

March 2008 EFL Monitoring Board's English Language Examination Examiners' Report

Overall, candidates showed more evidence of having prepared for the examination than for past ones. On the whole, candidates scored better on the parts which could be studied for than on parts which relied on the candidates' use of the language and which tested the candidates' ability to express an idea in different ways. Candidates should remember that while language terminology is important, they also need exposure to quality literature and periodicals to broaden their knowledge and use of the language.

Candidates, for the most part, scored very well on Section A, assumedly because language description can be studied.

Section A, Part 1 has a multiple choice format and most candidates scored well on this section. Prospective candidates should study very well for this section as it accounts for 15% of the marks on the entire exam.

Section A, Parts 2, 3 & 4, phonology, were, in general, better than past examinations and again showed signs of preparation. In part 2, candidates should study noun/verb stress patterns, remember that only one syllable can have the main stress and bear in mind that stress can change depending on the part of speech a base word changes into, i.e. senior/seniority. In part 4, candidates should pay more attention to weak forms and must first know the standard pronunciations of the words in question.

Candidates generally scored poorly in Section B, Part 1. There was evidence that candidates were able to recognise and name differences in structure at a mechanical level (i.e. naming the difference between a bare infinitive and the infinitive with 'to') but less evidence that candidates were able to distinguish between the different functions of modals, the relationship between time and tense, multiple functions of tenses in terms of meaning and the recognition of differences in register. This would suggest that there had been a greater focus in exam preparation on familiarisation with basic grammatical terminology (Section A) but less emphasis on the relationship between structure and meaning.

Section B, Part 2 was better and many candidates were able to demonstrate a higher degree of sensitivity to register, possibly due the fact that language here is presented in the form of a written text and was therefore contextualised. However, there were instances of grammatical errors, especially in terms of inappropriate verb forms, and candidates would do well to consider their answers in this section both in terms of grammatical accuracy and also with respect to appropriateness in terms of register.

Section B Part 3. Candidates generally made a good attempt at this section. However, performance was sometimes marred by poor spelling, unfamiliarity with conditional sentence structures and difficulties with common verb patterns and multi-word verb particles, especially with 'look forward to + V+ing' and the spelling of the words 'definitely' and 'separate'.

Section C Part 1. This selective deletion task tested candidates' expectancy grammar in a particular lexical area. It was pitched at the correct level allowing many candidates to perform quite well and distinguish themselves from others whose level of proficiency was of a lower level.

Section C Part 2. Candidates' performance on this exercise, which tested the ability to produce both informal and formal chunks of language typically found in letters, was generally satisfactory though not to the extent that the next examination paper need not test this aspect as a worrying number of candidates are unable to sign off an informal letter.

Section C Part 3 required candidates to transform a formal utterance into its informal equivalent. Performance on this showed that many candidates do not possess this competence.

Section C Part 4. This task tested candidates' recognition of idioms. Performance on this varied but was generally satisfactory.

Section C Part 5 also tested idioms and candidates performed less well than they did on the previous task as this was a production task. This task served to discriminate between candidates with a strong command of idiomatic English and others who have a limited command.

Writing skills

With some exceptions, the writing tasks were generally of a high level. The majority of candidates chose the same writing task, one, which allowed them to show argumentative and discursive skills.