

Everyday English 1



About this free course

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Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

This free badged course, *Everyday English 1*, is an introduction to Level 1 Functional Skills English and Level 1 Essential Skills Wales Communication. It is designed to inspire you to improve your current English skills and help you to remember any areas that you may have forgotten. Working through the activities and learning the tips and techniques outlined in this course will help you to communicate more effectively in everyday life and make progress in your career.

You can work through the course at your own pace. You may find it helpful to have at hand a notepad and pen, although you can make and save notes online within the course material.

The course has three sessions, with a total study time of approximately 48 hours. The sessions cover the following topics: speaking and listening, reading and writing. There are plenty of examples to help you as you progress, together with opportunities to practise your understanding.

The regular interactive quizzes form part of this practice and the end-of-course quiz is an opportunity to earn a badge that demonstrates your new skills. You can read more on how to study the course and about badges in the next sections.

After completing this course you should be able to:

- understand how to make a range of relevant and extended contributions to formal and informal discussions
- read and understand the main points and ideas in a range of straightforward texts
- utilise information contained in various texts and identify suitable responses
- construct a range of texts to communicate information, ideas and opinions
- utilise accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar to communicate clearly in writing.

Moving around the course

The easiest way to navigate around the course is through the 'My course progress' page. You can get back there at any time by clicking on 'Back to course' in the menu bar.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page (including links to the quizzes), to open it in a new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

What is a badged course?

While studying *Everyday English 1* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are a key part of The Open University's mission *to promote the educational well-being of the community*. The courses also provide another way of helping you to progress from informal to formal learning.

To complete a course you need to be able to find about 48 hours of study time. It is possible to study at any time and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are all available on The Open University's [OpenLearn](#) website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor. But you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes.

What is a badge?

Digital badges are a way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill. Schools, colleges and universities are working with employers and other organisations to develop open badges that help learners gain recognition for their skills, and support employers to identify the right candidate for a job.

Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on the course. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that underpin successful study. So, completing this course should encourage you to think about taking other courses, for example enrolling at a college for a formal qualification. (You will be given details on this at the end of the course.)



How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read all of the pages of the course
- score 70% or more in the end-of-course quiz.

For all the quizzes, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that for the end-of-course quiz, it is possible to get all the questions right but not score 70% and so not be eligible for the OpenLearn badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

If you're not successful in getting 70% in the end-of-course quiz the first time, after 24 hours you can attempt it again and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

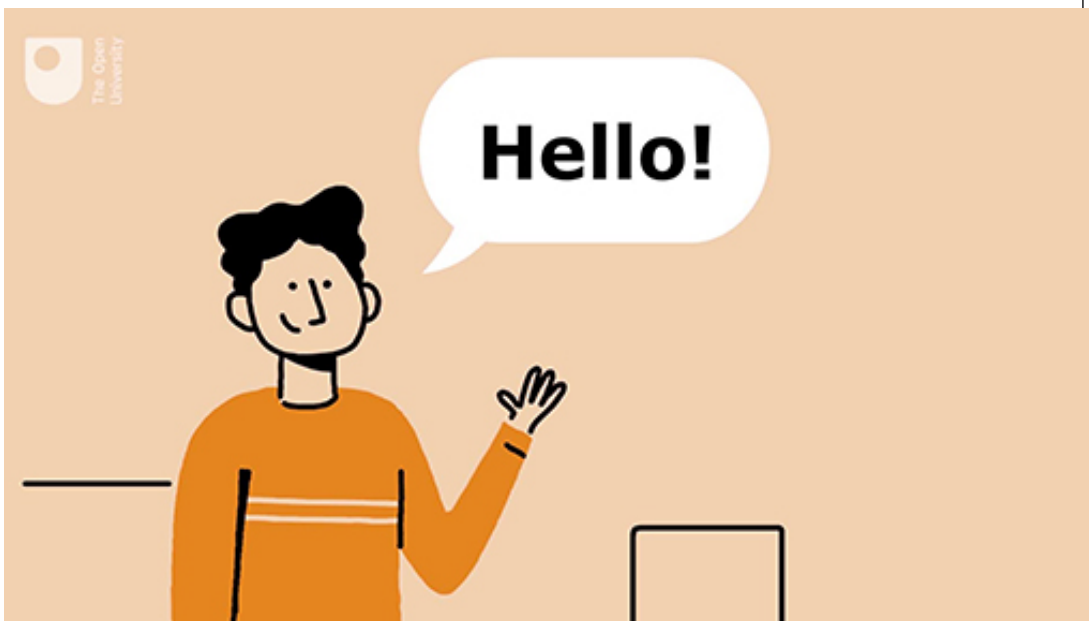
If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the [OpenLearn FAQs](#). When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in [My OpenLearn](#) within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

