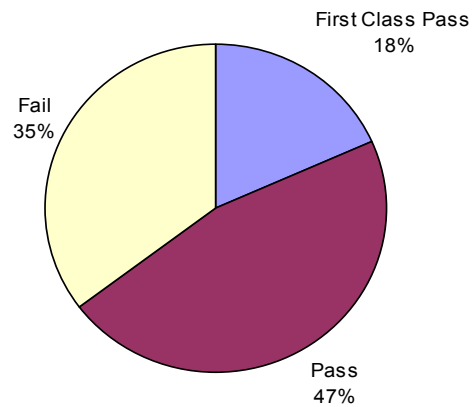


8959 English for Business Communications - Levels 1, 2 and 3

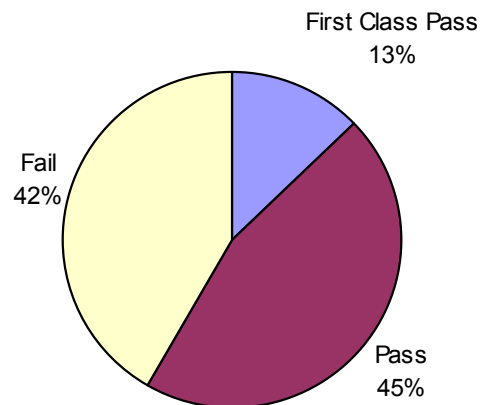
General Observations

The majority of candidates seem to understand the format of the examination and produce at least some relevant answers, especially at Level 1, although the pass rate decreases at Level Two, where more complex correspondence is required and only 44% of candidates have passed at Level 3, where a higher understanding of the requirements of business communication is expected.

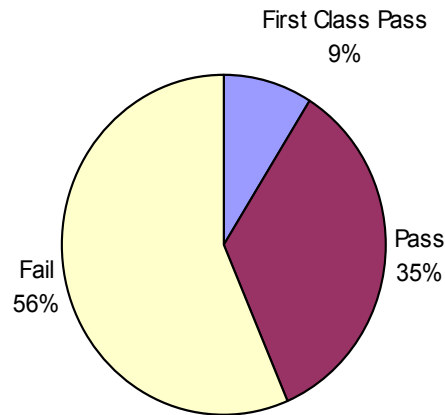
Level 1



Level 2



Level 3



Areas of good performance

At all three levels, the layout of business documents is usually handled with confidence by most candidates, although many omit a reference and/or heading. Checking that the salutations and complementary closes are consistent would also often improve layout even further. At Level 1, the majority of candidates use the standard letter form provided for Task 4 in a competent manner and high marks are often achieved on this task.

Most candidates include the majority of the information requested, although not always in a logical order.

At Level 1, most candidates complete the whole paper. This is not always the case at Levels 2 and 3. Greater attention to word limits and time management could improve the grades of a considerable number of candidates.

Areas for development

Many candidates lose marks simply because they fail to read the prompts carefully enough. These examinations test reading (as well as writing) skills but the vast majority of candidates who fail, do so because they have not followed the instructions they have been given. It is permitted to use a dictionary at all levels and candidates should check any vocabulary they don't know and make sure they are very clear about what is required before they start to write anything. It is also essential that candidates understand their 'role' within the company and bear this in mind throughout the examination. Frequently, for example, memoranda are sent by the wrong person – if a candidate is asked to send a memo in his/her own name, then this is what they should do. This will often make it impossible to simply copy out the information in the prompt without changing it, yet many weak candidates do this, resulting in an incomprehensible piece of correspondence. It should be noted that, at all levels, the information given in the prompts will need to be modified in an appropriate manner (in accordance with the instructions given) and cannot simply be copied out.

Many answers are too long and contain unnecessary and/or irrelevant information, generally because the prompts have not been read carefully enough. There are word limits for some tasks at Levels 2 and 3, which should be adhered to. There is also often a tendency to use archaic language eg 'This letter serves to inform you...' which is not appropriate in modern

business communication. Candidates should try to be as concise as possible when writing business communications.

