

Trinity College London Skills for Life (QCF)

Frequently asked questions

SPEAKING & LISTENING

Entry 2 Task 1: the student's picture

How do students know how much to say and when for their picture/photo input e.g. at the start?

At Entry 2, extended utterances are expected, but at the same time the examiner expects to give some support if necessary. The use of a picture to prompt the conversation means that the interaction should be authentic and natural. If the student has a few introductory comments prepared, it will give him or her confidence, and enable the discussion to begin: 'This is a picture of the park near my house. I went there last weekend'; 'This is a photo from my birthday party. It was one month ago'. Alternatively, the examiner may look at the picture and ask a question or make a comment to open up the conversation.

Practice with the time limit in class. If teachers are familiar with the old 'recent past event' task, they can build on this. However, now the student can't recite by rote, and the examiner will be listening actively and eliciting the target language. This means that the story will have to be shorter than before, and the student has to be prepared for questions.

Level 1 Task 1

Most students will want to describe a recipe. I know from past experience that this is always the most popular choice. Is it a problem if most students choose to do this? Do students *have to* use the passive voice?

Students can choose to describe any process with which they are familiar, but if they choose a recipe, they should avoid listing ingredients in detail, as this takes up valuable time when they could be demonstrating their range of language. The process may well lend itself to using the passive voice, but it is an opportunity for candidates to show their range of Level 1 structures and functions, and so there is no single structure which has to be present.

Level 1 Task 2: the examiner's story

We think that student intervention to ask questions/ express understanding/ express emotional response are what is wanted. Is that correct?

Yes, that is correct. The QCF requirements in general place greater emphasis on listening – specifically active listening – than the previous exams.

Are the examiner and student, for the purposes of the story, positioned more as interlocutory equals than as senior/ junior?

Yes: as far as possible within an exam situation, the candidate and examiner are communicating as equals, i.e. neutral and respectful.

In the story, should students restrict themselves to commenting on the examiner's story or should they embark on a narrative turn themselves?

No, they should not embark on a narrative turn, but should express their views (For example, brief utterances like 'oh, that happened to me once. It was awful / funny'; 'that sounds frightening'; 'oh, that's interesting'; 'you should be more careful next time').

Level 1 Task 3 role play

In the role play, is the student expected to "run with the ball" and provide a set of ideas based on the examiner's cue, or is it a discussion?

It would definitely be good if the candidate produced some ideas, and it is at the same time a discussion. AC 4.3: plan action with others includes:

Plan action with other people

- ▶ Negotiate a plan with other speakers, and do so on occasions when agreement cannot be taken for granted
- ▶ Select appropriate register when:
 - contrasting ideas
 - summarising
 - making suggestions

The examiner will have ideas and suggestions, but if the student can make suggestions as well, and contrast them to select the best course of action, then they will be communicating 'with ease and confidence' and scoring highly for this. At Level 1, students would be expected to be pro-active in communicating. Having said that, they are not tested on their imagination or technical knowledge.

Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2 Task 3: role play

What is the relationship between the examiner and the candidate in the role plays?

The relationship is specified, so it is clear if it the examiner is a colleague or manager (i.e. a superior in a work context). At Entry 3, students are able to participate in 'familiar, formal exchanges'. At level 1, they are expected to engage in 'formal exchanges'. At Level 2, students should be able to engage in discussion 'in a wide range of formal and social exchanges'

Entry 1 to Level 2 group discussions

Is the topic always work related or is there a choice of a work or non-work related topic?

At Entry 1 and Entry 2, students prepare topics from one of two lists, and the centre informs the examiner which list the candidates have prepared. From Entry 3 onwards, the examiner chooses a discussion topic that may be related to work, study, social life or every day activities.

WRITING

There didn't seem to be a lot of blank paper in the booklet for student rough work – will the booklets be bigger for the real exams?

The booklets will be the same size, i.e. A4 (A3 folded in half). While some students may want more paper (which they can ask for in the exam room and submit with their exam), some may find vast expanses of white paper intimidating.

What does Trinity define as a "writing plan" for the purposes of these exams?

A plan is by definition personal to the user, so it could be a spidergram, bubbles, a list, notes, or anything that shows that the candidate has prepared /planned what they are going to write before starting to write their text. This is from the Core Curriculum Wt/L1.1a. (Mother tongue is not acceptable, however, as it is not possible for the marker to assess its relevance to the final text.)

The marks for the plans are only 0, 2 and 4, as it is not possible to grade a plan more finely. It is a QCF requirement that candidates demonstrate that they know *when* to plan, (i.e. that it is not appropriate to plan a text message) and students can plan one or more of the other tasks.

Is planning included in the question word count?

No.

Entry 2 Task 2

Is it necessary for the learners to add a heading to their composition? This would definitely contribute to fulfilment of AC 1.1, as it makes it clear it is an article. However, if there is no title, they wouldn't be penalised specifically for this, particularly if genre, purpose and audience is otherwise addressed satisfactorily.

Entry 3 and Level 1 task 4: the text message

Are students supposed to use 'text language', and will be spelling and grammar be penalised?

This is the most novel part of the exams, and is there as a way of including an informal writing task, but without unduly increasing the word count (as an email would, for example). Also, text messages are the most frequent and therefore authentic form of communication for many people. If you look at the ACs assessed in this at Level 1, you will see they are:

- 2.1 Produce content appropriate to purpose
- 2.2 Use appropriate language for a given task

Spelling is therefore not assessed. A verb-less utterance is authentic ('So sorry about this') but a whole message without verbs may not fulfil the 'produce content appropriate to purpose' criterion. Emoticons are authentic and acceptable, within reason.

READING

Surely the 5 work-related texts in question 3 would be harder for teenagers and housewives?

This is a requirement for SFA funding. It was felt that by having more, shorter texts (rather than one long one), it would be fairer for people who were not yet in the workplace. At lower levels these are still fairly general, but by Level 1 they are becoming more work-focussed. Lexis is still general work lexis, however, not specific to a career or profession. Teachers could look at Personnel / HR documents for generic vocabulary and structures, to start with.

Entry 2 Task 1

Are questions 4-6 supposed to test deducing vocabulary from the context?

These are core curriculum descriptors tested here:

Rw/E2.2a: Recognise a range of familiar words and words with common spelling patterns
Rw/E2.3a: Use context and a range of phonic and graphic knowledge to decode words

This means that at least one of the words will *not* be possible to deduce from context, and it will be at or below Entry 2 level, so an Entry 2 candidate will be able to recognise it.