

ESOL Skills for Life 2023 Examiner's report

Introduction

This report has been compiled using feedback obtained from examiners throughout the year.

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 trinitycollege.com/qualifications/english-language/ESOL-skills-for-life/ESOL-Skills-for-Life-levels 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 variant of the exam use a photo bank of candidate images. Group discussions comprise two candidates. Examiners report that:

- ▶ centres provide the correct timetable and paper marksheets at the start of face-to-face sessions.
- ▶ appropriate waiting facilities are in place for candidates and there is good supervision of candidates.

In most cases, examiners report that they are met at the centre reception area and taken to the exam room in good time for the start of the exam, allowing them sufficient time to:

- ▶ check the exam room
- ▶ meet the steward/centre representative
- ▶ discuss the timetable
- ▶ set up their materials.

Examiners appreciate centre staff managing the exam session so that it flows smoothly:

- ▶ Pairs of candidates are ready to start the one-to-one at the allotted time and are kept back for the group discussion component.
- ▶ Candidate picture numbers are known for Task 1 (Entry 1 to Level 1) and dummy candidates are only used for the group discussion where there are uneven numbers.

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. Examiners report instances where it appears that candidates are choosing which picture to talk about from the photo

book while they are in the exam room (or asking the examiner to choose a picture for them) and are therefore not prepared for this task. Centres are reminded that candidates need to choose and prepare to discuss the picture in advance. Centres are also reminded that examiners have copies of all the images for Entry 1 to Level 1 and so centres or candidates do not need to print these to take into the exam room.

To prevent delays caused by searching for picture numbers during the exam, examiners ask that candidates know their picture numbers when they come into the exam room and can say them clearly. Candidates are also welcome to enter the exam room with their picture number written on a piece of paper.

Examiners report that candidates are well prepared for Task 1 overall 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. On occasion, examiners note that candidates have sometimes prepared the picture for Task 1 using language of the level below. For example, at Level 1, candidates have spoken about a time in the past when they completed the process, rather than describing the process itself.

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, examiners suggest that centres look carefully at the assessment criteria and amplification for Task 1 and support candidates to include the full range of language items and functions expected for the task, therefore allowing candidates to demonstrate them during the exam.

Centres are reminded that candidates at Entry 2 to Level 1 can 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 must be selected from the photo bank.

Entry 1

Examiners report that weaker candidates either talk about the general topic of the picture in Task 1 or describe the picture, rather than relating the picture to themselves and their current daily life. Candidates therefore have difficulty answering the examiner's questions. Examiners have noted that candidates do not always demonstrate the language of the grade during Task 1. For example, the modal verb 'can' is regularly not demonstrated and candidates do not always take the opportunity to include a description, using adjectives with 'be'. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Entry 1 for examples of questions which the examiner may ask during this task.

Entry 2

In Task 1, stronger candidates are well prepared to talk about the theme of the picture they have chosen from the photo bank and the specific link to their own past event. Candidates who are less well prepared tend to only describe what is in the photo, without making the link between the theme of the photo and themselves. This impacts on their ability to use Entry 2 language and functions. Examiners also feel that candidates would benefit from more pronunciation practice of past simple regular endings as clear pronunciation of these endings confirms to the examiner that the candidate is using past simple. Stronger candidates use a wide range of past simple verbs accurately, describe a person, place or thing relevant to their past event and listen and respond to examiner questions. Examiners note that modals and forms with similar meaning (must/have to etc) are one of the language items assessed in Task 1 alongside past simple, but that modals are not always demonstrated. Candidates should also be prepared to expect the examiner to ask a

comparative question in this task. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Entry 2 for examples of questions which the examiner may ask during this task.

Entry 3

Examiners report that weaker performances occur when candidates talk about the topic that is depicted in the photo they have chosen, rather than their own specific experience of that topic. Candidate accounts are therefore less well structured, without a clear introduction, development and ending. Similarly, candidates describe the photo they have chosen without linking it to their past experience. This leads to a limited range of Entry 3 tenses being used for the narrative, which is a focus of assessment in this task. Examiners suggest that centres refamiliarise themselves with the full range of Entry 3 tenses that candidates can incorporate into their narrative. In addition, examiners find that candidates tend not to include any 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 this comparison. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Entry 3 for examples of questions which the examiner may ask during this task.

