



Skills for Life

Reading Entry 2 Examination Report

2007 – Test 067

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 2006/7.

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

Test 067

The paper is based on the topic of shopping.

There were 40 marks available on the paper, 16 for Part 1, 10 for Part 2 and 14 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	7	7	16
Part 2	3	5	2	10
Part 3	2	10	2	14
Total	7	22	11	40

All three parts of this paper were of a very similar level of difficulty, although Part 1 was very slightly easier. Overall, the paper was well done with candidates scoring least well on word focus questions. This is because there is a tendency (less so than at Entry 1) for weaker candidates in particular to leave open questions blank. In this paper many of the open questions were word focus, and of these, the questions on deduction of meaning were particularly challenging to the weaker candidates. They should be encouraged to write something as they won't lose marks for wrong answers. Weaker candidates also had problems with the pronoun referencing questions in this paper.

Part 1

Part 1 begins with an email asking for advice about where to buy household goods, followed by a reply suggesting catalogue shopping and finally an extract from a catalogue.

Candidates found question 1 relatively easy: a high percentage of candidates correctly chose 'She wants to buy some items for her flat'. About a quarter of the weaker candidates chose 'She wants to borrow some money', maybe because the words 'money' and 'borrowed' both appear in the same line of the text. For question 2 a fairly wide selection of wrong words was given. A few candidates provided a list and some wrote out a sentence, e.g. 'I haven't got much for the kitchen'. It is then not clear which word the candidate thinks is spelt incorrectly. Candidates should follow the instruction to write one word and to take their answer from the line given. It is also worth noting that for questions testing spelling, the task is just to identify the misspelt word in the text; how the candidate spells the word in their answer is not important.

For question 3 a few candidates ticked only one box and although the question was well answered on the whole, the most common wrong answer was 'You can order things from home'. Candidates may have been using their own ideas here and not getting the information from the text. Candidates found questions 4 and 5 relatively hard, and almost a fifth of the weaker candidates failed to answer question 4. Of those that did answer it, there was a big difference in ability between the weaker third of candidates and the stronger third.

Candidates should look for the word with the same meaning in the context of the text, i.e. 'latest' does not always mean 'new' but here it is a substitute. Question 5 was slightly easier, but some candidates wrote words that already have a capital letter, such as 'It's'. Candidates need to be trained to look for a word that isn't capitalised, but should be.

Question 6 requires candidates to order products from a catalogue alphabetically. The first two items in this question proved to be fairly easy, but the third and fourth items were a bit harder. Some of the weaker candidates had difficulty with the second letter ordering, and chose 'pictures' to go after 'plates' rather than choosing the correct answer, 'radios'. However, most candidates attempted this question, with only 6% leaving any part of it blank.

Question 7 posed no particular problem. Question 8B was the most straightforward in this part of the paper, with 93% of candidates ticking the correct answer. Only 10% of weaker candidates failed to attempt question 9 but this proved straightforward for the stronger candidates.

Part 2

Part 2 consists of an order form for a catalogue and a letter from a mail order company. Question 10 was generally well done – 94% of the stronger candidates ticked the correct answer but 27% of the weaker candidates ticked 'complaint form', maybe because the word 'complaint' is in the text. Question 11 was slightly harder: 'You can call the company to find out about special offers' was chosen by 43% of weaker candidates and 14% of stronger candidates (one third of the overall candidature) possibly because 'special' appears in the text. Both of these questions are examples of the tendency of weaker candidates in particular to look for word matches in a text without considering the overall meaning. Question 12 was very easy for the stronger candidates but weaker candidates were choosing all options in equal proportions, perhaps guessing. They should be encouraged to try to substitute the options in the question in place of the relevant pronoun in the text to determine whether the sentence then makes sense or not. Question 13 was again straightforward for the stronger candidates but 30% of the weaker ones left a blank here. Questions 14 to 17 were all relatively straightforward. Question 14 was one of the easiest in this part of the paper, along with question 15C. Question 16 was left blank by 28% of the weaker candidates but most of those who answered got it right. Question 17 was done better than the previous referencing question (question 12) but about a quarter of the weaker candidates opted for 'catalogues'.

Part 3

Part 3 consists of three students writing about buying things. Questions 18 to 20 posed few problems, with approximately 80% of candidates getting the correct answers. Question 21 was harder, as about half of the weaker candidates ticked 'Ahmed', maybe because the word 'present' is in Ahmed's text. Question 22 was very straightforward and for question 23 most ticked the correct number of boxes. However, weaker candidates were misled by the words 'credit card', 'sales' and 'department stores' appearing in the texts, so many of the weaker candidates ticked the first and fourth options. As in question 21, candidates should be encouraged to read texts for meaning and avoid merely identifying items of vocabulary. Question 24 (the easiest question in this part of the paper) was answered well by all candidates. Questions 25 and 26 were not answered by 38% and 44% of the weaker candidates respectively but part of the reason for this could be the time factor as these are the final questions. These questions were slightly more challenging for the stronger candidates than other questions of the same types but were nevertheless answered correctly by 86% and 76% of the stronger candidates respectively.

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

Don't

- leave any questions blank. Answer all the questions. You will not lose marks for writing a wrong answer.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.