



ENTRY LEVEL

ENGLISH (NEW SPECIFICATION)

Introduction

This has been the first series of the new Entry Level Certificate English and it has been warmly welcomed by most centres. Many Year 9 and Year 10 students were entered as this specification builds on subject content typically taught at Key Stage 3 and provides a suitable foundation for the study of GCSE English language. In addition to this, the course provides for those learners who do not progress beyond this level and lower ability Year 11 students also benefited from the course. Learners' knowledge, understanding and skills are developed over the course and assessed through three components at the end.

Component 1 – the Written Examination

The non-literary part of the exam was made up of three tests of progressive difficulty. Text A was very simple and had few written words; Text B had more information but in humorous cartoon form; Text C was mainly continuous writing with three small illustrations. Several centres were delighted with the resource material; one centre said that their students had come out of the exam room smiling, licking their wrists and smelling their breath as Text B had advised. 20 marks were achievable in total: 5 marks were tick boxes and 4 marks were joining boxes with lines so difficulties with handwriting should not have posed a great problem. However, if this were the case, candidates are allowed to have a scribe for this part of the paper.

For the second part of the paper which assesses functional writing, a scribe is not allowed, but a reader is. Question 4 was a competition form from a new dentist which needed the candidate's name, email address (or school email address) and 3-4 sentences saying 'what would put the biggest smile on your face?' Marks were lost if the candidate did not use his/her first name and surname (Mickey Mouse was also not allowed) and also if the email address was not plausible i.e. it had to have @ and a dot in the latter part of the address. Marks for the sentences were awarded if the ideas were relevant and developed so a wish list would not score highly.

The formal letter to the head teacher on the need for good toilet facilities was a subject close to the hearts of many of the candidates. For the first time at Entry Level, the marking grid was in two parts: a mark for communicating and organising and a mark for writing accurately. Generally, those writing in the correct register, making clear points, developing ideas and writing with some degree of accuracy scored highly. Centres should note that the mark scheme caters for those not quite reaching Entry Level standard to those working towards Level 1. This question saw the full range of abilities of the students from those struggling to make a point beyond the words given in the task to those whose sophisticated and articulate expression shone out.

Component 2 – Four Topic Tests

These four topic tests are each of 30 minutes' duration and may be taken at any time during the course. They must be taken under a high level of control. Topic tests 1 and 2 may be scribed (but not read) as these test reading skills; topic tests 3 and 4 may be read (but not scribed) as these test writing skills.

These tests are marked by the centre and should be internally moderated where there is more than one teaching group to ensure consistency. When samples are submitted there should be four tasks for each student; the front cover of these four tasks should be the Record Keeping Mark Sheet signed by the teacher and student for authentication purposes. Some centres were not aware that students needed to sign the sheets and, when requested, it was difficult for these signatures to be obtained in some cases if the students were already on study leave; however, this is a requirement and a mark of 0 may be applied if the work cannot be authenticated. The Record Keeping Mark Sheet is important in the moderation process as it contains relevant teacher comments and all individual marks at a glance for the moderator.

Topic Test 1: Response to twentieth/twenty first century prose

The extract for study was taken from 'Private Peaceful' by Michael Morpurgo. Candidates had few problems with the simple information retrieval questions; however, 1.8 asked what they had learned of the character of Big Joe, demanding skills of inference and deduction. Many just commented on how 'greedy' Joe was (a few commented on his 'large appetite'). The more perceptive were aware of his 'simple nature' (one candidate commented that he was like George in 'Of Mice and Men'), of his gullibility, of his pleasure in aligning with his brothers in their 'shared secret' and in his generosity in offering his 'sweets' to the boys. When teachers marked this, they should have given a mark with some annotation informed by the mark scheme, making clear their decision to the moderator. Again, the five bands of marks cover the range from unclassified to Level 1, catering for all abilities between.

Topic Test 2: Editing and Sequencing

Test 2.1 was a cloze procedure with ten words to place correctly. On the whole this was well done but on some occasions it had been marked hastily and incorrectly. This was also the case with the rest of the questions in this test, especially the boxes which had to be numbered in 2.3 and 2.4. Candidates did not have to get the whole sequence correct; if they could correctly order one of the three sentences, a mark should have been awarded. Some centres did not show ticks on the work which made moderation very difficult. All work should be clearly marked and annotated.