At Levels 2 and 3, it is expected that some consideration be given to tone, especially in a Press Release, Article or Speech. Candidates must show an awareness of the intended audience and tailor the information they are using appropriately e.g. it would not be sensible to give out long, complicated contact details in a speech, whereas contact details may well be highly desirable in a Press Release, although giving the Managing Director as the first point of contact would not be appropriate. It should be noted that at Level 3, it is sometimes necessary to glean information from previous tasks. Invitations frequently omit a venue, time or date although these are readily available in other parts of the paper. Candidates should also be aware of the conventions for writing formal invitations, agenda and minutes. Candidates are permitted to use calendars in the examination and should ensure that they give correct dates, eg 'next Thursday' is not acceptable as a date.

The weakest task at Levels 2 and 3 is the Report. In both cases, an Informal Report is requested, yet many candidates insist on inserting numerous unnecessary headings (eg Terms of Reference, Procedures etc). At neither level is it acceptable to simply copy out the prompts, yet many candidates persist in doing this. Explicit instructions are given regarding the information to be included and these need to be followed precisely, especially if a word limit is given. Candidates will inevitably need to modify the information they have been given in order to follow the instructions. At Level 3, an Analytical Report is expected, and this may well require a certain amount of calculations before the necessary information can be obtained from the prompts. This is why candidates are allowed the use of a calculator, and they should take full advantage of this. Marks are not awarded for repeating the information given in the prompts. Analytical skills are being tested in this task at Level 3.

Recommendations

Candidates should use the reading time at the beginning to full advantage and ensure they understand the scenario and are fully aware of their 'role' in the company. They should also take time to read each task before starting to write. It is important to understand who is sending each piece of communication, to whom it is being sent, and why, and then to write what is required, bearing in mind any word restrictions and adopting an appropriate tone. These examinations test comprehension, as well as writing, and it is imperative that candidates understand the purpose and intended audience of each piece of communication. Candidates should make a note of all relevant points to be included and put them into a sensible order before attempting a task and not be tempted to include additional, unnecessary information.

When candidates are practising for these examinations it would be helpful to use similar 'Situations'. It may also be beneficial to teach some typical business phrases e.g. 'In response to your letter of.....', etc and discuss when phrases are appropriate and how to decide on the tone of a piece of communication before starting to write. Short, simple, concise sentences are ideal for business correspondence and avoid candidates making unnecessary grammatical errors. It would also be helpful to candidates if, when practising, they were given a maximum number of words to use. This might help them concentrate on being precise and including only necessary, relevant information in a logical order. It would also be helpful to ensure candidates can use calendars, calculators and dictionaries.

Time management is an important element of these examinations and so candidates should ensure they allow sufficient time for each task. Learning to write concisely is also useful in this respect.

Tips

- Take the following into the examination room with you:
 - Calendar
 - Dictionary
 - Calculator
- Read the whole paper very carefully before you start to write anything.
- Make yourself a 'name plate' before starting to write, to remind yourself of your position within the company, the name of the company, what the company does, and who your 'boss' is. Keep this in front of you throughout the examination and keep referring to it.
- Read each question very carefully, and then write your answer as concisely as possible.
- Keep to word limits.
- Write full sentences and check tenses are consistent.
- Try to use phrases you know are up-to-date and appropriate in modern business correspondence and also appropriate to the tone of the task.
- Be courteous but don't pay unnecessary compliments or be too familiar.
- Check spellings.
- Start each task on a new sheet of paper.
- It is not necessary to leave more than two or three lines between the complementary close and the designation – try to keep to one sheet of paper for each task.
- It is not necessary to draw the company's logo, or decorate correspondence in any way.
- Make sure you understand different types of business correspondence (eg orders, quotations, delivery notes, graphs and charts) and cannot only read the information they contain but also, at Level 3, analyse and comment on it. Practise doing this before the exam.
- Do the tasks in order and make sure you allow sufficient time to finish the paper.
- Read over all work at the end of the examination and check that it makes sense.

Additional comments

The candidates who obtain the highest marks are often those who write the least but include all the necessary information in a concise and business like manner.

