



Skills for Life

Reading Entry 2 Examination Report

2011 – Test 102

Skills for Life Reading Examination Report: Entry 2

This report is based on candidate performance on one version of the Skills for Life Reading Entry 2 tests in 2010/11.

The report is intended as an aid to teachers and colleges in preparing candidates for future Cambridge ESOL Skills for Life Reading tests.

Test 102

The paper is based on the topics of cafes and food.

There are 42 marks available on the paper, 12 for Part 1, 14 for Part 2 and 16 for Part 3. The number of marks for each individual question is provided on the question paper. The breakdown of marks available for each assessment focus (Text, Sentence and Word) is shown below.

	Text	Sentence	Word	Total
Part 1	2	8	2	12
Part 2	5	4	5	14
Part 3	3	10	3	16
Total	10	22	10	42

Part 1 of the paper proved to be the most straightforward for candidates and Part 3 was the most difficult. Overall the paper was well done with candidates scoring slightly better on text-focus questions than sentence and word-focus questions.

Part 1

Part 1 begins with an email to a friend, arranging to meet. The second text is a letter of complaint to a cafe. Question 1 asks about the purpose of the email. While 78% overall answered this question correctly, 32% of the weaker candidates ticked B, 'She wants to find a new class,' possibly because they were word spotting 'new class' in the text without noting that the writer has already started her new class. This highlights the fact that candidates need to read the surrounding sentence rather than going for individual words in the text. In these questions the candidates are not looking for the right kinds of text-focus clues, e.g. the request for action from the reader would usually come at the end of the text as it does here.

The figures were similar for Question 2, 'How many children has Sandra got?' While 80% overall answered this correctly, 36% of the weaker candidates opted for '1'. Sandra only names one child but she also mentions 'both kids'. This is a question of looking at the whole text and not going for the first clue. Question 3, a reference question, was also not well answered by the weaker candidates, 49% of whom chose 'menu', which would lead to 'The menu has a nice menu.' Weaker candidates often go for the word that is nearest without considering meaning. They should be encouraged to insert the options into the sentence and consider the sense of the sentence. Question 4, a spelling question, was well done on the whole but 17% of weaker candidates left this blank. They do not lose marks for a wrong answer and so should be encouraged to have a guess if they are not sure.

Question 5, about Text B, was answered well with 84% overall answering correctly. Question 6, a series of five True/False items, was done well, D being the most straightforward – 90% of candidates overall answered this correctly. A and B proved the most difficult for the weaker candidates. For A they may have noted that they waited a long time and deduced that the cafe was busy, when it was not. This again indicates that they need to read the whole sentence. Question 7 posed few problems but Question 8, a vocabulary deduction question, led to a big difference in scores between the stronger (87%) and weakest (20%) candidates. This was partly, but not totally, due to the fact that 11% of the weaker candidates left this blank. The weaker candidates are looking for a plural noun, of which there are only two in paragraph 3:

burgers and clients. They then have to decide which one means 'customers'. Work on identifying parts of speech might help learners to do this kind of task.

Part 2

Part 2 is based on a feedback questionnaire for a college canteen. Question 9, asking about the text type, was well done with 74% overall answering correctly. However, 44% of the weaker candidates thought that it was an email. Question 10, about the number of days a week Sandra uses the canteen, was very well answered (89% overall). Question 11 consists of four 'yes/no' items. These were well done but the weaker candidates had most problems with 11C, 'which course Sandra is studying'. They may have been confused by the fact that this information is given in Text A and so they should note that these questions refer only to the current text.

Questions 12-14 were all open-ended and answered quite well, with the weaker candidates having the biggest problems with Question 14, the spelling question. 23% of them did not attempt this question. There are only six words in the line referred to so they should at least have a guess. Question 15 was answered correctly by only 53% of candidates, although 84% of the strongest candidates got it right. This involves close reading of the second paragraph of Part 6 of the text and seeing the link between 'closing too early' and 'she would like it to stay open later'. Work on identifying language chunks with the same meaning may be helpful, especially when they involve words which are opposites, as in this case. Question 16, 'Who should Sandra give Text C to?' also caused difficulty for all but the strongest candidates through not reading the sentences carefully enough. Options A and B, 'the canteen staff' and 'the canteen manager', were equally popular with about 20% of candidates going for each. Both were mentioned in the text but are not the answer to the question. Question 17 is a three-item A-Z task. This was done excellently by the stronger candidates but the weaker candidates had trouble with the first space, with 21% of them wanting to put 'drinks' after 'chips', omitting 'crisps'. Their performance was, however, a little better for the second and third items.

Part 3

Part 3 consists of three students writing about food. The multiple-choice Questions 18-22 showed good scores overall, with the stronger candidates scoring very highly. Question 23 is a series of three true/false questions, which also gave rise to quite high scores, the lowest being for C, 'Ahmed thinks eating at home is better than going to restaurants.' He mentions the word 'restaurants' but not 'home', so word spotting may be the reason for this. He does say 'It's nicer to stay in.' Learners should be exposed to different ways of saying the same thing – at least for their passive knowledge. Questions 24 to 26 are open-ended questions and again these were left blank by fewer of the weaker candidates this time. The most straightforward was Question 25, 'Which food does Miguel not like?' For these open-ended questions, learners need to realise that they might not find the words of the question; they should look for paraphrase in the text, e.g. for Question 26, 'What food can Ahmed cook?' the answer is cued by 'the only dish I know how to make is...' Questions 27 and 28 are both reference questions with again a tendency for weaker candidates to answer without considering meaning, resulting in 'The children usually taste good' for Question 28.

Questions 29-31 are open-ended word-focus questions, which were well answered by the stronger candidates. However, over 30% of weaker candidates did not reach this part of the paper. Of the weaker candidates that did answer, the success rate was poor. This is usually caused by not keeping to the directed sentence or paragraph or writing more than one word.

Recommendations for candidate preparation

All Cambridge ESOL Skills for Life tests are based on the *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum* and cover all the Basic Skills Standards in each mode at each level. Therefore, by following the *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum*, teachers will be preparing their students for the tests. Candidates will benefit from being reminded of the following Dos and Don'ts:

Do

- Do practise reading as many different types of text as possible.
- Do practise different reading skills, i.e. skimming, scanning, deducing meaning, identifying references, etc.
- Do bring world knowledge to your reading, but this should not replace reading the actual texts as candidates' experiences may be different.
- Do read all the instructions and introductions to texts and try to imagine the situation or scenario in each part of the paper.
- Do read the questions very carefully so that you know what you have to write. Think about the kind of information you need to look for in the text.
- Do always look at all the options in multiple-choice questions before making a choice.
- Do tick the boxes for the correct answers. Do not use other symbols. Make sure you know how many boxes to tick.
- Do cross out your wrong answers very clearly.
- Do use words from the texts, where possible, to answer the questions. You do not need to use different words.

Don't

- Don't leave any questions blank. Answer all the questions. You will not lose marks for writing a wrong answer.
- Don't always choose the option that contains a word that is also in the text (word spotting). Look at the meaning of the question and look for synonyms in the text.
- Don't write long answers to questions. They can usually be answered in a few words but make sure you give enough information to answer the question.
- Don't write any extra information. Give only the answer to the question. If it is not clear to the examiner that you have understood the question and identified the correct answer, you may not get a mark.
- Don't use your dictionary too much. This will take too much time and you do not need to know the meaning of all the words in a text to answer the questions.