

Level 2 English for Business



International
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Annual Qualification Review

2012

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the annual qualification review is to provide qualification-specific support and guidance to centres. This information is designed to help teachers preparing to teach the subject and to help candidates preparing to take the examination.

The review identifies candidate strengths and weaknesses and provides examples of good and poor candidate responses.

The reviews are published in September and take into account candidate performance, demonstrated in both on demand and series examinations, over the preceding 12 months.

PASS RATE STATISTICS

The following statistics are based on the performance of candidates who took this qualification between 1 September 2011 and 31 August 2012.

Global pass rate 85%

Grade distributions

Pass	22.8%
Merit	35.9%
Distinction	26.3%

GENERAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Strengths

- formal layout of answers especially of answers requiring:
 - a memo
 - a report
- selection of information

Weaknesses

- lack of planning to answers
- lack of checking for errors after writing answers
- wholesale copying from questions
- retention of given, inappropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures
- inaccuracies in grammar
- poor organisation of messages
- insufficient attention to specific instructions and recommendations stated on the question paper e.g.
 - *“Remember that in Question 3 you should use your own words whenever possible.”*
 - *“We prefer articles to be 4 or 5 paragraphs long.”*
 - *“Write in connected English.”*
 - *“I don’t want a leaflet that has the information scattered over the page.”*
- failure to heed information given in the *Specification*:
 - *“Question 3 is an exercise in reformulation.”*
 - *“Question 1 involves an extended writing task ... “*

TEACHING POINTS BY SYLLABUS TOPIC

The comments and teaching points remain almost unchanged from those made last year.

Syllabus topic area 1

Letter

It is clear that centres have taught candidates the importance of letter writing even in a modern business-world of electronic forms of message.

Specific recommendations for improvement are that candidates need to:

- plan their answers. (This is true of all answers but particularly so of LETTERS and LISTS.)
- make certain that the content of the letter DIRECTLY ANSWERS the points raised in the incoming letter
- match the greeting and the close:

<i>Dear Sir/Madam/Sirs</i>	plus	<i>Yours faithfully</i>
<i>Dear Name</i>	plus	<i>Yours sincerely</i>

Syllabus topic area 2

Leaflet

With the exception, perhaps, of answers to Question 3, the leaflet is often the weakest answer offered by candidates.

Often, candidates unsystematically “scatter” words directly taken from the question without trying to link the ideas or to form them into a coherent message. Such answers fail.

The teaching points for the candidates are:

- “Scattered” answers do not answer the question adequately
- Full sentences are not always needed in leaflets and notices but there has to be a LOGICAL SEQUENCE to the message and the information given in the question will need to be REWORDED and GROUPED logically.
- The purpose of the leaflet needs to be unambiguous. Candidates should bear in mind at whom the leaflet is aimed, what the intended outcome of the message is, and what their own reaction would be, if they received the leaflet. The following simple questions may help them to judge their own answers:

“Is the leaflet understandable?”

“Does the leaflet make its points unambiguously?”

“Does this leaflet fulfil the following requirement stated in the ‘Specification’:

‘Question 1 involves an extended writing task ...?’”

“Is there enough evidence of the candidate’s own English ability for an examiner to make a valid and reliable assessment of its quality?”

Syllabus topic area 3

Report

This is a popular choice and the method of writing a report remains well taught and learned. The most frequent problem is failure to allocate the material adequately to the chosen headings.

The recommended textbook for English for Business Level Two is

LCCI English for Business Level 2 Testbuilder
published by MacMillan
ISBN 978-0-230-73387-9

and it suggests the use of one format in preference to others. Some teachers, quite correctly, say that other formats are now more current, for example the memo-style report. For Level 2 English for Business any report format is acceptable. However, the “Terms of Reference” style continues to be the layout that is recommended. Once this format is learned, a report almost writes itself. The headings always need the same type of content.

The teaching points are:

- a report must be STRUCTURED APPROPRIATELY
- whichever format is used, candidates should know what material to ALLOCATE to the HEADINGS
- the recommended style is:

TITLE (simply and briefly summing up of the subject of the report)

TERMS OF REFERENCE (stating the subject of report, who wants it, and by when)

PROCEDURE/PROCEEDINGS (explaining how the data is collected)

FINDINGS (giving the ‘bare’ findings without comment on them)

CONCLUSIONS (offering an interpretation of the findings)

RECOMMENDATIONS (stating what should be done)

NAME of the person making the report

DATE on which the report is written.

