

## Notes and Guidance: Non-exam assessment

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Step Up to English (5970) is an Entry Level qualification that can be used with students in different teaching contexts: from Key Stage 3, alongside/as an alternative to GCSE study, through to adult literacy.

Step Up to English is designed to provide clear progression pathways for Entry Level students, whether that's to continue onto a GCSE English Language course, Functional Skills English Levels 1/Level 2 or enter the world of work.

The assessment objectives are aligned with those for GCSE English Language which means Step Up to English can be used as a diagnostic tool, enabling teachers to track students' strengths, areas for development and readiness for the demands of GCSE study.

The purpose of this guide is to provide additional support in all elements of coordinating the non-exam assessments: from understanding the requirements through to submission of a sample to the moderator.

This document should be read in conjunction with the [specification](#).

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## NEA advisers and support

All our centres have a designated NEA adviser. Advisers are experienced teachers and moderators who can provide guidance and support throughout the academic year on delivering NEA.

We send NEA adviser contact details to Exams Officers from mid-September at the start of each academic year.

If you are teaching Step Up to English for the first time please contact us to request the contact details of your adviser:

Email [english-gcse@aqa.org.uk](mailto:english-gcse@aqa.org.uk)

Telephone 0161 953 7504

Your NEA adviser can discuss and support you with:

- specification requirements
- teaching approaches
- planning and conducting the assessments
- general guidance on application of the mark schemes
- general processes, administration and submission of assessments.

Your NEA adviser will contact you once in the autumn and spring terms with key reminders and signpost key documents in readiness for NEA submission deadlines.

## NEA requirements

Students are entered at 'Silver' or 'Gold' step. Students do not necessarily need to be entered for Silver before Gold; the step which is most appropriate for your students will depend on their current level of academic achievement and the level of demand they are working towards:

Silver step	Gold step
<b>Certificated at:</b> Entry Level 1 or Entry Level 2.	<b>Certificated at:</b> Entry Level 3. <b>GCSE-ready descriptors are provided for diagnostic purposes only.</b>

Overview of subject content for both Silver and Gold is as follows:

Component 1: Literacy topics Non-Literary/Transactional/Functional tasks	
<b>Required number of NEAs</b>	2
<b>Content overview (set by AQA) per NEA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 spoken language</li> <li>3 reading texts</li> <li>1 writing task</li> </ul>
<b>Duration (under controlled conditions)</b>	1 hour 30 minutes per NEA (not inclusive of spoken language assessment)
<b>Assessment weighting</b>	25% + 25% of the final Award
<b>Guided learning hours</b>	Approx 120 hours

Component 2: Literary reading and Creative writing	
<b>Required number of NEAs</b>	1
<b>Content overview (set by AQA) per NEA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 reading tasks</li> <li>1 writing task (choice of 2)</li> </ul>
<b>Duration (under controlled conditions)</b>	1 hour 30 minutes
<b>Assessment weighting</b>	50% of the final Award (Mark scaled or doubled by AQA after moderation)
<b>Guided learning hours</b>	Approx 120 hours

## Preparing for assessments

Each student must submit:

- 2 x Component 1 NEAs
- 1 x Component 2 NEA

There is a choice of **6 differently themed, externally-set NEAs**, for each component. These are available to download and print from [Centre Services](#). Speak to your Exams Officer about how to register for Centre Services if you currently don't have an account.

We provide a range of different NEAs:

- to enable you to choose topics that will best engage and enthuse your students
- to allow you to use particular NEAs for practice purposes, enabling students to build familiarity and confidence with the assessment before settling on the NEAs that will be conducted under controlled conditions.

Each academic year we replace one NEA, for each component, with a newly-themed NEA. This ensures that the content remains up-to-date, relevant and interesting to teachers and students. We will notify centres with information about which NEAs will expire, with one year's notice. This means that expiring NEAs have one academic year's shelf-life remaining and will not be valid for submission thereafter.

Specimen and expired NEAs are **not valid** for submission but they can be used:

- as a source of additional teaching material
- as practice assessments
- as a diagnostic tool to identify which level (Silver or Gold step) to enter students for.

Expired NEAs and the corresponding Schemes of Work are available to download from [Centre Services](#).

## Access arrangements

Step Up to English aims to develop foundation literacy skills and consequently the Access arrangements for this specification differ from those available for GCSE English Language.