Level 1

At Level 1, examiners note that candidates can generally respond well to questions, thus demonstrating many of the functions required in this task. However, some candidates appear surprised when the examiner interrupts to ask questions or to request further clarification on what has been said. Centres are reminded that Level 1 Task 1 is not a recited presentation of the process and so candidates require a little more practice in pairs at explaining their process, with their partner commenting and asking questions as they go along.

Stronger performances in Task 1 tend to use a range of Level 1 language while weaker ones are often descriptive, using imperatives rather than Level 1 items. Weaker candidates often miss the language cues from the examiner which aim to elicit some of the Level 1 language. Centres are advised to check the specifications for the language expectations of Level 1 and support candidates to integrate a wider range of Level 1 language items into the process task, eg present simple passive. Candidates could anticipate the types of questions the examiner may ask 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. Examiners report that processes are often well prepared, using a logical structure and sequence markers. However, candidates sometimes introduce the process by spending a long time listing the tools or ingredients that they need at the start. 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 often results in candidates not having time to finish their process once the examiner has asked questions. Examiners advise that candidates start talking about the process itself straightaway.

Examiners find that specialist lexis is often used very well in the process task. However, in some cases, mispronounced technical vocabulary can sometimes be a barrier to the examiner's understanding in this task. Candidates and centres should bear this in mind when preparing more specialised processes and ensure that any pronunciation of lower frequency vocabulary items is carefully practiced.

Level 2

Overall, examiners note the range of interesting presentations on topical issues that have been prepared by candidates for Task 1 and which cover the pros and cons of the subject, as required for this task.

Stronger candidates give well-structured presentations which include advantages and disadvantages, using a range of more complex language and expressions flexibly and with a high degree of accuracy. These presentations are also timed correctly. Weaker presentations, however, use a more limited range of language and tend to be overly descriptive. Centres are reminded that the presentation should be persuasive, covering both pros and cons of the topic rather than simply describing it. Some presentations are longer than the allotted time, meaning that examiners are obliged to interrupt and stop candidates before they have finished all their points or given a conclusion. Centres are reminded that the candidate has up to six minutes to deliver the presentation but that they should aim to bring this to a conclusion within the allotted time. Candidates should practise their presentations under timed conditions, which will help them to gauge the amount of material required for the time and edit accordingly.

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).

Stronger candidates are confident in asking questions and are aware that this is primarily a listening task in which they need to elicit information from the examiner and respond appropriately to what is said.

At Entry 1 and Entry 2, examiners report that weaker candidates ask questions which elicit a description of the picture. Centres are reminded that candidates need to ask questions in response to what the examiner says. Examiners also find that some candidates appear to have pre-prepared two or three questions to ask the examiner and that once these have been asked, the candidates find it difficult to ask further questions. The examiner will not stop Task 2 until the time for the task has elapsed, so candidates need to be prepared to ask questions until the examiner stops the task. Candidates may benefit from more in-class practice of asking questions to help with this task.

At Entry 2, examiners note that some candidates appear to mishear the examiner's instructions that the picture is about a future event, and ask past simple questions instead. Other candidates ask questions in the future using *will*. Centres are reminded that the focus of Entry 2 Task 2 is for the candidates to ask questions about the examiner's future event using present continuous and *going to* for the future.

In Task 2 at 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 to demonstrate their listening skills, by giving their views and opinions and asking for more information as appropriate. Sometimes, examiners find that weaker performances occur when candidates focus on asking a series of questions related to the examiner's choice, therefore not giving their views and opinions. In other cases, candidates give their views and opinions immediately, rather than listening and responding to what the examiner has said.

