



FOR OFFICIAL USE

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

National  
Qualifications  
2026

Mark

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

**X827/76/02**

**ESOL  
Reading**

WEDNESDAY, 13 MAY

9:00 AM – 10:10 AM



Fill in these boxes and read what is printed below.

Full name of centre

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Town

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Forename(s)

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Surname

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Number of seat

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Date of birth

Day

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

Month

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

Year

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

Scottish candidate number

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

**Total marks — 35**

Read the **THREE** texts and attempt **ALL** questions.

**You must NOT use a dictionary.**

Write your answers clearly in the spaces provided in this booklet. Additional space for answers is provided at the end of this booklet. If you use this space you must clearly identify the question number you are attempting.

Use **blue** or **black** ink.

Do not remove any exam materials. You must leave this booklet on your desk; if you do not, you could lose all the marks for this paper.



**Qualifications  
Scotland**  
Teisteanasan Alba

## Read the THREE texts and attempt ALL questions

## Text 1

Read the article below and attempt the questions that follow.

- 1 'Great news! I found the cure for my anxiety!!' the author Sarah Gailey once announced on social media. 'All I need is for everyone I know to tell me definitively that they aren't angry at me, once every 15 seconds, for ever.' I know how she feels. For years, I possessed a remarkable superpower: I could turn almost any work opportunity that came my way, no matter how exciting, into an unpleasant emotional drama, simply by agreeing to do it. Once I'd accepted a deadline, there was now another person in the world who might be growing impatient that I hadn't finished yet, or who might end up disappointed in what I produced — and the thought that they might be harbouring any negativity towards me felt hugely oppressive.
- 2 This same overinvestment in other people's emotions meant I was always saying yes to things I should really have declined, because I flinched internally at the thought of the other person feeling crestfallen. And I rarely enjoyed myself fully when attending social gatherings, owing to a deep suspicion that the others present, however happy they appeared, might secretly only be spending time with me reluctantly.
- 3 What I eventually figured out — not that it ever seems to get particularly easy — is that other people's negative emotions are ultimately a problem that belongs to them. And you have to allow other people to have their problems — they're perfectly entitled to feel that way. The people you're worried about who might well be angry with you, disappointed in you or bored by you almost never actually are. They've got their own troubles to worry about. If there's anyone who should be genuinely invested in their problems, it's them.
- 4 According to stereotype, people-pleasers are self-effacing sorts, constantly putting others ahead of themselves — and yet there's something strikingly narcissistic and self-absorbed in the notion that your boss, client or colleague has nothing better to do than pace up and down all day, thinking bad thoughts about you. Or, by the same token, that your presence at a social gathering is so utterly consequential that it has the power to ruin it for anyone else. As the novelist Leila Sales observes, 'It's weird that when I don't respond to someone's e-mail, it's because I'm busy, but when other people don't respond to my e-mails, it's because they hate me.' (I think it's also worth noting that on the mercifully few occasions in adulthood that another adult actually has exploded in rage at me, it had never occurred to me for a moment that they might be angry at all. Clearly, I'd been worrying about the wrong people.)
- 5 But what if someone genuinely is furious, disappointed or otherwise upset with you? Still — at the most fundamental level — not your problem. This isn't to endorse the 'ignore the haters!' mentality one sometimes encounters from self-help gurus, according to which you should disregard other people's emotions as a matter of principle. Nor is it fine to be horrible to others, treating them like dirt before sauntering away, complacently reassuring yourself that you needn't take responsibility for the feelings you just triggered. It's a pointless exercise to make your sense of feeling OK dependent on the knowledge that everyone around you is feeling OK, too.