Any guidance provided here does not replace, and should be read in conjunction with, the most up to date [JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments guidelines](#).

The key differences are outlined as follows:

### Spoken language:

- Students are able to complete the Spoken Language assessment using British Sign Language (BSL) – prior approval is not required.
- Students who are mute can apply to AQA for an exemption.

### Reading:

- A human reader **will not be allowed to read questions or text in papers (or sections of papers) that assess reading**.
- A computer reader or reading pen will be allowed for the Reading tasks.
- A human reader is allowed for both the Writing and Spoken language tasks.

### Writing:

- A scribe or speech recognition technology **will not be allowed for papers (or sections of papers) that assess writing**.
- A scribe will be allowed for both the Reading and Spoken language tasks.
- Students may produce their assessments in Braille but it is the centre's responsibility to provide the transcript for the moderator.
- Students (where it is their normal way of working) may use a word processor, with the spelling and grammar check facility/predictive text **disabled** (switched off).
- Please bear in mind that the AO5 strand of the mark scheme for the Writing tasks rewards students' handwriting skills, so this part of the mark scheme will not be accessed if all their responses to writing tasks have been word processed. In order to award marks for this strand of the AO5 skills descriptor students must supply some evidence of handwritten work (for example a handwritten plan would be sufficient.)

The table below indicates, at-a-glance, the Access arrangements that you can put in place for Step Up to English. This does not replace the [JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments guidelines](#) and it is the responsibility of the centre to consult the JCQ for the full details and access requirements for each arrangement.

Access Arrangement	Spoken Language	Reading	Writing	JCQ Forms Required
Enlarge (A3) or photocopy to coloured paper	Yes	Yes	Yes	No evidence required
Human Reader	Yes	No	Yes	Form 13 (state <b>Human Reader for S&amp;L / Writing tasks only</b> ) and Form 11 (retain for records)
Computer Reader	Yes	Yes	Yes	Form 11 (retain for records)
Read aloud / examination reading pen	Yes	Yes	Yes	No evidence required
Scribe (or word processor with spelling and grammar check enabled)	N/A	Yes	No	Form 13 (state <b>Scribe for Reading tasks only</b> ) and Form 11 (retain for records)
Word Processor	N/A	Yes	Yes - <b>SPaG check must be disabled</b>	No evidence required. State 'SPaG disabled' in 'Details of additional assistance' box on NEA front cover
25% Extra time	N/A	Yes		Form 11 (retain for records)
Braille Transcript	Yes Transcribed by centre			Form 5 (Braille transcript cover sheet)
Prompter	Yes	Yes	Yes	No evidence required
Language Modifier	Yes	No	Yes	Form 6A (language modifier cover sheet) and Form 13

Communication Professional (for students using Sign Language)	No	No	No	N/A
Practical Assistant	Yes	Yes	Yes	Form 13 and Form 11 (retain for records)
Bilingual Dictionary with 10% extra time (for the use of the dictionary)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Form 11 (retain for records)

Visit our website for more information about [Access arrangements](#).



## Conducting the assessments

These NEAs are confidential and should be stored securely until the time of issue.

Students may attempt more than the required number of NEAs and you can submit the required combination of NEAs where they have achieved the highest marks.

However, once an NEA has been attempted it cannot be repeated ie students can only be assessed once on a given task.

### Spoken language

The spoken language element of the specification is completed as part of Component 1.

Key points to note include:

- The spoken language task is not inclusive of the 1 hour 30 minutes assessment time; there is no specific time allocated to this task.
- The spoken language task can be conducted by the teacher at any time during the course and does not have to be completed prior to the written assessment, but be mindful that the spoken language task set is in-keeping with the overall topic of the NEA and supports the reading and writing tasks.
- The assessment is structured into two stages: planning and delivery.
- During the planning stage students should be given relevant materials to help them prepare for their individual presentation (for example: information leaflets).
- Students may prepare materials to support their delivery (for example: PowerPoint slides or prompt cards).
- Students should be prepared to answer questions that seek additional information and/or clarity.
- The spoken language task can be completed in front of a single teacher and by virtual means if appropriate.

