for the intended audience

Most candidate at Entry 2 write interesting accounts and descriptions of their favourite places using an appropriate format and addressing the audience appropriately.

However, candidates who do not achieve full marks in this criterion, write on topic but did not address the specific purpose of the task. For example, if the rubric asks them to write what they did at a specific place, they may write an account of their entire day but only briefly mention the visit to the place. Another common mistake in Task 3 includes writing an account rather than a description.

Another issue at this level is in interpreting the rubric 'Write an article for your teacher'. While Trinity has an obligation to specify the 'appropriate format' and 'intended audience' for the candidate to be able to achieve this criterion, candidates should be advised that this phrasing is simply intended to reflect the ordinary short piece of text they might produce in class. Therefore, writing a note, email or letter to their teacher is not an appropriate format, but one solid paragraph of writing is acceptable.

A small number of candidates write too much in Task 2 and as a result may not have sufficient time to finish Task 3.

1.2 Construct simple and compound sentences correctly

Some stronger performances demonstrate impressive control over a wide range of grammatical items of the level appropriate for Tasks 2 and 3, as listed in the Entry 2 specification.

However, many candidates do not take the opportunity to produce compound sentences (using a range of basic conjunctions such as '*and*', '*but*' and '*or*'). Word order and basic verb forms are generally delivered correctly at this level, with many candidates using both regular and irregular past forms accurately. Some weaker candidates struggle with when to use the past and when to use the present and write both tasks using the past tense.

1.3 Use adjectives correctly

Some candidates may not be aware that this is a discrete assessment criterion. In these cases, an otherwise strong candidate, does not use adjectives at all, preventing them from receiving any mark for this criterion. This was a particular issue in Task 2.

Candidates who have been well prepared appeared to be aware of the need to demonstrate the use of adjectives and include several adjectives in their responses, mostly with correct word order. Many candidates used a very narrow range of only the most common adjectives (eg *good*, *bad*, *nice*) and very few candidates include comparative adjectives in their writing, which is one of the items in the amplification for this criterion at Entry 2. Candidates could be reminded that they should be using a range of adjectives in both Task 2 and Task 3 and should include comparative forms as well.

1.4 Use punctuation correctly

Many candidates only demonstrate the use of punctuation expected at Entry 1 (end of sentence full stops). In order to demonstrate the ability to use punctuation at Entry 2, candidates need to use commas in a list as well as a wider range of end of sentence punctuation marks (full stops, question marks and exclamation marks as appropriate). Candidates who have been well prepared use a list separated by commas effectively, particularly in Task 3. Use of full stops as sentence boundary markers is generally well controlled at this level.

1.5 Use upper- and lower-case letters correctly

At this level, candidates are expected to use capital letters correctly for proper nouns (in addition to the sentence boundaries expected at Entry 1). Most candidates consistently capitalise names of people and places in both Task 2 and 3. However, some candidates do not capitalise days of the week, months, and street names. The issue of randomly capitalising entire words or capitalising a single letter of the alphabet throughout is also found at this level, particularly for candidates who are new to the Roman script. It is usually in these areas where marks for this criterion are lost.

1.6 Spell words correctly

Markers are often impressed with a wide range of lexis used by candidates. Spelling ability is also generally high and most spelling errors do not impede understanding. At this level, it is often only ambitious, above-level or specialist vocabulary which is spelled incorrectly.

2.1 Record personal details in a form correctly

At Entry 2, it is relatively common for candidates to lose marks by leaving fields blank. These often include an email address, mobile phone number or emergency contact details. Tutors should teach candidates the use of N/A to help them overcome any cases where no answer is applicable (exactly as they would use in real life). Marks are also lost where candidates provide date of birth, instead of current date or a particular date. Candidates are advised to read the form carefully to avoid these errors.

Entry 3–Level 2

Plans

The majority of candidates do show evidence of planning their writing, but in some rare instances, candidates do not include a plan at all and therefore do not achieve any marks for this criterion.

In addition, the quality of planning varies, often from cohort to cohort. There is usually a clear correlation between sound planning technique and final answers, ie evidence of a couple of minutes spent brainstorming ideas for a final answer almost invariably results in higher marks for criteria such as content, structuring and sequencing.

Common situations which result in a 0 being awarded:

- ▶ No plan at all
- ▶ Plan bears no relation to any question
- ▶ Plan for final task only (informal)
- ▶ Rubric has been copied, word for word.

