OCR

Oxford Cambridge and RSA

Functional Skills

English

Level 1 09498
Level 2 09499

OCR Report to Centres 2013-2014

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Functional Skills English

Level 1 **09498**

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OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Functional Skills English Reading Level 1

Administration/Documentation:

The majority of centres administer this qualification very effectively. However, where centres enter candidates on Interchange individually or in small batches rather than in a single cohort, additional administration is generated for examination officers and examiners alike. Although entering candidates individually or in small batches is not precluded by OCR, entering candidates in a single batch, even if they have not all sat the examination at exactly the same time, helps to ensure the timely issuing of results.

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OCR Support and Resources:

Support and resources for Functional Skills English can be accessed via the OCR website.

Assessment Summary:

General
The majority of candidates attempt all questions for the Reading assessment. Most candidates are able to read, understand and effectively engage with the topics and content of the source documents. Most candidates perform well when answering questions that require a fixed response, whereas, the standard of responses for questions that require explanation and reasoning are mixed. Candidates often employ effective techniques in responding to the assessment, although a few candidates still spend too much time providing detailed responses to earlier, less complex, questions which leave insufficient time for more demanding questions that attract higher marks. Both centres and candidates should be reminded that spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure do not form part of this assessment and therefore, candidates are not penalised for technical inaccuracy.

1R1 – Identify the main points and ideas and how they are presented in a variety of texts
Most candidates are able to identify the main points and ideas in a variety of texts with many candidates able to identify the techniques that have been used to convey information. Less able candidates have difficulty expressing how these techniques help the reader. A small proportion of candidates have difficulty understanding both the questions and source documents.

1R2 – Read and understand texts in detail
The majority of candidates gain a clear understanding of the overall theme and ideas within each of the source documents. In some instances, candidates can provide insufficient detail in their answers. For example, candidates may provide a general answer that summarises thoughts and themes from both documents, whereas, specific examples from one or either document is what is required. Occasionally, marks have been lost for only providing one valid example when the question requires two examples.

1R3 – Use information contained in texts
Most candidates will base their responses on information provided within the source documents. Some candidates do not use sufficient information meaning their overall response does not fully meet the purpose of the question. In a minority of responses, candidates use information from their own experience to respond to questions.

1R4 – Identify suitable responses to texts
Overall, candidates are able to demonstrate they understand the questions asked of them but, in general, responses lack sufficient detail meaning their answer is not functional. Often, candidates state "email them", "go to the website" or "phone them" and fail to provide the email address, website or telephone number. In weaker responses, candidates often give opinions or quote information from the source documents that do not sufficiently address the question.

Advice
Centres should prepare candidates thoroughly and use the Functional Skills English criteria to adequately prepare candidates for the requirements of Level 1 Reading. Candidates should:

- take time to read and understand what each question is asking of them
- plan their time so that more time can be spent on questions with higher marks
- check whether there are two parts to a question and ensure each part of the question has been addressed in their answer
- use appropriate information from the correct resource document and, where required, support their answers with points or examples from the texts provided
- avoid using, at length, personal experiences that are unrelated to the topics addressed in the source documents
- understand that questions about contacting an individual or an organisation for information require the actual contact details that have been provided in the source documents. Stating "call them" or "email them" is not sufficient
- understand that language and layout features are used to convey a message. Candidates should be able to explain the effect of each individual feature / technique identified.

Functional Skills English Writing
Level 1

Administration/Documentation:

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OCR Support and Resources:

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Assessment Summary:

General
The stimulus material and tasks appear to engage candidates. The vast majority of candidates attempt both tasks.

1W1 (Content)
The majority of responses are clear and coherent but with varying levels of detail. Most responses follow the suggested content supplied by the tasks given. More able candidates develop ideas effectively, with some writing above the Level 1 standard. A few, weaker, candidates copy the text given in the task and stimulus material without amending it to suit the purpose of the task.

1W2 (Spelling)
Spelling is quite good in the majority of answers with many candidates scoring high marks. However, 'writting' (for 'writing') is still a very common error. Candidates often make errors in spelling words which are present in the task or stimulus material. Errors in the spelling of homophones also remain very common, particularly, "there/their", "witch /which", "hole / whole", "lose/loose", "to/too" and "you're/your". There is also much confusion over the correct use of "of" and "off". Some candidates continue to conflate words eg "alot", "aswell", "gonna" and "wonna".