Text 1 (continued)

- 6 The notion that other people's approval is what ultimately determines the value of our actions starts early in life and runs deep. Many of us make it to middle age still craving the approval of our parents, whether they happen to be alive or not, or of substitute parent figures. The offices of the world are full of people subconsciously treating their managers as mothers, or fathers, or older siblings, while themselves busily replaying whatever role it was — 'the helpful one', 'crisis manager', 'high achiever' — that elicited the greatest approval in earlier life.
- 7 Stop wasting time! Time for us humans is so limited as we seek to enjoy a meaningful life. No external approval is ever going to arrive that would make everything feel perfect. You really are your own boss, and there's no one to accept your letter of resignation. It's all a bit stressful, really. But far better than spending your life in search of a feeling of security that nobody and nothing could ever provide.
- 8 The liberating truth about life as a finite human is that our situation is worse than we think. It feels really difficult to please everyone, to do everything, to create perfect work, or to do a perfect job as parents, partners or citizens. But it's not 'really difficult'; it's completely impossible. And this realisation is a gateway to freedom and empowerment. Very well, then: here you are, on a desert island. The plane has crashed. You're one of the survivors. Make the best of it and get stuck in to living. You're never going to please everyone, or do everything, or accomplish anything perfectly. So what would you like to do with your life instead?

Questions 1–4: Complete each gap with **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text.

1. The writer of this text had a/an \_\_\_\_\_, which was  
the ability to change positive things at work into negative ones. 1
2. Every \_\_\_\_\_ that the writer had to meet  
created the threat of someone else's dissatisfaction. 1
3. It would have been better if the writer had \_\_\_\_\_  
many more invitations. 1
4. The writer faces further anxiety about the feelings of others during  
\_\_\_\_\_. 1

[Turn over



**Text 1 questions (continued)**

**Questions 5–9:** Choose the correct answer for each question and tick (✓) **one** box.

5. The writer says that other people's negative feelings are things that he needs to: 1

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| A analyse in more detail. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B challenge as unfair.    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C think less about.       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D take more seriously.    | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. The writer believes that when it comes to 'people-pleasers': 1

- |                                           |                          |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A the stereotypes are generally true.     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B they genuinely put other people first.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C they demonstrate a kind of selfishness. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D their colleagues think badly of them.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. The novelist Leila Sales: 1

- |                                                 |                          |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A makes fun of her own illogical thinking.      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B rarely replies to other people's e-mails.     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C can't understand why people don't e-mail her. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D has failed to spot when others are angry.     | <input type="checkbox"/> |



**Text 1 questions (continued)**

8. What is the writer's criticism of some 'self-help gurus'?

1

A They worry too much about the feelings of others. ☐

B They can automatically dismiss the feelings of others. ☐

C They deliberately provoke the feelings of others. ☐

D They say we can't depend on the feelings of others. ☐

9. The writer implies that at work, we should:

1

A be more mature. ☐

B act like a parent. ☐

C help others more. ☐

D achieve more. ☐

**Questions 10–11:**

10. What does the writer say we should stop waiting for?

1

---

11. What should we feel when we finally understand our true situation?

1

---

[Turn over



\* X 8 2 7 7 6 0 2 0 5 \*

## Text 2

Read the article below and attempt the questions that follow.