Reasons for a 2 being awarded:

- ▶ Plan relates to rubric but lacks detail (eg little more than the wording of the rubric used)
- ▶ A very simple spider graph (two or three arms) with one or two words for each arm
- ▶ A list of key questions/statements, often copied from the rubric, with little or no detail.

Effective plans likely to achieve a 4:

- ▶ Markers can see a clear relation to one or more task(s) and can identify the basis of a final answer; if only one task is planned, this is not the informal task.

Enable candidates to achieve higher marks for paragraphing, structure, coherence, etc, in the actual answer for whichever task(s) they have chosen to plan.

Forms

At Entry 3 to Level 2, the form will always include two or three closed fields and one or more open response fields. A minority of candidates miss out the closed responses, while many do not include the full details required, with the most common omission being the use of first name only (where the form requires a full name) or only including part of the course. At level 1 and Level 2, candidates sometimes miss out a signature and/or date at the end of the form.

At Level 1 and 2, some candidates over-focus on the overarching question in the rubric provided for context above the form and ignore the questions on the form itself in the open response fields. This often results in the whole response being included in the first open response field, with just one or two sentences in the remaining fields.

Additionally, at Entry 3, not all candidates appear to be familiar with the concept of using a form to provide feedback and the purpose of such a form. For example, if the form asks for feedback on one aspect of college life (eg the college canteen), they should limit their feedback to this area rather than talking about the college in general. Some candidates incorrectly complete the form using a format of a letter/email, directly addressing the recipient of the form (eg *Dear Headteacher...*) and signing it off (eg *Yours sincerely...*)

At Level 1 and Level 2, many candidates do not produce responses using an appropriate formal register required in Task 1. They write using an informal register and often a conversational, personal style.

At Level 2, the candidate is required to use given facts and/or data to produce their response. Candidates who achieve a high score for this section demonstrate that they are able to successfully paraphrase this information and adapt it for the purpose of their writing. This allows them to demonstrate the range of skills required at this level. However, many candidates either do not incorporate the information into their response at all, or may copy it verbatim, using it in a very basic way without identifying the key information and adapting it for the purpose of their writing.

Text production and content

Stronger candidates respond to all parts of the rubric, with the right level of expansion and appropriate detail. However, weaker scripts at Entry 3, Levels 1 and 2, often do not respond to the questions with adequate expansion and level of detail and produce texts which are significantly below the suggested word count. Where these issues arise, it may be because the candidate has read the question too quickly and/or not taken the time to plan their answer. This results in parts of the question being missed out (eg reports at Level 1 candidates include effective description but do not always suggest improvements or give recommendations), being under-developed (eg the rubric asks for suggestions but only one suggestion is included in the response) or the focus of the response not matching the question asked (eg 'Write a review of a restaurant for a website' becomes a review of a website). Candidates who produce responses which are too short often do not achieve full marks in this area, and while this is only formally assessed once per task ('judge level of detail to write and what to include'), it can have an impact on other criteria. This is especially true in the case of short answers, where the candidate does not have the opportunity to demonstrate a wide enough range of structures, lexis, punctuation, or discourse markers.

From Entry 3 upwards it is noted that the range and complexity of functions and grammar does not consistently reflect the national standards as described in the core curriculum and listed in Trinity's exam specifications. Many candidates, especially at Entry 3 and Level 1, do not take the opportunity to display the complex structures required in more formal texts that they have learned during their course.

Register

The concept of register is introduced at Entry 3, with 'identify appropriate register for task and audience' being seen within the content criterion. At this level, this is generally achieved well, although some candidates do not recognise the level of formality required in Task 1. The final task on the paper is an informal communication. The response to this is often stronger than to the more formal tasks, with many candidates including a wide range of informal text features appropriate to an email to a close friend, such as emoticons, friendly greetings, contracted forms, colloquial language, and sign-offs that include formatting such as kisses. Some weaker candidates lose marks in this task because they are not able to control the register throughout the task and include more formal aspects, such as formal cohesive devices or greetings.