Now get started with Session 1.

Speaking and listening

Introduction

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For most people, speaking and listening is the part of English they do the most. From short 'hellos' or commands to our dogs, to detailed discussions to plan for tomorrow's work, to telling a story, we all speak and listen throughout the day, every day.

People typically speak thousands of words a day and hear even more, especially if you count television and radio.

Employers regularly say that being able to speak clearly and confidently and to listen carefully is the most important English skill they look for in their employees. Good speaking and listening skills are vital in almost every workplace to communicate effectively with customers, colleagues and managers.

This session is the longest in the course but is broken up into clear and easily manageable sections to help you in your studies.

If you are doing this course to prepare you for either the **Functional Skills English Level 1** qualification or the **Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1** qualification, remember that speaking and listening is an important part of both programmes.

- For the **Functional Skills English Level 1** qualification, the speaking and listening assessment consists of two assessed discussions. You must pass them both to gain the Level 1 qualification.
- For the **Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1** qualification, there are two parts: a controlled task and a confirmatory test. The controlled task includes a speaking and listening assessment in the form of a small group discussion, as well as a reading and a writing assessment.

1 Speaking and listening in everyday life



Figure 1 Everyday speaking and listening

You start this session by thinking about the speaking and listening you do in your everyday life. How can you speak so that people understand you? Why is this course about listening as well as speaking? And just how important is body language?

1.1 Speaking

Whether you consider yourself to be quiet and shy or bubbly and chatty, you have to do some speaking from day to day. It is a basic part of your life.

Activity 1 The people you talk to

Allow about 10 minutes

Take a few minutes to think about a typical day – yesterday, for example – and make a list of the people you talked to.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have thought of some of these:

Children
Partner

Pets
Boss
Colleagues
Mum
Dad
Shop assistant
Teacher.

Now think about what you said to the people you have named.

Go back to your list and note down what you talked to each person about and how long you spoke to them.

Discussion

Did you find this difficult? If so, it's not surprising – speaking is so embedded into your daily life and you do it so much that it can be hard to remember the detail of what you actually say.

When you speak it is usually important that you are understood. You usually do many things to make sure this happens. Most of these things you do without really thinking about them, but if you can identify how you make yourself clear and understood, you can get better at them and reduce the likelihood of being misunderstood.

Activity 2 Misunderstandings

Allow about 5 minutes

Try to think of a time when someone did not understand what you said. Why was that? Were you clear? What did you do about it?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

If you're a teacher and your students don't understand what you're saying, you might repeat it or reword it – or say it more loudly!

Generally, there are a number of things you might do when you are not understood. You might speak more loudly or more slowly; you might try repeating or rewording what you said; you might ask your listener if they understood you. Sometimes you might even try writing it down.

Activity 3 Speaking clearly

Allow about 5 minutes

Take a few minutes to think of things that might affect how clearly you speak. Note them down in the box.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have thought of some of these:

- Distance
- Having something in or over your mouth
- Being too loud or too quiet
- Other noises around you
- Being distracted.

Sometimes it doesn't matter if you are understood completely, but at other times, such as in an emergency, it is vital.

To be understood completely, what you say has to be heard. But how do you ensure that?