At Level 1 Task 2, stronger candidates are prepared to ask questions and they form different question types such as embedded, tag questions or statements as required in the amplification for this task. They also make comments and show their understanding of the details of the examiner's past story by using phonological features such as stress and intonation to show surprise etc. Weaker candidates are less able to follow the examiner's natural pauses which seek a comment or reaction. This can mean that candidates do not demonstrate turn-taking skills, make any comments or ask any questions during this task. In instances where candidates do ask questions, weaker performances are often characterised by questions which do not allow them to demonstrate their ability to form the range of question types expected at Level 1.

In Task 2 at 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. Weaker performances on this task are where candidates are less able to follow the examiner's extended turns or to give extended answers themselves. Examiners also note that in weaker performances, the level of the candidate language drops in Task 2 compared to that demonstrated in Task 1. This makes it difficult for the examiner to discuss the topic of the presentation at the appropriate level. Centres could provide Level 2 candidates with more opportunities to practise Task 2 in the classroom through pair work, where candidates take turns to ask extended questions about each other's presentations and give detailed answers in response, demonstrating Level 2 language. Please see the [sample examiner plan](#) for Level 2 for examples of questions which the examiner may ask during this task.

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 and takes the part of the person with whom the candidate needs to interact. The candidate does not need to play a role, but they do need to imagine themselves in that situation. Although this is usually very well understood across the levels, examiners suggest that candidates practise a wider range of scenarios in class related to education, work and social roles. 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.

At Entry 2 and Entry 3, weaker candidates appear not to completely understand the role play situation provided by the examiner. As a solution, examiners recommend that candidates practise strategies for checking information and asking for clarification. 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. Examiners therefore feel that candidates would benefit from more role play practice, with a focus on asking questions.

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, and candidates are therefore less able 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'. In some weaker performances, candidates tend to accept the examiner's polite feedback, suggestions and counter-point of them rather than challenge or defend their actions, while in others the candidate does not offer criticism of the examiner, therefore failing to demonstrate the full range of language functions required for the task. In stronger performances, candidates politely criticise the examiner and use a range of language to negotiate a solution in the role play.

Group discussion

The format of the group discussion is two candidates talking together about a topic provided by the examiner. Examiners point out that, even with two candidates taking part in the discussion, it remains an interactive task using the skills of listening, taking turns, interrupting politely, asking questions, expressing views, following up on what their partner has said, etc. Although in stronger performances candidates use these skills and take part in a conversation, listening carefully to one another and responding to what the other has said, weaker performances tend to involve candidates taking turns to make unrelated points instead of having a two-way conversation. At Entry 3 and Level 1 in particular, examiners also note the absence of fixed phrases for turn taking

as well as functional language such as for agreeing/disagreeing, making suggestions, introducing an opinion, etc.

Sometimes, weaker candidates at Entry 1 and Entry 2 need to be reminded of the topic if their conversation moves to a different subject. Topics for Entry 1 and Entry 2 are published in the specifications and are known in advance, so candidates should have sufficient practice of these topics. For Entry 3 and Level 1 where the subject is not known in advance, examiners recommend that candidates seek clarification if they are unsure whether they have understood the topic. At Level 2, candidates who appear to lack ideas about how to discuss the topic in detail or offer solutions to problems will receive lower marks. Examiners encourage Level 2 candidates to familiarise themselves with national/global issues by reading newspapers or online articles, watching the news and by practising group discussion topics in class.

Centres are reminded that dummy candidates for the group discussion should only be used where there are uneven numbers of candidates. Examiners report that, in some cases, dummy candidates are being used so that candidates can complete the group discussion with the person they have been practising with in class. Candidates should be able to work with different partners in case someone is absent on the day. Candidates may therefore benefit from practising the group discussion task in class with a number of different partners.

Writing

Overall, it is noted that answers are of a high standard, particularly at Entry level 1 and 2, with many candidates demonstrating ability above the level. At Entry 3 and above, many 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 produce interesting personal accounts and responses which include insight into their communities. However, at these higher levels, it is also relatively 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, who are often fluent, confident speakers, produce texts which are overly conversational (particularly in tasks 1 and 2 at Entry 3, and 1, 2 and 3 at Levels 1-2). They would benefit from a focus on how written language differs from spoken, and how to include complexity and ambition in structures, across different registers.