1W3 (Punctuation)
Use of punctuation is variable. Most candidates use capital letters at the beginning of sentences and full stops at the end, although some candidates use commas where they should have ended a sentence. Use of capital letters for proper nouns is less successful and the use of 'i' for 'I' is extensive. There is also the random use of capital letters at the beginning, or in the middle, of words. Question marks are sometimes omitted, not used correctly, or followed by a full stop. Some, candidates write their entire response in capital letters which means that they cannot access full marks for this skill area.

1W4 (Grammar)
On the whole, grammar is used reasonably accurately, only rarely interfering with the communication of meaning. The most common errors are a lack of subject/verb agreement, inconsistency of tense, unusual syntax (word order) or the omission of definite and indefinite articles ('a' and 'the'). There are also many instances of 'should of' or 'could of' and the use of slang terms, inappropriate for formal writing.

1W5 (Format)
Attempts to format the document and accuracy in using the formats required, varies from centre to centre. There is a clear pattern emerging of centres in which candidates have been well prepared when it comes to laying out a document correctly and most gain full or almost full marks. In other centres, candidates are unsure how to format documents eg formal letters, reports, articles or emails and in such centres the majority of candidates score no marks.

1W6 (Structure)
The majority of candidates take note of the scaffolding in the question paper and sequence their responses accordingly. Such candidates are able to produce documents with a beginning, middle and end, although the 'flow' in the middle could sometimes be improved. Occasionally there is an inappropriate tone to the documents, perhaps by being overly familiar. Some documents are extremely brief, perhaps due to running out of time.

Advice
Centres should prepare candidates thoroughly and use the Functional English Criteria to make candidates aware of the requirements of Level 1 Writing. Candidates should:
- be taught to respond appropriately to each task, use their own words, taking note of the scaffolding in the question
- give themselves time for proof-reading and corrections, ensuring their spelling, grammar and punctuation are accurate. They should be taught techniques to avoid these basic errors. In particular, all centres should teach candidates to use upper case for the personal pronoun and the correct spelling of the word "writing"
- be reminded that if they are word processing responses, 'typos' will be treated as errors and thus it is still important for them to proof read and correct their work
- be aware of, and use, the appropriate format for different types of document. For example
  - a letter should include sender and recipient addresses, date, salutation and complimentary close
  - an article should include a heading, strapline, sub-headings where appropriate and paragraphs
  - an email should include to, from, subject and date
  - a leaflet should include a heading, sub-headings, bullet points where appropriate and paragraphs
  - a report should include a heading, sub-headings, numbered sections where appropriate and paragraphs.
- be aware that there are no marks for submitting plans or drafts of documents, or drawings/images. Therefore, they should not waste their time including these.

Functional Skills English Reading
Level 2

Administration/Documentation:

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OCR Support and Resources:

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Assessment Summary:

General
The vast majority of candidates are able to complete the Reading papers in the time allocated and appear to understand most of the topics and contents of the source documents. Candidates much more frequently misinterpret the actual questions, fail to provide the number of examples or reasons required, or do not realise that they are asked to explain their answer or make recommendations. Some candidates omit questions completely. A few include too much information in the questions they answer first and, as a result, do not have to answer later questions. A few centres appear to enter candidates for Level 2 when they would be more appropriately entered at Level 1.

2R1 (Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information)
The majority of candidates appear to understand the source documents and are able to select appropriate information and identify the main ideas from them. Most candidate relate well to less formal documents, such as web-based discussion forums, but less so to more formal documents, such as extracts from reports or formal letters. The majority correctly restrict their responses to information and views expressed in the source documents.

2R2 (Read and summarise information/ideas from different sources)
Candidates have difficulty explaining terms used in the source documents, often repeating the words used in the document or giving generic dictionary definitions which do not apply to the context. When asked to provide examples, many draw on personal experience rather than using examples provided in the documents. Most candidates are able to summarise and explain views expressed in the documents, but some find comparing these with views from other documents challenging. More able candidates include a comparison of both differences and similarities in their responses.

2R3 (Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed)
Most candidates correctly identify the purposes of the source documents, explaining in sufficient detail, although a few still simply identify the purpose as to 'inform / persuade / instruct', or describe the content or format used.

Describing how techniques are used by the author of the documents is, for most candidates, challenging. Many candidates provide a list of techniques without explaining how effective they are. At Level 2, it is not sufficient for candidates to simply identify the features of the text. They must also include specific examples from the source documents and a brief explanation of how these features are used to persuade or convince the reader.