By Levels 1 and 2, language tone is an assessment criterion in its own right. At Level 1 the focus is on using the right level of formality to suit the context. Most candidates display a clear understanding of this. Where performances are weaker, this is usually due to an inability to differentiate clearly, with the formal email task being overly informal, or articles (which should be neutral in style) often showing an overly conversational style. Candidates should learn to identify both the target reader and the text type in order to inform the chosen register and to maintain appropriate register throughout the task. Also, some weaker candidates at Levels 1 and 2 do not demonstrate a range of lexical phrases and vocabulary appropriate for the genre and audience (particularly in reports, letters of complaint, or letters of enquiry) or only include one or two examples at the start of the task. Some candidates struggle in particular with the tone of letters of complaint, and their responses come across as aggressive or threatening.

Structuring and Sequencing

Entry 3 to Level 2 exams have an increasing focus on structuring and sequencing of texts to various effects. Most candidates are aware of the need to structure their writing, with responses consisting of an introduction, development, and conclusion. This is done well in most tasks across all three levels.

Most candidates at Entry 3 use some form of paragraphing and many understand the concept of separating ideas out in this way. However, some candidates do not use paragraphs appropriately, with some simply chunking text at random, including one-sentence paragraphs or not using paragraphs at all. Again, markers note that many candidates often omit topic sentences and go straight into detail, so we would advise practising the idea of structuring a paragraph with a general statement followed by details.

At Level 1 and Level 2, candidates are required to indicate logical arrangements and the relationship between ideas through the use of a wide range of discourse markers, connectives and logical phrases, examples of which can be found in the exam specifications (eg Level 1 – *as, if, unless, so, as a result of that, even though, accordingly, for this reason, therefore*). However, many candidates rely on a limited range of basic discourse markers, conjunctions, and connectives, or when they attempt to use more sophisticated cohesive devices, they use them inappropriately.

At Level 1, many candidates find it difficult to produce reports and would benefit from reviewing typical ways of laying out a report, for example using headings and subheadings to separate key points. Many Level 2 candidates also find it difficult to write an effective and convincing review,

often writing descriptively rather than including evaluative or critical statements. At all levels, candidates occasionally use inappropriate text types – eg a letter instead of an article or an article instead of a report.

Grammar

Markers noted that at Entry 3 to Level 2, many candidates could be more ambitious in the structures used, with many relying heavily on grammar below the level, with only one or two examples of the grammatical structures listed in the amplification and key language items for the level. While there is often an appropriate level of grammatical accuracy when using language below the level, candidates often do not score full marks in this criterion because they do not demonstrate a wide range of grammatical items required at the level and appropriate for the task. For example, while many Level 1 candidates use basic tenses accurately (present simple and continuous, past simple, present perfect), only some include conditional sentences, and very few include reported speech, passive voice, or a wider range of tenses.

Strong performances in the tasks are characterised by the use of a wide range of grammatical structures with a reasonably consistent level of control.

Punctuation

Strong performances show that candidates have clearly understood the importance of displaying their knowledge of the full range of punctuation marks to enhance meaning in their work and to aid clarity. However, many candidates do not appear to be aware of the need to use a full range of punctuation marks available (including commas for various purposes, and apostrophes, quotation marks and colons or semi-colons at higher levels), and while their use of basic punctuation is accurate, in weaker performances eg at Entry 3, use of punctuation is limited to start and end of sentence marks, expected of an Entry 2 candidate.

Some candidates, who do not include complex structures required at these levels in their responses (eg sentences with relative clauses at Entry 3, conditional sentences or reported speech at Level 1, or fronting and cleft sentences at Level 2), are not able to demonstrate their ability to use punctuation to aid clarity and are therefore not awarded full marks in this criterion. Markers noted that as sentences become more complex at higher levels, commas are more important to aid the reader.

In addition, at Entry 3 in particular, many candidates continued to use capitalisation inappropriately, for example capitalising all nouns or significant words in a sentence.

Lexis

Overall, candidates perform well in this criterion across all three levels. At Entry 3, most candidates display a broad range of lexis to meet the purpose of the text, but the weaker performances at Levels 1 and 2 tend to be characterised by a limited, repetitive vocabulary. Candidates generally display a good lexical range when they write about topics they are familiar with, such as related to their work. In less familiar contexts, candidates sometimes limit their use of specialist lexis to that in the rubric. The most common lexical errors include candidates using the wrong word type (eg noun or adjective instead of adverb) or incorrect suffixes (eg bored instead of boring). Excellent performances at Level 2 show a flexible and creative use of specialist lexis, and appropriate use of collocations, idioms, and colloquialisms.

At all levels, spelling is fairly well controlled and where errors occur, they rarely impede understanding.