It was also noted that some candidates, who appear to have a good level of control of grammar, functions, and lexis of the level, misinterpret the rubric and produce responses which are off topic or off task, inappropriately addressing the audience or using an incorrect format. Those candidates would benefit from a better understanding of the format of the exam and the assessment criteria.

A small minority of candidates use a pencil or erasable pen to produce their response. Please remind candidates that these are not allowed in the exam.

Below we have looked at marker feedback in relation to each of the assessment criteria for Entry 1 and Entry 2 as we have a large amount of data for these levels. For Entry 3 to Level 2, comments were often relevant across the board and therefore we have conflated these, specifying those which only related to one level.

Entry 1

Most candidates attempt all the tasks, but a very small minority have been known to miss Task 3 completely. This was possibly because they ran out of time and failed to complete the final task.

Compared to previous years, there has been an increase in the number of candidates at Entry 1 who produce responses which include grammar, functions and lexis significantly above the level. While it is always acceptable for a candidate to use all the language that they know, if they attempt

grammar, functions, and lexis from above the level, they should ensure that they are able to use them correctly, as misuse may affect candidates ability to fulfill the assessment criteria.

1.1 Construct simple sentences correctly for an intended audience

Candidates who do extremely well write in 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. For example, in Task 3, candidates write a note directly addressing the audience, rather than an article (eg starting with *Dear Teacher...* rather than an article for a teacher) or produce a memorised response which does not address the rubric. Another issue arises from candidates attempting to write using compound sentences with simple connectors *and* or *but* (an above-level skill, which is required at Entry 2) and therefore being unable to control word order. This is particularly common when attempting to use the present continuous tense. A small number of candidates write using one structure in a repetitive way (eg *I like my city. I like a gym. I like a shop.*) 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 the sentences. Additionally, a small number of candidates capitalise a specific letter in all instances, wherever it appears in a word (eg 'I pLAy footbAll in A pArk...).

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 candidates attempting more ambitious vocabulary, sometimes above the level. Spelling errors were most often found to relate to the vowel sounds (eg in homophones red > read), candidates missing out the final 'e' or not doubling letters when adding 'ing' (eg get > getting).

2.1 Record personal details in a simple form correctly

This criterion was often well achieved, with almost all candidates completing all or almost all of the form correctly. Where errors or omissions occurred, these were in most cases related to the address, for example missing out fields completely (particularly the postcode or telephone number), not using the appropriate format or omitting appropriate key information (eg date of birth instead of today's date, or nationality or language instead of name of country). Very few candidates failed to include all of the key information (for example their house number, a complete phone number and an accurate email address), leading to an award of 1 because the

communicative purpose is not met (ie they cannot be contacted in any way). See page 19 of the Entry 1 specification for more details.

Entry 2

1.1 Present information in an appropriate format for the intended audience

Candidates who do not achieve full marks on this criterion usually write on topic but go off task. For example, if the rubric asks them to write what they did at a place, they might describe the place or write about the entire day and either neglect to mention the visit to the place at all or mention it only in passing. 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' in order 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 completely acceptable.

A small number of candidates write too little in both task 2 and task 3. While writing to word count is a suggestion rather than a strict requirement, these candidates often produce responses which do not include sufficient expansion or do not include content pertinent to the task.

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 appear to be aware of the requirement to produce several 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. Noun phrases, articles, adverbs and prepositional phrases are also often used incorrectly.

1.3 Use adjectives correctly

Markers often note that some students may not be aware that this is a discrete assessment criterion. In these cases, an otherwise strong candidate may inadvertently use no adjectives at all, preventing them from receiving any mark for this criterion. This is a particular issue in task 2. Candidates who had been well prepared appear to be aware of the need to demonstrate the use of adjectives and include several adjectives in their responses, mostly with correct word order. Very few candidates included comparative adjectives in their writing, which is one of the items in the amplification for this criterion at Entry 2.

