



Essential Skills Criteria for Communication

Level 1 and Level 2

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The criteria

Introduction

1. The Essential Skills qualifications in Communication assess two components:
 1. Speaking and Listening;
 2. Reading and Writing.
2. Essential Skills qualifications in Communication are available at Level 1 and Level 2. The criteria for these qualifications specify the requirements in terms of skill standards and coverage and range at each level. At each level of the qualification, these subsume the previous level's skill standards and coverage and range, supporting a progression-based suite of skills qualifications. The coverage and range statements provide an indication of the type of communication content learners are expected to apply in functional contexts; however, relevant content could also be drawn from equivalent NI Core Curriculum standards and NI Cross Curricular Skills.
3. These criteria should be used in conjunction with the Essential Skills Qualifications Criteria publication, which includes the criteria common to all Essential Skills qualifications and the controlled assessment regulations for the qualifications: Speaking and Listening at Level 1 and Level 2.

Speaking and listening

4. Speaking and listening within Essential Skills qualifications are defined as non-written communication, normally conducted face to face.
5. In exceptional circumstances, assessment may take place remotely, provided that the medium through which remote assessment takes place meets the requirements specified in the *General Conditions of Recognition – Reasonable Adjustments*.
6. The term 'speaking and listening' as used by these standards is intended to be interpreted in a broadly inclusive way and is not intended to create any unnecessary barriers to learners with speech or hearing impairment.
7. The needs of individual learners will vary, but as guidance the term should be interpreted as meaning communication, discussion and presentation that:
 1. can include the use of sign language (e.g. British Sign Language (BSL) , Irish Sign Language (ISL), sign-supported Communication) provided this is made accessible to all participants in the discussion. (It is recognised that BSL and ISL are languages in their own right and not a form of Communication. BSL and ISL are, however, permitted as an alternative to Communication for the assessment of speaking, listening and communication where BSL and ISL are the learner's normal way of communicating in the contexts described by the standards). No other languages are permitted as alternatives to Communication;

2. can include access to augmentative speech equipment and such software as constitutes the learner's normal way of working;
3. does not depend solely on the use of written language or require the individual/s with whom the learner is communicating to be able to read (as these skills are covered by the requirements for reading and writing).

Reading

8. 'Reading' within Essential Skills qualifications is defined as the independent decoding and understanding of written language and text in a purposeful context.
9. 'Text' is defined as materials that include the use of words that are written, printed, on screen or presented using Braille.
10. As a reasonable adjustment, learners who are classed as disabled under the terms of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and use assistive technology as their normal way of reading can demonstrate that they are able to independently meet the requirements of the reading standards through the use of screen reader software.
11. A human reader cannot be used to demonstrate the requirements of the standards as this does not meet the requirement for independence. Please refer to the Access Arrangements guidance for Functional Skills Qualifications (Appendix 2) of the JCQ document entitled 'Adjustments for candidates with disabilities and learning difficulties'.

Writing

12. 'Writing' within Essential Skills qualifications is defined as the independent construction of written text to communicate in a purposeful context.
13. 'Text' is defined as materials that include the use of words that are written, printed, on screen or presented using Braille, and that are presented in a way that is accessible for the intended audience.
14. As a reasonable adjustment, learners who are classed as disabled under the terms of the DDA and use assistive technology as their normal way of producing written texts can demonstrate that they are able to independently meet the requirements of the writing standards through the use of a computer and appropriate software.
15. As a last resort, for learners with disabilities who cannot use assistive technology, a human scribe may be used. Centres must seek approval from the Awarding Organisation in advance. Each Awarding Organisation must keep a record for inspection by the qualifications regulator when required.

Skill standards and assessment weightings

Level 1

Skill standard	Coverage and range	Marks/ Assessment weighting
<p>Speaking and listening</p> <p>1. Take full part in formal and informal discussions and exchanges that include unfamiliar subjects.</p>	<p>a) Make relevant and extended contributions to discussions, allowing for and responding to others' input;</p> <p>b) Prepare for and contribute to the formal discussion of ideas and opinions;</p> <p>c) Use an image to support discussion</p> <p>d) Make different kinds of contributions to discussions;</p> <p>e) Present information/points of view clearly and in appropriate language.</p>	<p>PASS/FAIL</p>
<p>Reading and Writing</p> <p>2. Read and understand a range of straightforward texts.</p>	<p>a) Identify the main points and ideas and how they are presented in a variety of texts;</p> <p>b) Read and understand texts in detail;</p> <p>c) Utilise information contained in texts;</p> <p>d) Identify suitable responses to texts;</p> <p>e) In more than one type of text.</p>	<p>50%</p>