- 1 Each summer, thousands of the best and brightest graduates join the workforce full of hope that their employer will provide ample opportunity to apply their intellectual gifts. But they are often in for an unpleasant surprise: in many cases, although they have been selected for their intelligence, they are not expected to use it. They will be assigned mundane tasks that they will consider stupid. Nevertheless, they stick at it, holding out hope that, after a few years of dull work, something more interesting will appear over the horizon. But this rarely happens. Little by little, these ambitious young minds come to a realisation they had not bargained for: in the eyes of corporate culture, what matters most isn't finding a well-thought-out solution — it's appeasing clients with glitzy PowerPoint presentations and superficial 'box-ticking' exercises. Those who strive to employ what expertise they have in a meaningful way are often politely advised that the office might not be the place for them.
- 2 Hans, who works in a local government agency, shared his experience of a routine inspection which revealed 25 desperately-needed improvements. Hans and his colleagues, relishing the opportunity to make improvements, carefully and painstakingly created 25 new policies and procedures to address the concerns. 'The result? Management signed them off, no questions asked, and the regulator was appeased,' Hans says, 'but in practice, nothing changed. When I questioned it, management played dumb and brushed me off — it was intensely frustrating. I used to think smart people got the chance to climb the corporate ladder, but I've been sadly disappointed.' While this type of mindless compliance is widespread, apparently there is an art to 'acting stupid' at work. We enlisted a group of experts to explain how.
- 3 'It can be a tricky process,' explains Devin Patel, a corporate consultant in organisational behaviour. 'Underdo it, and managers may see you as a threat. But if you overdo it, you'll come across as incompetent and quickly become a liability. Colleagues may suspect that you're playing dumb to shirk responsibility or workload.' Patel elaborates that successful practitioners of corporate stupidity need to ascertain how to present as harmless yet efficient. 'It's not about solving problems; it's about not causing waves,' he adds.
- 4 Business strategist Lina Chen champions a different approach, 'In today's corporate world, originality is overrated,' she says. 'If a leading global corporation introduces a new strategy or initiative, jump on the bandwagon, even if it's irrelevant to your sector. No one ever got fired for copying "best practices," even when those practices are outdated or unsuitable.' Chen emphasizes that the key to survival is imitation, not innovation. 'Get on board with trends and make it look like you're in sync with the front runners. And when things inevitably go pear-shaped, you can always say, "Well, everyone got it wrong," which protects you from individual blame,' she explains.
- 5 According to Ahmed El-Sayed, a senior management consultant, 'looking good on paper — or, more precisely, on PowerPoint — is far more important than having all the answers.' El-Sayed notes that most decision-makers only bother to peruse the executive summary and the polished slides, rarely digging into the deeper content. 'It's all about the show,' he adds. 'If you package mediocrity with enough polish and flair, no one will notice the cracks.'



\* X 8 2 7 7 6 0 2 0 6 \*

Text 2 (continued)

- 6 Compliance expert Thandiwe Ndlovu promotes a traditional, if perhaps outdated, value. ‘No matter how absurd the request, the surest way to stay in favour is by executing your bosses wishes to the letter,’ she advises. Ndlovu adds that this approach not only makes you look loyal but also provides a safety net to shift the blame upward. ‘“I was just following orders” is a classic defence, and in many corporate cultures, it works like a charm,’ she shrugs.
- 7 Finally, management guru Maria Fernandez has some advice for anyone drowning in meaningless corporate tasks. ‘Buzzwords are your lifeline,’ Fernandez explains. ‘A few well-placed terms like “synergy”, “innovation”, or “thought leadership” can give the illusion that you’re contributing something groundbreaking — without actually doing much at all.’ She adds with a smirk, ‘if you can wrap your ideas in complex language, no one will dare question you for fear of appearing to be out of their depth.’
- 8 Clearly, engaging in corporate stupidity can be highly strategic for those who successfully master its nuances, helping them rise through the ranks with minimum effort and accountability.

Questions 12–14: Complete each gap with **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text.

12. Graduates often find they are required to complete \_\_\_\_\_  
as opposed to engaging their brains. 1
13. Over time, an unexpected reality about \_\_\_\_\_  
is discovered by the new recruits. 1
14. Graduates who attempt to put their \_\_\_\_\_  
to use often face unwelcome consequences. 1

[Turn over



\* X 8 2 7 7 6 0 2 0 7 \*

**Text 2 questions (continued)**

**Questions 15–16:** Choose the correct answer for each question and tick (✓) **one** box.

**15.** Which of the following is true of Hans? **1**

- A He didn't understand the need to update the policies. ☐
- B The quality of his work was criticised by the company. ☐
- C His superiors declined to engage with his query. ☐
- D He was promoted after the project concluded. ☐

**16.** According to Devin Patel, successfully accomplishing corporate stupidity: **1**

- A creates issues for management. ☐
- B needs to be a fast process. ☐
- C may involve taking on extra duties. ☐
- D requires a delicate balancing act. ☐