Syllabus topic area 4

Article

The article is not a popular choice. (Very occasionally Question 3 requires an article and then obviously there is no choice.) Some very basic problems frequently appear such as sentence formation and paragraphing.

The teaching points are:

- candidates are expected to be able to FORM SENTENCES adequately – subject plus verb etc
- paragraphing is also expected – not necessarily topic sentence type, but EACH PARAGRAPH should have a “theme” or “TOPIC”

- often the question asks for 4 to 5 paragraphs equating with the COMMON PATTERN of an introductory paragraph with 2 or 3 topic paragraphs and a final “sum up” paragraph.

Syllabus topic area 5

List or structured notes

This type of task is asked for in QUESTION 3 and it is always an exercise in REFORMULATION and REWORDING.

The word LIST is intended to be read very loosely. Grouping of material, headings, sub-headings that are often associated with structured notes etc are welcome. Numbers, bullets etc can be useful tools.

The teaching points are that candidates should:

- make NOTES of the important statements from the passage. (Some candidates may benefit from being reminded that a “list of main points” from an article etc infers that the list will be shorter than the original!)
- ORGANISE the notes into a structure, possibly sets of grouped points
- REWORD the selected points appropriately
- CHECK the GRAMMATICAL CONSISTENCY of bulleted points etc.

Syllabus topic area 6

Memo

The memo is by far the most chosen option in Question 1 and its techniques are often well understood by candidates.

The teaching points are:

- a memo usually needs to be PARAGRAPHED
- numbers and/or bullet points may be used but each set should ordinarily be introduced by a statement of introduction
- a memo’s message should be SUCCINCT - “to the point” and brief without being terse
- candidates should take care identifying the sender, recipient and subject
- the message part of a memo needs to have a beginning, a middle and an end.

Syllabus topic area 7

Notice

The comments and notes on how to approach a question asking for a notice to be written are virtually identical to those for a leaflet.

Sometimes, candidates unsystematically “scatter” words directly taken from the question without any attempt to link the ideas or to form them into a coherent message. Such answers fail.

The teaching points for the candidates are:

- “Scattered” answers do not answer the question adequately
- Full sentences are not always needed in leaflets and notices but there has to be a LOGICAL SEQUENCE to the message and the information given in the question will almost certainly need to be REWORDED and GROUPED logically.
- The purpose of the notice needs to be unambiguous. Candidates should bear in mind at whom the notice is aimed, what the intended outcome of the message is, and how effective their notice would be in ‘real life’. The following simple questions may help them to judge their own answers:

“Is the notice understandable?”

“Does the notice make its points unambiguously?”

“Does this notice fulfil the following requirement stated in the ‘Specification’:

‘Question 1 involves an extended writing task ...’?”

“Is there enough evidence of the candidate’s own English ability for an examiner to make a valid and reliable assessment of its quality?”

FURTHER GUIDANCE

Planning answers

A frequent comment from examiners of EFB2 is that there is very little evidence of candidates planning their answers. The time allocation is sufficient for candidates:

- to read all the questions thoroughly
- to select the information needed for the answer
- to decide on an appropriate format and layout
- to organise the information logically
- to choose suitable vocabulary and grammatical structures
- to write the answer
- to check the answer for errors and to correct them.

It is emphasised that some candidates who fail, do so not because of inadequate English but because of inadequate planning.

Organising information

In addition to the general approach to planning an answer that is given above, it is also helpful for candidates to remember that most types of business communication benefit from having:

- a beginning in which some form of introduction is given, possibly outlining the background or reason for the message
- a logically ordered middle section that gives the details of the information clearly and concisely
- an ending that closes the message by summing up the message very precisely or in some other way 'rounds off' the communication.

Changing the given vocabulary and grammatical structures:

If candidates make definite, obvious attempts to use vocabulary and grammar appropriately and sensibly, occasional repetitions of given words and structures are expected and accepted.

