



National
Qualifications
2026

2026 ESOL

Writing

Higher

Question Paper Finalised Marking Instructions

These marking instructions have been prepared by examination teams for use by Qualifications Scotland appointed markers when marking external course assessments.

The information in this document may be reproduced in support of Qualifications Scotland qualifications only on a non-commercial basis. If it is reproduced, Qualifications Scotland must be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be reproduced for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from Qualifications Scotland.

General marking principles for Higher ESOL Writing

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

- (a) Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.
- (b) Assessment should be holistic. There may be strengths and weaknesses in the performance; focus as far as possible on the strengths, taking account of weaknesses only where they significantly detract from the overall performance.
- (c) Do not award marks where the candidate has used in their writing chunks of text lifted en bloc from the reading passages.
- (d) Award marks where the candidate demonstrates ability according to the main criteria of content and organisation; vocabulary and spelling; and grammar and punctuation.
- (e) Award the highest level descriptor for writing even if there are a number of basic slips and errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation, etc. These should not detract from your overall impression of the candidate's performance.
- (f) Candidates may display ability across more than one band descriptor. You must consider carefully the most appropriate overall band for the candidate's performance.
- (g) Once the appropriate band descriptor has been selected, follow this guidance
 - if the evidence almost matches the level above, award the highest available mark from the range
 - if the candidate's work just meets the standard described, award the lowest mark from the range
 - otherwise award the mark from the middle of the range
- (h) The script must be legible. Do not make mark judgements based on the quality of the handwriting. If answers are written in capitals, use legibility as a criterion.

	Description of performance and mark							
	Everyday life	Work or Study	Everyday life	Work or Study	Everyday life	Work or Study	Everyday life	Work or Study
	15-13		12-11		10-9		8	
Content and organisation	Fully achieves task, using language flexibly and effectively with well-developed support for each point made. Writing is coherent and cohesive with a very positive impact on the reader. Style and layout are wholly effective in addressing the intended reader. Structure/ paragraphing is consistent and coherent.		Fully achieves task, using language effectively with clear support for each point made. Writing is coherent and cohesive with a positive impact on the reader. Style and layout are wholly appropriate for the intended reader. Structure/ paragraphing is consistent and appropriate.		Fully achieves task with clear support for points made. Writing is coherent and cohesive and conveys message with ease. Style and layout are appropriate for the intended reader. The structure is clear and paragraphing follows conventions.		Achieves task with clear support for most points made. Writing is coherent and cohesive and message is clear. Style and layout are appropriate for the intended reader. The structure is clear and the paragraphing mainly follows conventions.	
Vocabulary and spelling	Uses an optimum range of vocabulary accurately and effectively within the context of the task. Spelling is mainly accurate with very occasional errors.		Uses a wide range of vocabulary accurately and effectively within the context of the task. Spelling is mainly accurate with occasional errors.		Uses a wide range of vocabulary accurately and appropriately within the context of the task. Spelling is mostly accurate and errors are not persistent.		Uses a sufficiently wide range of vocabulary with a level of accuracy appropriate to the task. Spelling is mostly accurate and any errors do not interfere with intelligibility.	
Grammar and punctuation	Uses an optimum range of grammatical structures effectively, with a high level of accuracy. Punctuation is consistently accurate.		Uses a wide range of grammatical structures effectively with a high level of accuracy. Punctuation is consistent and appropriate.		Uses a wide range of grammatical structures with a reasonable level of accuracy. Punctuation is mostly accurate.		Uses a sufficiently wide range of grammatical structures, and the message is conveyed with ease despite some errors. Punctuation is sufficiently accurate and appropriate to task purpose.	

	Description of performance and mark							
	Everyday life	Work or Study	Everyday life	Work or Study	Everyday life	Work or Study	Everyday life	Work or Study
	7-6		5-3		2-1		0	
Content and organisation	Task may be achieved. Coherence is weak in places and range of cohesive devices is limited and/or used inappropriately. Message may be difficult to follow. Style and layout may be inappropriate for intended reader. There is no evidence of paragraphing and structure may be confused.		Writing is mainly irrelevant to task. Lack of coherence and cohesion means message is not conveyed on first reading. Style and layout may be inappropriate for intended reader. Structure is confused.		Writing does not relate to task. There is little or no coherence or cohesion. Style and layout are inappropriate for intended reader. Structure is confused.		No evidence produced by candidate that matches descriptions of performance.	
Vocabulary and spelling	Uses a limited range of vocabulary with errors in accuracy and appropriateness. Persistent spelling errors may interfere with intelligibility.		Only basic vocabulary attempted, with frequent errors. Persistent spelling errors impede intelligibility.		Only very basic vocabulary attempted, with very frequent errors. Frequent and persistent spelling errors impede intelligibility.		No evidence produced by candidate that matches descriptions of performance.	
Grammar and punctuation	Uses only a limited range of grammatical structures, which may contain frequent errors and interfere with communication. Punctuation may be inaccurate.		Grammatical structures contain frequent errors, which impede communication. Punctuation may be inaccurate.		Errors predominate. Punctuation is inaccurate.		No evidence produced by candidate that matches descriptions of performance.	

[END OF MARKING INSTRUCTIONS]