**Questions 17–18:**

**17.** Which word in paragraph 3 means 'to avoid doing something you should do'? **1**

\_\_\_\_\_

**18.** Which phrase in paragraph 4 means 'fail or fall apart'? **1**

\_\_\_\_\_



Text 2 questions (continued)

19. Match each expert (i–iv) with the correct advice (A–E). There is **ONE** option that you do **NOT** need.

(i) Lina Chen

☐

1

(ii) Ahmed El-Sayed

☐

1

(iii) Thandiwe Ndlovu

☐

1

(iv) Maria Fernandez

☐

1

- A A little jargon goes a long way.
- B Follow the crowd.
- C Model yourself on your superiors.
- D Obedience is key.
- E Prioritise style over substance.

Question 20: Choose the correct answer for the question below and tick (✓) **one** box.

20. Which of the following is the best title for this text?

1

- A Empowering Employees: How to Climb the Corporate Ladder
- B Corporate Compliance: How to Survive the Modern Workplace
- C Intelligent Solutions: How to Problem Solve and Drive Change
- D Navigating Success: How to Make Meaningful Contributions

☐
☐
☐
☐

[Turn over



## Text 3

Read the text below and attempt the questions that follow.

- 1 Not long ago, I drove to Aberdeen for the bi-monthly guest lecture I've been delivering to the university undergraduate students. I left my car in the university car park, as was customary, and rushed off to give my talk. Normally, I would snap a picture of where I'd left it, but I was pressed for time and didn't bother. After the event, I returned to the car park, but I couldn't find my car. I paced the ramps, frustrated, thinking I had parked on the fourth floor. Just as I was about to call the police to report a potential car theft, I finally located it on level 4B.
- 2 Initially, I was troubled by having no recollection of where I'd parked my car and thought I'd have to see a specialist about it. I envisaged worst-case scenarios where I was a burden to my relatives who would have to help with even the simplest of daily tasks. But, as a scientist, I knew I had the capacity to dig deeper and uncover whether or not I was starting to have a serious memory problem. After a little bit of research, I came to the conclusion that I wasn't — I simply hadn't concentrated on where I'd parked in the first place. The thing is that to remember something, you first have to notice it. And noticing requires two things: perception and attention.
- 3 Imagine standing in front of the Christmas tree at Harrods. You take in the sight of the lights and the tree's shape through your eyes. This visual information is sent to your brain and processed. But if you don't focus on the scene, those neurons won't link, and no lasting memory will be formed. Without attention, it's as if the moment never happened. It's because your memory doesn't work like a video camera, constantly documenting everything you experience. Instead, it's selective. You can only retain what you actively pay attention to, and since you can't concentrate on everything, you end up remembering only parts of what's around you.
- 4 It doesn't help that, in the modern world, we're bombarded by sensory information every day. If you're awake for 16 hours, your senses absorb data for over 57,000 seconds. On average, a person is exposed to approximately 6,000 to 10,000 pictures daily, which is ten times more than what our grandparents saw and ninety times more than what an average person saw just over a century ago! And this doesn't include other senses, like touch or smell. No wonder our brains can't capture it all!
- 5 Concentrating on routine tasks, like where you left your keys or remembering someone's name, is especially challenging. Not because they're particularly complex, but because they're not stimulating enough for the brain and can often slip away unnoticed. Our brains favour novelty and tend to focus on what's interesting, emotional, or surprising, because in such instances multiple brain regions are activated and new neuropathways are created. Performing routine activities, on the other hand, defaults our minds to autopilot, which allows us to daydream, reminisce about the past or plan ahead, rather than focus on task at hand. Forming a memory in this inattentive state is impossible. To truly remember something, you need to engage with it consciously. The good news is that there are techniques which will help you do so.



