



# Skills for Life

## Reading Entry 3 Examination Report

2011 – Test 103

## Skills for Life Reading Examination Report: Entry 3

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This report is based on candidate performance on one version of the Skills for Life Reading Entry 3 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 103

The paper is based on the topic of reading.

There are 47 marks available on the paper, 14 for Part 1, 15 for Part 2 and 18 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
<b>Part 1</b>	2	7	5	14
<b>Part 2</b>	6	5	4	15
<b>Part 3</b>	5	10	3	18
<b>Total</b>	13	22	12	47

Part 2 of the paper proved to be the most straightforward for candidates and Part 1 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, asking for advice on how to improve reading skills. The second text is a web entry about reading skills. Question 1 asks about the purpose of the email. This question proved quite problematic for the weaker learners, whose answers were distributed equally between the three options. It seems that they were 'word spotting' on 'party' and 'new class,' without reading the surrounding text carefully enough. 80% of the stronger candidates answered this question correctly. Question 2 was more straightforward with 95% of the stronger candidates getting the answer correct, although 'in the park' was a significant distractor for the weaker candidates with only 64% of them answering correctly.

Question 3 is a series of true/false items, all of which provided few problems for the stronger candidates. The weaker candidates found A and C the most challenging. For D, they may have been inferring meaning that was not intended. They should be encouraged to check their assumptions against the text.

Questions 4 and 5 are open-ended questions and almost all candidates attempted them. Question 4 was the most difficult with only 48% overall answering correctly. They need to read the first paragraph quite carefully to establish that Zohra has not yet started her new job. Question 5 was well done.

Question 6 is about the best title for Text B and this was very straightforward for all. However, for Question 7, 22% overall thought that three different types of books are mentioned in the text: maybe they were including newspapers as well as novels and dictionaries. They would be advised to think carefully about the generic terms given in this question type. Question 8 is a reference question, proving to be no problem for the stronger candidates but almost half of the weaker candidates, and a quarter overall, got this question wrong. They are clearly not slotting the options into the text and seeing if it makes sense.

Questions 9, 10 and 11 are all open-ended questions which were left blank by 10%, 17% and 8% of the weaker candidates respectively. Question 9 asks 'How often...' which calls for work on question forms and what kind of information learners need to look for. Question 10 is a spelling question and was by far the

easiest of the three – although it is important that candidates restrict their search only to the given paragraph and they should write something even if they are not sure. Question 11 involved deduction of meaning, which proved the most difficult question in this group. Candidates should focus on the part of speech required – in this case, a noun, restrict their answer to one word and as for the spelling question keep within the given paragraph.

## Part 2

Part 2 is based on an article about a new chain of bookshops and another article about libraries. Question 12, asking for the best title for the article, was well done with 82% overall answering correctly. Question 13, asking what a customer liked about the bookstores, was also well done with 83% overall answering correctly, however 27% of the weaker candidates fell for ‘They sell the latest books,’ having failed to notice the ‘not’ in the previous sentence. This highlights the need to read whole sentences and not just ‘word spot’. There was a similar issue with Question 14 about why a customer prefers small bookshops – 87% answered correctly but 30% of the weaker candidates ticked A, ‘You can buy DVDs,’ when the text says the loud music gives her a headache. Question 15 is a reference question which was not particularly well done, only 63% overall answered this correctly. 26% spread over all ability levels chose C, ‘a pleasure’, which, when inserted into the sentence in the text, does not make sense.

Question 16 is a series of four yes/no questions of which A and D were very straightforward; the most difficult proved to be B – whether the name of the bookstore is given or not. They may have had difficulty recognising ‘Books for You’ as a name but a clue lies in the fact that it is written in italics in the text. It would be an idea to spend some class time looking at the uses of italics in texts. For Question 16C there was a significant difference in performance between the stronger and weaker candidates – 100% and 47% respectively. Weaker candidates often do find it harder to spot that something is not there.

Multiple-choice Questions 17-19 on the second text in this part were all answered well overall, with the weaker candidates having the biggest problems with Question 19, where they failed to notice the difference between ‘many’ in the option and ‘a few’ in the text. Question 20 asks how many job titles there are in the last paragraph and a third of all candidates opted for two instead of three. They should ensure that they scan the whole paragraph for such questions. Question 21 is a series of three A-Z questions. A was very easy for all – 97% overall got the answer correct. However, B and C proved more difficult for the weaker candidates. Both questions involved looking at the second letters but candidates at this level should be able to do this.

## Part 3

Part 3 consists of articles about reading newspapers, written by three students. Question 22, about the reason for writing, was very well done and the stronger candidates answered Questions 23-27 with little difficulty. In Question 23 there may be confusion for the weaker candidates between ‘borrow’ in the text and ‘lend’ in the question. In Question 24, ‘Who says he does not buy newspapers?’ the key is Ding, but 25% of the weaker candidates ticked Fabiano, distracted by the fact that it is Fabiano’s sister who doesn’t buy them. In Question 25 all three students mention other people but only Ali says he actually reads with them, using the word ‘together’. This calls for careful reading of the texts. Question 27 was well done overall, but weaker candidates found it challenging to untangle ‘unlike’, ‘aren’t similar’ and ‘the only thing that’s the same’ as meaning the same thing.

Question 28, a series of yes/no questions, was well done, as was Question 29, three open-ended questions about what each student finds difficult. However, by this point roughly 20% of the weaker candidates had run out of time and so the performance percentages drop considerably. The stronger candidates continued to answer very well to the end of the paper. The most difficult was Question 30, a vocabulary-deduction question: ‘Which word means very big?’ Here candidates are looking for an adjective. ‘Vast’ is closely followed by ‘lots of’ as a gloss and ‘very big’ would fit in the sentence in its place. Learners would clearly benefit from looking at words in this way.

## 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 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.