Topic Test 3: Narrative Writing

Candidates had to choose one title from two options. Their writing had to be relevant to the title if they were to be awarded a mark for communicating and organising but not necessarily for writing accuracy. To score highly, candidates had to write creatively and imaginatively, using accurate spelling, language and punctuation. The vast majority of centres used the mark scheme well, annotating the work against the criteria for communicating and organising and writing accurately. However, a few gave just one mark instead of two with no annotation, leaving the external moderator no idea of how marks had been reached. On these occasions, if the moderator had not seen the work from all the students, it had to be requested from the centre to ensure fairness. This, more than any of the other topic tests, needed to be internally moderated if there was more than one teaching group taught by different teachers.

Topic Test 4: Proofreading

Candidates had two passages to correct for spelling, punctuation and grammar. This was clearly right or wrong. However, candidates had been told to circle errors and then write the correction above; those who just circled them could not be awarded marks. One centre corrected the mistakes that the student had made or omitted and this made moderation extremely difficult as it was almost impossible to determine who had written the correct answer. It must be made clear to the moderator where marks are being awarded using the tick system; the teacher does not need to write anything else on the script. At times, these exercises were marked hastily and errors were made.

Component 3: Communication

Of all the components, this proved the most difficult. Each candidate undertook four tasks:

- 1.1 group discussion on punishment in schools
- 1.2 individual presentation on punishment in schools
- 2.1 individual presentation for a job interview
- 2.2 panel interview for the job.

By far the most common problem was that of candidates reading from prepared scripts. **No scripting of any part of this component is allowed**; communications should be prepared but natural and spontaneous.

The group discussion for 1.1 could be problematic for some candidates who might be their centre's only candidate or have social difficulties with other students. It is acceptable for the teacher to form part of the 'group' but it should still be a *discussion*, not a teacher question and answer session. The recordings of some groups also caused difficulties for the moderator. Whether the recording is visual or not, the moderator still needs to be able to identify the speakers, and this was not always possible even though names had been included on the running order. A recording of about five minutes is usually sufficient for all the members of the group to participate fully; however, some centres submitted recordings of up to twenty minutes which is excessive.

For the individual presentation 1.2, some candidates used brief notes or PowerPoint headings well; however, some candidates read their presentations which should not have been allowed. In the space of two to four minutes it should be possible for candidates to convey their ideas clearly and persuasively. This should be an *individual presentation* so the candidate should speak on his or her own for a time before being encouraged/prompted by the teacher.

For the individual presentation (2.1) in the world of work section, again it had to be done by the candidate alone and, again, it should not have been read. Candidates had been given a series of four bullet points to help them structure their presentation and it was expected that they would tackle them as far as possible on their own. One centre asked the candidates the bullet point questions before moving seamlessly on to the panel interview and it was hard to see that there had been a presentation at all.

Generally, 2.2 was more successful than 2.1 for many candidates as they needed the support of the teacher's questions and prompts to develop their answers. It was a pleasure to hear the enthusiasm of many although several seemed to be applying for the job of barrister rather than barista!

In the specification it states *In lieu of a recording, centres may submit a full transcript of a candidate's performance*. This is not an easy option: the transcript must be an exact version of what was said by the candidate, every single word. This is not the same as a witness statement. One centre made the mistake of thinking that if the candidate submitted written notes (which he presumably read out) and the teacher submitted a witness statement, then this would suffice. It does not. The discussion/presentation needs to have taken place and been recorded before the transcript can be written by the teacher. As was noted before, no part of this component may be scripted so a submission of a candidate's prepared responses to questions would not be appropriate.

Every candidate needs to take all four tasks in this component and if he/she is chosen to be in the sample, all four of his/her tasks must be submitted. It is easier for the moderator if all four tasks can be ordered in one file per candidate rather than, for example a CD for all the work for 1.1, another for 1.2 etc. There has been some difficulty accessing recordings in this series and it would be very much appreciated if centres could check that recordings are accessible before they are submitted.

Finally, I would like to pass on my thanks to all the staff and students who have embarked on this new course this year. As expected with any new course, some centres have had slight administrative 'teething problems' but these have been few. I send my very best wishes to all staff and students for all their hard work and commitment to Entry Level.

