

Functional Skills English

Top tips for reading and writing tests



Name _____ Date _____

There are lots of things you can do to improve your score on a Functional Skills English Reading or Writing paper that don't involve learning any new English.

Here are just some examples:

Check how many total marks there are for each question – the more marks that can be achieved, the more complicated the task(s) will be – and you will need to make sure that you are doing what the question asks.

Use the text – if the question says something like 'According to text A/B ...' then make sure that you refer to the text in your response. You can quote directly from the text, or you can paraphrase what is actually written.

Read without prejudice – even if you know something about the subject, or have an opinion, unless the question specifically asks you what you think or what your opinion is, do not expect to get marks for something that is not in the text. Remember it is a test of your reading/writing skills, not your knowledge of the subject.

Give a long enough response – if the question asks for 3 reasons, you will most likely get one mark for each reason you can find in the text, so write down all 3. In the reading test, it is OK to copy from the text in your answer. If the question asks for an explanation or for you to give advice and a reason, there will be one mark for the advice and one mark for the reason/explanation so be sure to give both. Remember, the examiner/marker cannot see anything that you do not write down, so **WRITE IT DOWN**.

Write on the question paper – the question papers are not re-used for other students, so write on them if it helps. Underline things, use highlighters, mark things you think are important as you read. This will help when you come to answering the questions.

Read the text first – read the text to get an idea of what it is about. Then read the questions without trying to answer them, and look at how many marks there are for the answer. Finally read the text and answer the questions.

On the following pages is a worked example, taken from an IQ sample assessment. Here you can see what you need to include to get the full marks for this question.

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Reading

This is the sample reading text (A).

Good customer service is the best means of supporting any business. You can offer promotions and cut prices to bring in new customers, but unless you can get some of those customers to come back your business won't be profitable for long.

Good customer service is all about bringing customers back and then sending them away happy so they will pass good feedback about your business to others, who may then try the product or service you offer for themselves and in their turn become repeat customers.

If you're a good salesperson you can sell anything to anyone once, but it will be your approach to customer service that decides whether or not you'll ever be able to sell that person anything else. The heart of good customer service is forming a good relationship with customers. How do you go about forming such a relationship? By remembering that you will be judged by what you do, not what you say.

So, if you truly want to have good customer service, all you have to do is ensure that your business does the following things:

1) Ensure a real person is answering the phone
Make sure that someone picks up the phone when a customer calls your business.

2) Listen to your customers
Let your customer talk and show them you are listening by making the appropriate responses, such as suggesting how to solve the problem.

3) Don't make promises you can't keep
Reliability is one of the keys to any good relationship, and good customer service is no exception. If you say, "Your delivery will be on Thursday," make sure it can be delivered on Thursday. Otherwise, don't say it! Think before you give any promise, because broken promises are not good for customer relations.

4) Deal effectively with complaints
Give complaints your full attention and try to deal with them as effectively as you can. Position your business as one that is helpful to its customers.

5) Be helpful and make an extra effort
If you can be helpful even when a customer is not one of yours, then do so. That person may tell someone else, which will be free promotion for your business.

6) Train your staff
Train your staff to be helpful, polite, and knowledgeable. Explain to them how you expect queries to be answered.

7) Try to always throw in something extra
This can be as simple as a smile, a thank you, or an appropriate promotional item with an order.

If you apply these simple rules, your business will become known for its good customer services. Good customer service, over time, will keep your existing customers and so help to increase your profits.

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1a) The MAIN purpose of text A is to:

(1 mark)

A	Describe different types of customers	
B	Inform the reader how to work	
C	Explain how to provide good customer service	
D	Divide the work between employees	

There may be more than one purpose in a text, but there will be a MAIN purpose. Think about what the text is trying to do – is it a descriptive text (does it tell you what something looks or feels like?). Is it an informative text that you could call a ‘reference’ text? Does it tell you how to do something, or take you through a set of instructions? This is how you decide what the MAIN purpose is.

From the sample reading text on the previous page, you can see that the text contains a numbered list. Where do you normally find numbered lists? Think of some examples.

In this case, it is either a set of instructions or an explanation. It does tell you **how to work**, but it is not a set of instructions. So the only logical answer is C explain how to provide good customer service.

1f)

Your friend feels that she could improve her service when customers telephone the office. Using text A identify two pieces of good advice you could give to her when she talks to customers on the telephone.

You do not have to write in full sentences. (2 marks)

The questions states, ‘Using Text A’ so you should use something you read in the text, not your knowledge of Customer Service. Look at the text – the possible answers are highlighted. Now you need to re-read the question and choose the MOST appropriate response(s) for the question. Here it says ‘when she talks to customers on the telephone ...’ so your answers should relate to using the telephone.

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Answers

1. Make sure that someone picks up the **phone** when a customer calls your business.
2. Let your customer **talk** and show them you are **listening** by making the appropriate responses.
3. Think before you give any promise, because broken promises are not good for customer relations.

More reading tips

There will also be other questions about how the information is presented.

Think about the use of:

1. Bullet points
2. Numbered lists
3. Bold font
4. Headings and subheadings
5. Paragraphs and sections
6. Italic and other font styles
7. Text boxes and call-outs

All these are ways of directing the reader to the important information in a text.

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Writing

When you are looking at a writing task in the assessment, remember that it is a test of your writing and communication skills, not a knowledge test. All of the information you need to complete the writing task will be in the question or the scenario so read this carefully.

There are marks for planning your work, so make use of the space on the paper version, or use the highlighting and underlining tools on the online version to show how you have planned your writing.

Look at this writing task:

The 'Somton Calling' three-day music festival took place last week. You were a steward at the event and had a wonderful time. Your boss asks you to write an article about your experience for the council newsletter that goes to the Somton residents.

Include in your article:

- Details of your jobs at the festival (collecting tickets, showing people to seats, giving people directions).
- The groups/bands that played at the festival.
- The type of people who attended.

It is suggested that you write an article of between 100 and 150 words

(20 marks)

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Tips

- The first thing you should notice is the word count – here you are asked to write between 100 and 150 words – less than 100 and the examiner will not have enough information to be able to judge your writing ability, too many words and you have included too much information.
- Now look at what you have been asked to write – it could be an email, a letter, a report, an article for a magazine or newsletter. The type of writing you have been asked to produce normally has a set format or layout. If you do not use the expected format, you will lose marks.
- Think about what each type of document should include, for example, letters have opening and closing salutations (Dear... Yours) and these must be correct for the marks.
- Look at the bullet points – your writing must cover these; otherwise, you will not get all of the marks for the question.
- Now think about the words – is the writing formal or informal and how does this affect the language and words you will use?
- As well as the words, you need to think about spelling, punctuation, and grammar – these need to be right. Do you have commas in the right place, are the words in the right order, are there full stops at the end of your sentences, etc.
- Plan what to write and in what order by thinking about paragraphs. How will each paragraph start?
- If there are four bullet points, then your writing should have six paragraphs – an introduction, the four bullet points, and a conclusion. This is the same for all formats, a beginning, a middle, and an end for each piece of writing.
- From your plan, you can expand your writing to complete the task.
- Finally read it through, slowly and carefully, as if it was something written by someone else. Look for any mistakes, or bits that don't make sense, and any silly spelling mistakes. Correct these and the job is done.