### Reading and writing

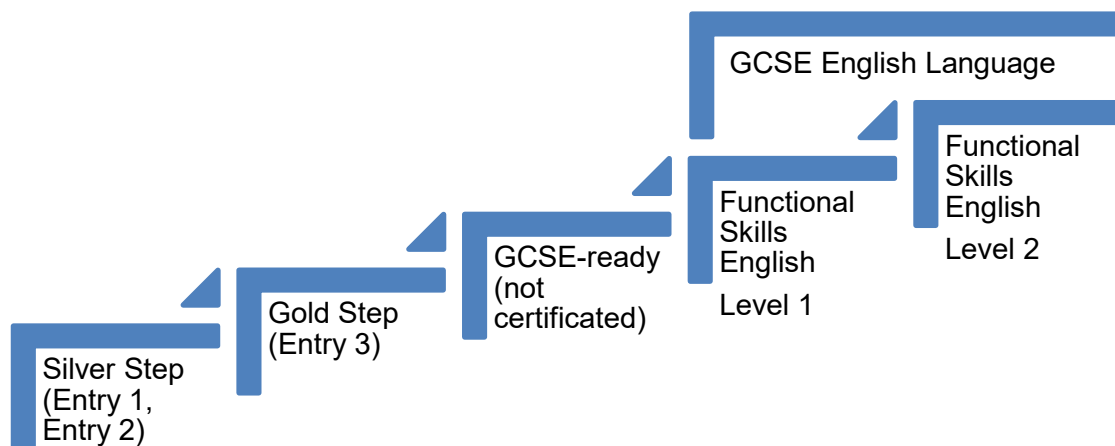
Key points to note include:

- The assessment must be completed under controlled conditions with formal supervision in the time totalling no more than 1 hour 30 minutes.
- The total assessment time may take place over one or more sessions ie the assessment can be broken down into any number of sessions, as appropriate for your students, but must be stored securely between sessions.
- The assessments can be completed one section at a time, ensuring they are stored securely between sittings (eg you could teach the skills required for the reading section of Component 1, using similarly themed texts to your choice of topics. Students then complete the reading section of the assessment, before you move on to teaching the skills required for the writing sections and so on.)
- The texts and questions must be unseen by students, but teachers can prepare students for what to expect on the assessment and how to tackle the text-types or question-types they're going to encounter in the NEA.
- For students working towards 'GCSE ready', it may be more appropriate to complete the NEA in a single sitting to give the assessment a 'GCSE' type feel.

## Re-taking assessments

- Students can re-take individual components during the course, but they cannot re-take the same task ie they must complete a new, unseen externally-set task.
- This is a linear qualification which means that all assessments are submitted in one series (January or June). Students can re-sit the qualification as many times as they wish, within the shelf life of the qualification.

## Progression and co-teaching with GCSE English subjects



- Step Up to English helps build the necessary foundation literacy skills that are required for progression to Functional Skills English and/or GCSE English qualifications. It is designed to be used as a bridging qualification for those who require it, but is a standalone qualification in its own right. (Please note that GCSE-Ready is not certificated and can only be used as a diagnostic tool).
- Component 1 has the 'functional' element that dovetails with Functional Skills English Level 1/Level 2. Component 2 provides the literary element that is integral to GCSE English subjects.
- Gold Step's high-quality, level-appropriate texts provide students with the opportunity to develop critical and analytical reading skills of a wide range of texts from the 19th to the 21st century, whilst also building confidence/familiarity in responding to literary texts, which would support them in progressing to both GCSE English Language and Literature.
- Step Up to English shares (differentiated) Assessment Objectives with GCSE Language which allows for seamless progression and/or co-teaching.

The tables below show the coverage of assessment objectives for each component:

## Gold step

### Component 1: Literacy topics

	Spoken Language task	Reading Task 1			Reading Task 2			Reading Task 3		Writing task	Total %
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2		
AO1		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		23%
AO2							✓				5%
AO3	N/A										
AO4			✓	✓							12%
AO5										✓	25%
AO6										✓	15%
AO7/8/9	✓										20%

### Component 2: Creative reading and writing

	Reading Questions							Writing	Total %
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 / 9	
AO1	✓	✓		✓					20%
AO2			✓		✓	✓			17%
AO3							✓		13%
AO4	N/A								
AO5								✓	30%
AO6								✓	20%
AO7/8/9	N/A								

## Silver step

### Component 1: Literacy topics

	Spoken Language task	Reading Task 1	Reading Task 2				Reading Task 3	Writing task	Total %
		Q1	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1		
AO1		✓	✓	✓					25%
AO2					✓		✓		7%
AO3	N/A								
AO4						✓			8%
AO5								✓	25%
AO6								✓	15%
AO7/8/9	✓								20%