1.4 Use punctuation correctly

The main comment from markers here is that in order to differentiate this level from Entry 1, it is important for students to be aware that they need to use commas in a list. Candidates who are well prepared use a list separated by commas effectively, particularly in task 3.

However, many candidates do not demonstrate the use of punctuation above the requirement of Entry 1 (use of full stops). In addition to the use of commas in a list, if the format required is a postcard, email or letter, candidates should be advised to take the opportunity to ask a question to demonstrate their ability to use a question mark. 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, but particularly where days of the week or months of the year are not capitalised in the first language, candidates often forget to capitalise these in English. The issue of randomly capitalising entire words or capitalising a single letter of the alphabet throughout persists at this level, and it is usually in these areas where marks are lost.

1.6 Spell words correctly

Markers noted that candidates of this level demonstrate a wide range of lexis related to the candidates' contexts and the need for writing. 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 leave fields blank, resulting in a loss of marks. Where fields are left 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). Occasionally the form asks for two sets of names (for example, an emergency contact) and candidates need to be aware of the need to enter different details here. Another common mistake at this level is providing date of birth instead of the current date or vice versa, or language or nationality instead of the country of origin.

Entry 3–Level 2

PLANS

While it has been relatively rare to see no plan at all, in some cohorts most candidates do not produce a plan 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. Occasionally markers are disheartened to see a weak answer when marks for these criteria would have been higher if the candidate had followed their own plan.

Common situations which will 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 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.

Good plans likely to achieve a 4:

- ▶ marker 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, eg use first name only (where the form requires a full name) or part of the course or miss out signature and/or date at the end of the form (particularly at Level 1 or Level 2).

At Level 1 and 2, in the more open response fields, a few candidates do not answer the questions on the form, sometimes over-focusing on the overarching question in the rubric provided for context above the form and ignoring the questions on the form itself.

Additionally, at Entry 3, not all candidates appeared 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 college canteen), they should limit their feedback to this rather than talking about the college in general.

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. Instead, many candidates do not incorporate the information into their response at all, copy the information verbatim or use it in a very basic way without identifying the key information and adapting it for the purpose of their writing.

TEXT PRODUCTION AND CONTENT

Many 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 question with adequate expansion and level of detail, and produce texts which are significantly below the suggested word count. Where 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 at Level 1 in task 2 candidates often include effective description but do not 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 do 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, fail 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. 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. Once again, most candidates display a clear understanding of the concept. Where performances are weaker, this is usually due to an inability to differentiate clearly, with Task 4 (the informal task) being overly formal, or Task 3 (the formal task) being overly informal, or Task 2 (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. 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 (eg in letters of complaint, or letters of enquiry) or only include one or two examples at the start of the task. At all three levels (Entry 3 to Level 2), the final task on the paper is an informal communication. Markers comment that 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.

STRUCTURING AND SEQUENCING

Entry 3 to Level 2 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 most responses consisting of an introduction, development and conclusion.

Candidates generally respond well to the introduction of paragraphing at Entry 3, although not all candidates grasp the concept of separating ideas out in this way, with some simply chunking their text at random, including one-sentence paragraphs or not using paragraphs at all. Again, markers noted that many candidates often miss out topic sentences and go straight into detail, so we would advise practising the idea of '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 (in the amplification and key language items). However, many candidates rely on a very limited range of very basic discourse markers, conjunctions, and connectives, or when they attempt to use more sophisticated cohesive devices, use them inappropriately.

At Level 1, many candidates would also benefit from giving thought to typical ways of laying out a report, for example using headings and subheadings to separate the points to be made.

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 the full range of grammatical items required at the level and appropriate for the task.

Strong performances in the exam are characterised by the deployment 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), and while their use of basic punctuation is accurate, in weaker performances eg at Entry 3, it 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.

LEXIS

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. 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.