Skill standard	Coverage and range	Marks/ Assessment weighting
3. Write a range of texts to communicate information, ideas and opinions, using formats and styles suitable for their purpose and audience.	a) Write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail; b) Present information in a logical sequence; c) Use language, format and structure suitable for purpose and audience; d) Use correct grammar, including correct and consistent use of tense; e) Ensure written work includes generally accurate punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear; f) In more than one type of text.	50%

Level 2

Skill standard	Coverage and range	Marks/ Assessment weighting
Speaking and listening 1. Make a range of contributions to discussions in a range of contexts, including those that are unfamiliar, and make effective presentations.	a) Consider complex information and give a relevant, cogent response in appropriate language; b) Present information and ideas clearly and persuasively to others; c) Use an image to support discussion; d) Adapt contributions to suit audience, purpose and situation; e) Make significant contributions to discussions, taking a range of roles and helping to move discussion forward.	PASS/FAIL

Skill standard	Coverage and range	Marks/ Assessment weighting
<p>Reading and Writing</p> <p>2. Select, read, understand and compare texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information; b) Read and summarise, succinctly, information/ideas from different sources; c) Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed; d) Detect point of view, implicit meaning and/or bias; e) Analyse texts in relation to audience needs and consider suitable responses; f) In two or more texts. 	<p>50%</p>
<p>3. Write a range of texts, including extended written documents, communicating information, ideas and opinions effectively and persuasively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Present information/ideas concisely, logically and persuasively; b) Present information on complex subjects clearly and concisely; c) Use a range of writing styles for different purposes; d) Use a range of sentence structures, including complex sentences, and paragraphs to organise written communication effectively; e) Punctuate written text using commas, apostrophes and inverted commas accurately; f) Ensure written work is fit for purpose and audience, with accurate spelling and grammar that support clear meaning in a range of text types. 	<p>50%</p>

Scheme of assessment

16. Assessment must cover all of the skill standards. Awarding Organisations are responsible for determining the extent to which assessments tasks provide opportunities for learners to apply the indicative coverage and range. This does not apply to Speaking and Listening.
17. Assessments may sample from the coverage and range within the Essential Skills qualifications. Awarding organisations must be able to demonstrate that any sampling of the coverage and range over time does not undermine the qualification as a measure of functionality at the level nor make sampled assessment content predictable. This must be supported by an assessment specification that details the awarding organisations approach to sampling for each assessment over time. Coverage of the complete range should be within a 3 – 4 paper cycle. This does not apply to Speaking and Listening.
18. Specifications for Essential Skills qualifications in Communication must allocate a weighting of 100 per cent to external assessment for the components for reading and writing at levels 1 and 2. Internal assessment is required at both levels for speaking and listening. All internal assessment must comply with the controlled assessment regulations.
19. Assessment must focus on functionality and the effective application of speaking and listening, reading and writing skills in purposeful contexts and scenarios that reflect real-life situations.
20. Learners must pass both the internal and external assessment components of the qualification – reading and writing; speaking and listening – to be awarded the qualification.
21. The duration of the assessment leading to an essential skills qualification in Communication at levels 1 and 2, should be a minimum of two hours and a maximum of three hours.
22. Assessments must include realistic texts that are suitable for the level.
23. Speaking, listening and communication:
 - 23.1 The assessment of speaking, listening and communication must be 100 per cent open response.
 - 23.2 Awarding Organisations must provide clear guidance for centres regarding arrangements for assessment that consistently measure performance of the skill standards at the level specified, in line with the controlled assessment regulations.
 - 23.3 All aspects of coverage and range must be evidenced in each assessment.
24. Reading:
 - 24.1 Fixed response assessment is permissible to support the direct assessment of reading skills and to minimise the writing demands that assessments place upon learners, but must not exceed 50 per cent of the assessment component at levels 1 and 2.
 - 24.1 Skill standards that require active engagement with reading materials and

utilisation of information contained in texts must all be assessed by open-response assessment.

25. Writing:

25.1 The assessment of writing must be 100 per cent open response.

25.2 Assessments must measure the quality of outcomes in relation to particular tasks' purposes and audiences, and recognise the importance of accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar in formal contexts.

25.3 At least 40 per cent of marks for writing must be allocated specifically for spelling, punctuation and grammar at levels 1 and 2.

25.4 Learners are permitted to use a dictionary within assessments.