What cannot be accepted is an answer that is really a collection of phrases and sentences copied directly from the question. Such answers do not give sufficient evidence for examiners to judge the candidate's ability to write a message in English and therefore heavily copied answers to any Question 1 or 2 will usually fail. When the inappropriate copying occurs in an answer to Question 3, it breaks a clear instruction in the syllabus for English for Business level 2, and therefore all such answers will fail.

EXAMPLES OF CANDIDATE RESPONSES

The examples are answers to Question 1 (c) of the Series 3 2012 question paper.

Question 1

Option (c)

Setting

The firm for which you work is building a new factory near Ostend in Belgium. For the past year there has been an agreement with the Hotel Langemart, Kleine Weststraat 12, Ostend 8400, Belgium with special rates being offered to any of your staff who need to visit the factory site. The agreement is currently being renegotiated.

Mr Axel Lindberg, International Manager, says, "I've stayed at the Hotel Langemart. I found it adequate, but not brilliant ... I thought the meals were so poor that I went to a local restaurant instead! I've written a list of the people from our firm who have stayed there. Can you ask them what they think about the Hotel Langemart and **write a report** to me, say, within 3 weeks? I need the report to help me in my negotiations with the hotel. It will be helpful if you recommend areas in which we would need the hotel to improve."

You interview the staff named by Mr Lindberg and ask them to grade the hotel in 8 categories. At the end, you average the comments and allocate them to a 6 point scale. Here is a chart of your findings:

Hotel Langemart	Ostend	Belgium
SCORE	0	1 2 3 4 5
Check-in process		
Comfort of bedroom		
Equipment in bedroom		
Cleanliness		
Staff helpfulness		
Quality of meals		
Check-out process		
Closeness to site of factory		

KEY

SCORE 0 to 1 = UNACCEPTABLE
 SCORE 2 = POOR
 SCORE 3 = ACCEPTABLE
 SCORE 4 = VERY GOOD
 SCORE 5 = EXCELLENT

Task

Write the report

(40 marks)

Here are genuine reproductions of what three candidates wrote as answers to this question.

Answer A – fail level response

The Report Requested By The Hotel Langemart

Term of references

The International Manager asked for me to report about staff and the hotel they use.

Method

Interviews were done with staff members visiting our site at Belgium.

Findings

They were asked about Hotel Langemart. They graded it the following:

Registration process	1 mark
Comfort in bedroom	3 marks
Equipment in bedroom	3 marks
Hygiene	5 marks
Staff	5 marks
Meals	2 marks
Sign out	3 marks
Factory conveniences	3 marks

Conclusions

Hotel must stress on the quality of meals there are providing.

The bedroom was comfortable and well equip.

The meals were so poor that he went to a local restaurant instead.

Signing-in is poor.

Cleaning and staff help are good.

Suggestions

Find an other hotel.

Discussion of candidate answer A:

The answer has some good points.

- It makes some sense. There is a message.
- Some changes are made to the given vocabulary and phrases.
- Acceptable headings are used.

However, there are rather more weaknesses.

- The message is very halting and does not always communicate adequately, or without ambiguity
e.g.: ... *asked me to report about staff ...*
Consider with certificate.
Interviews were done with staff members visiting our site at Belgium.
- The sequence is virtually the one given in the question.
- Inappropriate copying is evidenced especially by
The meals were so poor that he went to a local restaurant instead.
- There are several errors of grammar that hinder easy communication.

To reach the pass mark, answers must communicate the message more fluently, fully and correctly.

Here is a further example of a candidate's answer to the same question.

Answer B – pass level response

HOW GOOD IS THE HOTEL LANGEMART?

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Mr Axel Lindberg have to ask for a report on what staff are thinking of their stay at Hotel Langemart. He negotiates new deal with them and was not having satisfaction when he stayed there. He wants the ideas of other staff so he can tell the Hotel owner what needs to be accomplished. He want the report in three weeks.

PROCEDURE

Mr Axel Lindberg give me a list of the names of staff that stayed at Hotel Langemart. I interviewed with them and put a mark between 0 and 5 to say how good is Hotel Langemart. I put results in graph and studied results.

FINDINGS

1. Highest score 5 was for the cleaning of the Hotel and the staff were helpful.
2. Next highest score 4 did not appear.
3. Middle score 3 was adequate and many areas of the Hotel scored it:
 - comfort in bedroom
 - bedroom equipment (kettle, beverages, biscuits etc)
 - check-out
 - closeness to our site.
4. The next last high score 2 was scored (poor standard) by quality of meals.
5. The lowest service 1 is the check-in.

