

Top Tips for Functional Skills in English L1 & L2 Assessments

Top Tips Writing Assessment

1. Apply the Correct Format - Many candidates lose relatively easy marks by incorrectly formatting their answers. Along with correct paragraphing, appropriate introductions and conclusions, we expect to see:
 - Letters – two addresses, a date and correct open and close
 - Reports – heading, subheadings/bullets where appropriate
 - Articles – heading, subheadings/bullets where appropriate
 - Emails – addressee, subject header
2. Proofreading - Allow sufficient time for proofreading and editing your work. A significant proportion of marks are awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Also check for paragraphs and that your writing makes sense!
3. If you use capital letters for an entire answer you will not gain any of the marks available for punctuation.
4. Answer both questions. It is impossible to pass the assessment unless both questions are answered, and in sufficient detail.
5. Answer the question set. A common error is that although you may have written a well-written response in terms of structure and spelling, punctuation and grammar, sometimes it has little relevance to the task set. Therefore, it is important that you read the question with care to ensure you are providing a functional response.
6. Provide a sufficient response. Most candidates write responses of a suitable length, which enables markers to accurately assess their skills across the range of marking categories. However, some write very short responses which do not include enough to mark. Therefore, one of the writing tasks will have a word count but you should aim to write between 250 and 350 words per response for level 2 and 150-250 at level 1.
7. Tone/Register – remember to refer to the task and adopt an appropriate tone. Many candidates failing to achieve a pass are adopting an inappropriate tone – either too formal or too informal. Look at what the writing task is asking and who it is for. Remember to TAP the Text
 - **T**= What **type of text** are you writing?
 - **A**= Who is the **audience**?
 - **P**= What is the **purpose**?
8. For online writing assessments– try a practice online assessment as to write, review and proofread on screen are very different skills to doing so on paper – especially punctuation where capital letters and the personal pronoun will not be autocorrected. It also helps you get a feel for what the assessment will be like.
9. **Time management** – the writing assessment is 1 hour. Learners should allow 10 minutes for reading, planning and proofreading work and spend approximately 25 minutes on each task as they are equally weighted.

Top Tips Reading Assessment

1. **Misunderstanding or misreading e.g.** looking at content when asking about purpose. Close and careful reading is required to ensure that the question is understood.
2. Pay attention to the wording of the question. If you are asked to explain or describe something, the examiners are looking for more than just a simple list
3. **Make sure you use the text to answer the question** – It's a test of your reading skills - you must make sure the **answer is taken from the documents** rather than from your own ideas or experience. Don't use general or assumed knowledge to answer questions.
4. **Be aware of mark allocations** pay close attention to how many marks a question is worth and provide sufficient information accordingly. If an answer is worth 3 marks, for example, examiners are likely to be looking for three separate points. You can prepare for this by working on practice materials that require detailed answers.
5. Read the wording of multiple-choice questions carefully. **Only select one.** If you circle/highlight more than one response you will not be awarded a mark.
6. For questions about **writing style and understanding why a text is written** remember to
 - Identify the purpose of a text. Do not give an overview or comment on the text that focuses on content. Your answers should be about the purpose – for example: to advise about x, to persuade about y, to advertise and so on.
 - Understanding audience - who is the text aimed at – how do you know?
 - Formality and tone and register: e.g., is the article bias? is it formal, informal, semi-formal? is it sarcastic, fun, genuine, serious?
7. Complete the paper. To give yourself the best chance of success you must answer all questions.
8. Some questions require you to identify language features which may include bias, persuasion or humour. Make sure you are fully aware of the terms used before you sit the assessment so that you have the knowledge needed to answer the question.
9. Often candidates mix up language and organisational/presentational features.
A tip to remember:
 - Language if to do with words that are written.
 - Organisational/Presentational features are about how a text is set out e.g., the layout such as headings, columns, bullet points.
10. Take care with comparison questions. What are you being asked to compare? How many source documents does it say and which ones? Sometimes candidates do not read this question carefully!