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# Functional Skills

# **ENGLISH**

Level 1

Report on the Examination

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## Component 1 Reading

Some students sat this examination as an on-screen test. This report covers the on-screen test as well as the written paper.

### Question 5

The multiple choice questions were handled very well with the exception of Q5. The question was a simple retrieval of information where the correct answer was “to work in a library, you must have 5 GCSEs”. Almost 1/3 of candidates misinterpreted the sentence “Working hours will depend on the library’s opening hours but will usually be 40 hours per week” and chose the wrong answer option of “libraries are open for 40 hours per week”. Close and careful reading remains a crucial skill for success in this text.

### Question 7

This section required candidates to read a leaflet aimed at encouraging parents and carers to read with their children. Almost half of candidates scored full marks when asked to identify four good things about sharing a book with a child. However, only 25% achieved the same score on Q7b, which asked for four pieces of advice for parents or carers wishing to read with their child. It has become a feature of such questions that far too many candidates completely ignore the set text and offer suggestions from their own experience. Candidates must remember that this is a test of reading and all answers must come from the text, to which they are directed in the question.

### Question 2

The pattern of success in identifying and explaining the effect of presentational features continues, which is very pleasing. This series, less than 10% failed to score on this question, with almost 40% gaining full marks. However, the advice from the summer report remains relevant and bears repeating here. Some candidates get the marks almost by accident by citing several features and offering generic explanations as to why these make the article easier to understand. Training candidates to offer, in each part of the question, **one** presentational feature with an explanation relating to **that** feature would improve performance further and would be very welcome. However,

it is a delight to see any progress and teachers are to be commended for working so hard to help their students access the demands of this question.

## **Component 2 Writing**

### **Overview**

There is every reason to remain confident of the value of this qualification. It is consistent in its standard as a test of basic English writing skills and is the basis for secure progression.

With two questions containing stimulus material leading into a task which is supported by bullet points, candidates are able to use some of the information in the question. There is an element of problem solving and functional thinking in completing the task. At this level, centres now very rarely enter candidates who have little or no chance of getting inside Band 2 Mark Scheme descriptors. Candidates seemed generally confident and able to meet the requirements of the questions with an overwhelming majority of candidates on both Question 1 and Question 2 hitting at least 4 marks for content. It is the view of examiners that a majority of candidates in this series, at the top end of the distribution with total marks of 15 or more, would be well suited to the demands of Level 2 and should be encouraged to progress. Candidates whose marks fall below a total of 15 may well need a little more in the way of skill development before they progress on to Level 2. Close examination of the centre's mark profile would be very useful in establishing appropriate progression routes for candidates.

### **Question 1**

This question asked candidates to write an article to submit to a competition at Free Time magazine. The subject matter of the article was 'The best way to spend a free day'. Candidates were asked to write about what they would like to do on the free day, why they would recommend it and any arrangements for the free day that might be necessary.

Most candidates saw the task clearly and established their choice of free day early in the article. The better amongst these chose something that they were very familiar with, and were consequently able to provide interesting detail and convincing reasons for their choice. The range of activity chosen was vast, from the extremely mundane such as lying late in bed and taking a stroll to the shopping centre, to adventurous choices such as horse riding, karting, fishing and other outdoor activities. It was interesting to see that good candidates were able to write effectively

about simple activities, often enlivening their article with self-disparaging humour about the benefits of laziness and overeating. A good number of candidates were inspired by the picture of a family cycling around a park lake. Such candidates wrote well about the importance of sustaining strong family ties through shared activity, often including food in the form of a picnic or a meal at a restaurant.

An impressive number of candidates wrote well about activities that would help others, such as volunteering to work with a charity or seeking out those in need, such as homeless people and offering food and sustenance to them. Another impressive sub group wrote about self improvement through attending classes, reading or private study.

These good answers were well structured and the use of paragraphs often mirrored the bullet points to provide a three part structure. Sentences were able to carry information effectively and in many cases, were very enthusiastic with some element of persuasion, indicating that the candidates were ready for progression to Level 2.

Weaker candidates often struggled to establish a sense of function. The task was, implicitly, to put forward a case for the best way to spend a free day but weaker responses simply listed a number of activities, without any support or reasoning attached. Some responses took the form of brief quasi narratives which were often barely met the Band 1 mark descriptor 'attempts to present at least one fact or item of information'. A very tiny minority provided answers were incoherent, without successfully communicating any factual material. 'Writing not suitable for purpose and audience' is a key descriptor and this was the case with such candidates. Of course, this has to be put into perspective, as by far the greater proportion of candidates were able to achieve marks of 4 or more for content.

## **Question 2**

For this question, candidates were asked to send an email to The Animal House, an animal care and 'holiday home' with regards to placing a pet in the establishment. They were asked to provide information to Zadie Jones, the manager of the Animal House, about their pet, including the required duration of the stay and whether there were any special needs.

Overall, achievement on this question was significantly higher than on Question 1, due possibly to the inclusion of animals in the subject matter and the rather fetching picture of a family pet in the

stimulus material. Most candidates provided relevant information that enabled a mark of 4 or more to emerge. Information about the type and name of the pet with the dates required for the Animal House were present in all of these answers. The information was clearly organised into a coherent sequence, often including paragraphs.

Many of the better answers included detailed information about the pet's dietary and medical needs and it was surprising to find so many animals with behavioural issues. One or two candidates took the opportunity to write about imaginary pets such as tigers or crocodiles and where such indulgence was tethered into a functional email there was no immediate disadvantage to the candidate. It was only when the functionality of the letter was diminished that candidates would fail to gain marks, however, it was sometimes the case that candidates approaching the task in this way were unable to sustain credible information and therefore the top band was often unavailable to them.

Weaker candidates were unable to provide enough information for the Animal House and therefore met Band 1 descriptors. Often the candidates provided the simplest information such as the fact that they had a dog, but failed to indicate any dates for the stay or any other relevant information. These weaker answers also failed to adopt an appropriate tone and were unable to provide any context for their email.

### **Accuracy**

Perhaps the most important descriptor for Band 2 achievement is 'meaning is clear' and in this series the vast majority of candidates reached this band.

Band 2 nevertheless represents a modest level of achievement with written Standard English. Candidates in this band would typically provide some grammatical sentences, syntax would be largely appropriate for Standard English and the spelling of common words would be mostly accurate. When these are not present, the candidate's work will fall into Band 1 for accuracy.

The construction of grammatical sentences with clear full stops and capital letters remains elusive. Some examiners also noted an inconsistency in the use of upper case with weaker candidates displaying hit and miss approach. Some candidates made errors such as omitting words which could have been self-corrected through proof-reading.

Spelling was generally of a good standard although weaker candidates resorted to phonetic transcriptions of more difficult words. A feature that was much more evident in this series than before was the use of 'gonna' and 'wanna' in a formal context where written Standard English is expected.

I would also like to emphasise the importance of checking writing. This is particularly significant for those candidates taking on-screen assessments or providing word-processed answers. Also, when candidates produce very short answers, with unchecked typos dominating the reader's experience, it is highly unlikely that the candidate would score well for either content or accuracy.

One examiner commented:

'Most were awarded a mark in band 2 for accuracy. There were clear responses and often candidates made a few mistakes'

Simple spelling errors: 'sope', 'stroct' (stroked), 'your' instead of 'you're', 'alot' etc

Some candidates had issues with tense, agreement and word order.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

## **Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)