CONCLUSIONS

- The quality of the meal is poor and not liked by staff.
- Check-in is not good and too slow and not liked by staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Hotel must show better service to our visitors.
2. Arrival spoiled by slow check-in – must be better.
3. Food is not good – we pay enough for good food.
4. The Hotel is not value for us, look for other hotel.

AC

Dated

Discussion of candidate answer B:

Answer B has several faults including:

- occasional lack of sentence recognition
- incorrect verb forms
- some phrasing and structure problems
- awkward expression
- some ambiguity.

However, the improvements compared with answer A are considerable. For example:

- the errors cause some 'jarring' but the report is reasonably fluent
- it easily communicates its message
- the facts are incorporated into a logical structure and sequence
- the use of bullet points and numbers is good
- the candidate has obviously thought about the message and added acceptable interpretation to some of the bare facts.

Here is a further example of a candidate's answer to the same question.

Answer C – distinction level response

TERMS of REFERENCE

Staff visiting our new premises in Ostend have stayed at the Hotel Langemart, The agreement that we have with this hotel is ending and a new agreement is being negotiated. Mr Lindberg wants to know if our staff are satisfied with Hotel Langemart. I was asked to interview staff about this matter and to submit a report until 3 weeks.

PROCEDURE

Mr Lindberg gave me a list of staff that had stayed at the hotel. I interviewed them and asked them to rate the hotel in 8 areas and to give it a mark for each area ranging from 0 to 5. The areas covered checking into the hotel, checking out of the hotel, the comfort of the bedrooms and the equipment provided in the rooms, the level of cleanliness, the way they were treated by the staff of the hotel, the standard of meals offered, and how easy it was to reach our premises from the hotel. The marks awarded were averaged and a chart was drawn so that the findings were clear.

FINDINGS

Four areas were “adequate”:

- the equipment in bedrooms
- comfort in the bedrooms
- the checking-out
- the ease of getting to our new premises.

Two areas get full marks:

- standards of cleaning
- helpfulness of staff.

In two areas the hotel scored marks that were not satisfactory:

- the checking-in procedure
- the quality of the meals.

CONCLUSIONS

Our staff are not completely satisfied with Hotel Langemart. The checking-in system is completely unacceptable and the poor quality of the food is very worrying to them.

Some other important areas were not rated as good and, although they are not as bad as the checking-in and the food, they are still important to the comfort of our staff. These areas include the comfort of the bedrooms and the equipment that is available in them.

The politeness and helpfulness of the staff are valued by our staff, but it is doubtful if they make up for the weaknesses that the hotel has.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The hotel is not any more accessible from and to our new site and there are several hotels just as near as the Hotel Langemart. I recommend therefore the following as urgent.

1. Negotiate the provision of better meals.
2. Ask for a quicker enrolment on entry.
3. Discuss the need for improvement also in areas considered only ‘adequate’.

If there is no success in these negotiations, I recommend looking for a hotel that will provide a better service to our staff.

A. Candidate
(Dated)

Discussion of candidate answer C:

There are several areas where improvements could be made.

- a title is necessary
- the tense changes, sometimes for little logical reason, between present and past
- some of the vocabulary is not 'quite right' e.g. *enrolment*
- there is unnecessary repetition of e.g. *and*
- very occasionally the grammatical structure is 'strained' e.g.
The hotel is not any more accessible from and to our new site ...
- even more rarely it is wrong:
... submit a report until 3 weeks

but, as a Level 2 answer, it is excellent.

- the required information is expressed clearly
- it is generally well organised and structured
- the word choice and phrasing are the candidate's own
- the message and expression are appropriate to the task
- the communication is clear and fluent
- the 'facts' are correctly allocated to the sub-headings and each section is fluent and full
- the findings are not copied from the question, but are logically reorganised
- the conclusion appropriately follows on from the findings
- the recommendations are thoughtful, apt and clear
- the vocabulary and grammar are generally of a high standard.

Answer C is not perfect, but it is a clear distinction answer at English for Business Level 2.

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and performance