### Component 2: Creative reading and writing

	Reading Questions												Writing	Total %
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13 /14	
AO1	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			30%
AO2			✓					✓						10%
AO3												✓		10%
AO4	N/A													
AO5													✓	30%
AO6													✓	20%
AO7/8/9	N/A													

The skills within each assessment objective are 'threaded' from Silver Step Entry Level 1 up through to GCSE-ready. This enables you to use the assessment criteria diagnostically; providing a 'progression map' for individual students or the whole cohort. This, in turn, allows you to tailor teaching to focus on specific skills gaps within assessment objectives. (For more guidance on how you can use Step Up to English to support progression take a look at the Planning for Progression course materials, on [Centre Services](#)).

## Marking the assessments

### Teacher Online Standardisation (T-OLS)

T-OLS is available at any time and can be accessed by all teachers in a department. You can see sample work that's been marked by the Lead Moderator with detailed commentaries. You can submit marks and receive instant feedback on how your marking compares to the standard.

Visit our website for more information on [how to access T-OLS](#).

It is the responsibility of the teacher to mark the NEAs. Please ensure sufficient detail is provided to help a moderator to understand how you arrived at the marks awarded.

Remember that where more than one teacher delivers the course you must ensure that internal standardisation has taken place (see Section 5.5 of the specification.)

### Spoken language

Key points to note are:

- It is not requirement to provide a video or audio recording of the presentation.
- Use the levels of response marking grid in the mark scheme to determine a mark for this part of the assessment. Complete the 'key' column by marking 'D' (demonstrated), 'W' (working towards) or 'N' (no evidence) for each skill. This approach will help you to determine the band of 'best fit'.
- You must provide comments in the 'Comments and notes on contextualisation' box outlining the context of the activity and justification for the overall mark awarded, making clear reference to the Assessment Objectives.
- Best practice is to provide some key examples of contributions that the student made – during the planning and delivery stages of the assessment.
- You may enclose a copy of the completed Spoken Language level of response grid marked D, W or N, to further support the moderator in understanding how the centre arrived at the mark.
- The grid can helpfully be used as a diagnostic tool, to see where students' strengths or areas of development lie.

### Reading

Key points to note are:

- Straightforward responses can simply be ticked (ie annotation not required)
- Tasks requiring more subjective/extended responses (such as those assessing AO2, AO4 and AO1-inference) should have some annotation (referencing the relevant Assessment Objectives) to explain why marks have/not been awarded.

### Writing

Key points to note are:

- Marginal and/or summative comments (referencing the Assessment Objectives) will help you to see where students' strengths and areas for development lie.
- Annotations help the moderator to understand how you arrived at marks.
- Use the levels of response marking grid in the mark scheme to determine a mark for this part of the assessment. (You may enclose a copy of the completed grid to further support the moderator in understanding how you arrived at the final mark.) Complete the 'key' column by marking 'D' (demonstrated), 'W' (working towards) or 'N' (no evidence) for each skill. This approach will help you to determine the band of 'best fit'.

Once the best-fit band has been determined, the following principles can be applied:

For each skill (bullet point) in the marking criteria indicate whether the student has demonstrated (D), is working towards (W) or provided no evidence (N).

## Component 1

A05 Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adopting tone, style and register for different forms, purpose and audience. Organise information and ideas using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts	
<b>Bullet 1</b> Handwriting	D = award 1 mark (eg if you're placing the skill in Band 3 award 11; for Band 2 award 6; for Band 1 award 1) W or N = 0 marks.  Where a word processor is used exclusively, no marks are available for this bullet point as no evidence is available.
<b>Bullet 2</b> Structure and audience	D = add 2 marks. W = add 1 mark. N = 0 marks.
<b>Bullet 3</b> Construction (ideas and sentences)	D = add 2 marks. W = add 1 mark. N = 0 marks.