2R4 (Detect point of view, implicit meaning and / or bias)
Candidates often have difficulty with questions about bias, an essential Level 2 skill. Some candidates do not understand the term and are consequently unable to understand fully documents that require them to 'read between the lines'. Others, while understanding the term, are unable to explain why a document may be biased or to explain why an understanding of bias is important.

2R5 (Analyse texts in relation to audience and consider suitable responses)
When asked to give their own opinion on a subject, candidates should ensure that this opinion is based on evidence in the source documents. Many candidates provide considered opinions, using examples from the documents in support. However, many candidates still do not make full use of the necessary documents and end up using their own experience or unrelated views.

Advice
Centres should prepare candidates thoroughly and use the Functional English Criteria to make candidates aware of the requirements of Level 2 Reading. Candidates should:
- be instructed on exam technique and time management, so that they complete the whole test paper and demonstrate competence in all the skills at this level
- practice interpreting and comparing different kinds of texts, so that they are able to identify the purpose of texts, and should consider the different techniques employed by writers to engage or persuade audiences
- ensure that they are familiar with the terms used in the questions, for example 'identify' and 'explain', and that they can answer questions using these terms
- be encouraged to read the questions very carefully to ensure that their response is appropriate and the correct source material is referred to. They should be reminded of the need to answer all parts of the question
- be reminded that they are expected to extract information from the documents.

Functional Skills English Writing
Level 2

Administration/Documentation:

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Assessment Summary:

General
For the vast majority of candidates the stimulus material and tasks appear accessible and of interest, with both tasks being completed. Although the vast majority of candidates appear well-prepared, a minority are entered who are clearly not operating at Level 2 Writing.

2W1 (Content)
The majority of responses are effectively organised into paragraphs. Most candidates use information from the stimulus material and scenario given, although only a few are able to expand on this information. Occasionally, a few candidates appear unaware of the purpose of the writing tasks. A few candidates produce insufficiently brief responses.

2W2 (Spelling)
Spelling is quite good in the majority of responses with many candidates achieving high marks. Common errors include 'writting', a multitude of ways for spelling 'safety', 'benifit', 'dissapointing', 'alot', 'oppurtunity', 'preform' (for perform), 'opion' (for opinion), companys (for companies) and 'aswell'. Errors in homophones include 'your/you're', 'there/their/they're', 'fair/fare' 'to/too' and 'quite/quiet'.

2W3 (Punctuation)
Use of punctuation is generally sound for demarcation of sentences. Some candidates demonstrate a tendency to comma splice and struggle with complex sentences. There are many cases of candidates using lower case 'i' for the personal pronoun. In addition, many candidates appear unsure of how to use capital letters for proper nouns. The correct use of apostrophes, especially to indicate possession, is challenging for a number of candidates.

2W4 (Grammar)
On the whole, grammar is used reasonably accurately, only rarely interfering with the communication of meaning. The most common errors amongst less able candidates are a lack of subject/verb agreement, omitting definite and indefinite articles, misuse of conditional tenses and poor syntax.

2W5 (Format)
Very few candidates achieve full marks for format. Although most candidates make a reasonable attempt at formatting a business letter and email, they are less likely to produce an acceptable report, article or leaflet. Even with a letter, candidates mistakenly put their name above their address, which is incorrect, and some omit their own address completely which means the letter is not even functional. Although the majority of centres appear to prepare candidates well when it comes to laying out a document correctly, a significant minority of candidates would benefit from further guidance.

2W6 (Style and Tone)
Many candidates adopt an acceptable, convincing tone in both tasks. Some candidates write in an informal, chatty manner and use colloquialisms where a degree of formality is required. However, there are examples of extremely well-crafted responses which are both convincing and persuasive.

Advice
Centres should prepare candidates thoroughly and use the Functional English Criteria to make candidates aware of the requirements of Level 2 Writing. Candidates should:
- be encouraged to respond with an appropriate level of formality where appropriate
- give themselves time for proof-reading and corrections to ensure their spelling, grammar and punctuation are as accurate as possible. In particular, they should be able to use commas and apostrophes (for both omission and possession), accurately at this level
- ensure that candidates are aware of appropriate formats for different types of documents, eg
    - a report should include a heading, sub-headings, numbered sections (where appropriate) and paragraphs
    - an email should include to, from, subject and date
    - a letter should include sender and recipient addresses, date, salutation and complimentary close.
    - an article should include a heading, strapline, attribution, sub-heading (where appropriate) and paragraphs
    - a leaflet should include a heading, sub-headings, bullet points (where appropriate) and paragraphs.
- be aware, from the scenario given, whether the text requires persuasive, instructional, informative or descriptive writing.

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