Text 3 (continued)

- 6 In recent years, memory-boosting apps have gained popularity. However, research suggests that while they can improve performance on the tasks within the app, they don't translate to real-world memory improvement. What can help is ensuring that you get a good rest, as sleep deprivation can impair cognitive functions and reduce your ability to concentrate. Practising mindfulness techniques, such as deep-breathing exercises, can also help train your brain to stay present and attentive. Even caffeine has been proven to provide a temporary boost to your alertness and focus, as long as it is consumed in moderation and not too close to bedtime.
- 7 It is also important to be intentional about where we direct our attention because we remember what we focus on. Our brains have evolved to have a negativity bias and are far more likely to recall negative experiences, which has been crucial for the human race, helping us avoid potential threats. But science has proved that people who go against the grain and focus on joyous experiences have a much more optimistic outlook on life. On the other hand, distractions can also severely hamper your ability to remember things. Many people brag about how much they can multitask, but dividing your attention between tasks prevents you from truly focusing on any of them. If you want to remember something clearly, focus on it fully.
- 8 So, the next time you can't find your car, before panicking or blaming your memory, ask yourself: did I actually pay attention to where I parked in the first place?

Questions 21–22: Choose the correct answer for each question and tick (✓) one box.

21. What was unusual about the writer's visit to Aberdeen?

1

- A She had never driven there before.
- B She parked her car in a different place.
- C She did not take a photo of where she had left her car.
- D She had to call the police because her car had been stolen.

☐  
☐  
☐  
☐

[Turn over



Text 3 questions (continued)

22. The experience in the car park taught the writer that she:

1

A needs to see her doctor about her poor memory.

☐

B would have to rely on help from her family.

☐

C knew more about memory than she had thought.

☐

D should have focused on where she had parked.

☐

Questions 23–25: Complete each gap with **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** from the text.

23. In order to create a/an \_\_\_\_\_, you need to fully concentrate on what you are looking at.

1

24. Unlike a recording device, your mind works in a/an \_\_\_\_\_ way.

1

25. Nowadays, our everyday environment overwhelms us with \_\_\_\_\_.

1

Question 26–27: Choose the correct answer for each question and tick (✓) one box.

26. We fail to remember everyday details because they:

1

A collectively involve too much cognitive load.

☐

B cause too much activity in the brain.

☐

C are less attractive to our brain than new experiences.

☐

D simultaneously involve different parts of the brain.

☐


**Text 3 questions (continued)**

27. Which of the following is NOT a way to truly boost memory?

1

A Memory games/puzzles.

☐

B Getting enough sleep.

☐

C Meditation.

☐

D Drinking stimulants.

☐

**Questions 28–29:** Complete each gap with **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS** from the text.

28. We are able to \_\_\_\_\_ because  
our brains have been programmed to remember unpleasant events.

1

29. The ability to \_\_\_\_\_ is not the  
great achievement that people think it is.

1

**Questions 30–31:**

30. Which phrase in paragraph 5 means ‘to vanish without being seen’?

1

\_\_\_\_\_

31. Which phrase in paragraph 7 means ‘to do something unusual’?

1

\_\_\_\_\_

[Turn over



\* X 8 2 7 7 6 0 2 1 3 \*

**Text 3 questions (continued)**

**Question 32:** Choose the correct answer for the question below and tick (✓) **one** box.

**32.** What is the purpose of this text?

**1**

- A To discuss how the brain processes visual images in different environments. ☐
- B To explain how paying attention is crucial for improving memory and recalling everyday details. ☐
- C To encourage the use of modern tools to improve cognitive function. ☐
- D To highlight the emotional and psychological effects of forgetting routine information. ☐

**[END OF QUESTION PAPER]**



### ADDITIONAL SPACE FOR ANSWERS

[illegible]

[illegible]

## L

Qualifications Scotland has made every effort to trace the owners of copyright of this item and seek permissions. We are happy to discuss permission requirements and incorporate any missing acknowledgement. Please contact [question.papers@qualifications.gov.scot](mailto:question.papers@qualifications.gov.scot).