A06 Candidates must use vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation	
<b>Bullet 1</b> Spelling	D = award 1 mark (eg if you're placing the skill in Band 3 award 7 marks; for Band 2 award 4 marks; for Band 1 award 1 mark) W or N = 0 marks.
<b>Bullet 2</b> Punctuation	D = add 1 mark. W or N = 0 marks
<b>Bullet 3</b> Vocabulary choice	D = add 1 mark. W or N = 0 marks

## Component 2

A05 Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adopting tone, style and register for different forms, purpose and audience. Organise information and ideas using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts	
<b>Bullet 1</b> Handwriting	D = award 2 marks (eg if you're placing the skill in Band 3 award 13-14; for Band 2 award 7-8; for Band 1 award 1-2) W = 1 mark N = 0 marks. Where a word processor is used exclusively, no marks are available for this bullet point as no evidence is available.
<b>Bullet 2</b> Structure and audience	D = add 2 marks. W = add 1 mark. N = 0 marks.
<b>Bullet 3</b> Construction (ideas and sentences)	D = add 2 marks. W = add 1 mark. N = 0 marks.

A06 Candidates must use vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation	
<b>Bullet 1</b> Spelling	D = award 1 mark (eg if you're placing the skill in Band 3 award 9 marks; for Band 2 award 5 marks; for Band 1 award 1 mark) W or N = 0 marks.
<b>Bullet 2</b> Punctuation	D = add 1 mark. W or N = 0 marks
<b>Bullet 3</b> Vocabulary choice	D = add 1 mark. W or N = 0 marks

There is also an extra mark available for AO6 for Component 2, so if a skill has exceeded the criteria eg spelling is beyond Band 2 but not quite into Band 3, award the extra mark.

It is also useful to note, that if you have marked all of AO5 Band 2: NDD and Band 3: NWW, you can move into the higher band and begin to award just at the bottom of the Band 3 range.

For AO6, mark positively eg if you have marked Band 3 DNW, then you can award marks within Band 3 but at the bottom of the range.

## Grade boundaries

Step Up to English employs a compensatory mark scheme. Therefore, the final award is cumulative (across both components).

Grade boundaries are determined at the end of each series (January and June).

You can access [grade boundaries for previous series](#) on our website and use this as a guide to the marks that are likely to be required to achieve each award.

## Submitting assessments and moderation

- Students will be entered at either Silver or Gold Step. They cannot be entered for both Steps and they cannot submit a combination of Silver and Gold NEAs.
- Exams Officers will submit entries via [Electronic Data Interchange \(EDI\)](#) or Centre Marks Submission (CMS) on [Centre Services](#).
- For further advice, please see our website for information on [submitting marks online](#).



Before posting your sample to your moderator, please ensure that the following has been completed:

- ☐ Signed [Centre Declaration Form](#) using the Unit Code 5970/U
  - ☐ All NEAs signed by candidate and teacher
  - ☐ Completed JCQ Form 13 for a reader for the writing task (if applicable)
  - ☐ Completed JQC Form 13 for a scribe for the reading tasks (if applicable)
  - ☐ If a word processor is used for the writing task state 'SPaG disabled' in 'Details of additional assistance' box on NEA front cover
  - ☐ JCQ Form 13 and **enclosed letter from AQA** if a reader has been granted for the reading tasks.
  - ☐ JCQ Form 13 and **enclosed letter from AQA** if a scribe has been granted for the writing task.
  - ☐ Check addition of marks is correct on NEA front sheets and CMS/EDI
  - ☐ Check each candidate's work is numerically compiled and treasury tagged.
  - ☐ Check marks submitted to CMS/EDI are correct (ensure the two Component 1 NEAs are added together)
  - ☐ All candidates requested on CMS/EDI are enclosed to moderator
  - ☐ Two Component 1 NEAs are enclosed for each candidate in the sample
  - ☐ One Component 2 NEA is enclosed for each candidate in the sample
  - ☐ Ensure the NEAs are valid for submission (ie not specimen or expired NEAs)
- Please do not post work to a moderator which requires their signature.
  - After the series has concluded, a moderator feedback form will be issued to your centre, via your Head of Centre/Exams Officer.

## Additional support and resources

Via the main website you can access:

- A complementary [Scheme of work](#) for each NEA, to support you in preparing students for the assessment
- Suggested [teaching plans](#)
- [Subject specific vocabulary: high frequency and medium frequency](#)
- [AQA Approved textbooks](#)

You can access the following in [Centre Services](#):

- Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS)
- Examiner Reports
- Expired NEAs and the accompanying schemes of work, to use as practice/mock assessments or for teaching and learning purposes. Please note these are **not valid** for submission.
- Materials from previously run professional development courses