1.2 Articulation, volume and speed

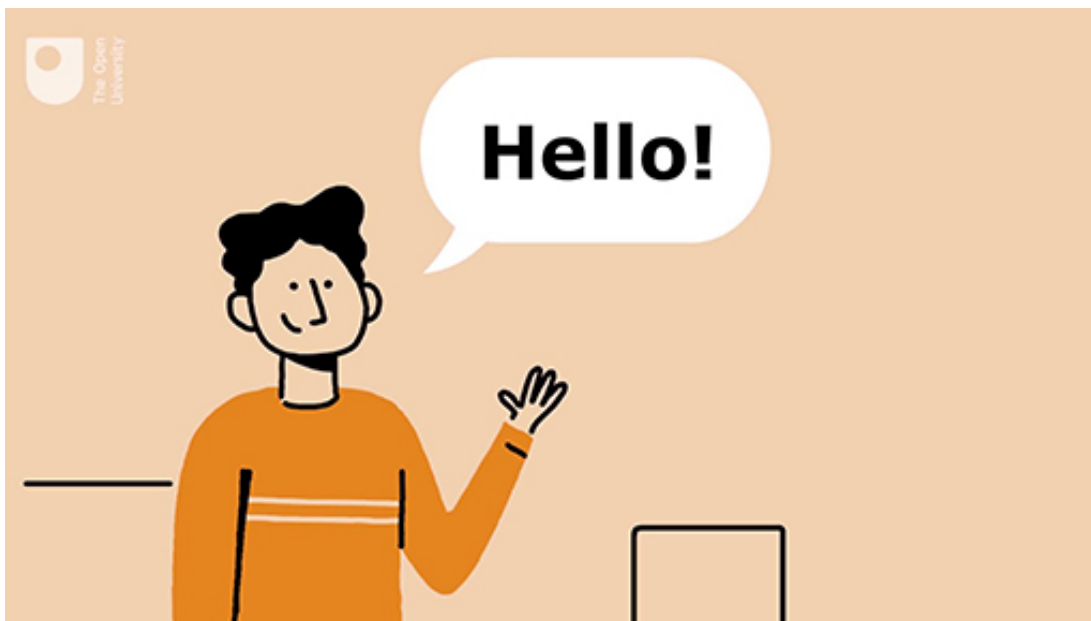


Figure 2 Making sure you are heard

To make sure you are heard, you have to consider how **clearly** you speak, whether you are using the right **volume** and the **speed** at which you talk.

Articulation

Sometimes it's difficult to understand what people are saying because they don't say the words clearly or they run the words into each other. It may sound as if they're talking too fast, but it's just that they're not taking the trouble to speak clearly. Saying each word clearly is called **articulation**. Some people can speak very fast but still manage to say every word clearly: newsreaders, for example.

Activity 4 The importance of articulation

Allow about 5 minutes

Note some occasions when it is important to articulate clearly.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You might have thought of some of the following:

- Speaking on the phone or leaving a voicemail message
- Speaking to someone from another country
- Speaking to your boss
- Speaking to an official
- Giving an announcement
- Speaking in a meeting.

Activity 5 Say what?

Allow about 10 minutes

Listen to the two short audios below. What is the difference between the two?

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You probably found the first audio difficult to understand as it sounds muffled and unclear. The speaker's articulation is not good.

The second version is much easier to understand. The words are clear. The speaker's articulation is good.

Volume

Speaking at the right volume is also very important if you want to get your message across. Whispering to a large group in a big hall would be as unsuitable as shouting at someone who is right next to you.

Activity 6 Speaking at the right volume

Allow about 5 minutes

Note down occasions when it may be necessary to speak fairly loudly and occasions when you can speak quietly.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Compare your answers to these:

Times when you have to speak loudly

- When asking a question after someone has given a presentation.
- When giving instructions to a group of children.
- When speaking to someone with machinery noise in the background.
- When speaking to someone and there's loud music playing.

Times when you have to speak quietly

- When sitting close to someone.
- When you don't want other people to overhear.
- When you are in a place where everyone is quiet, like a doctor's waiting room.
- When someone else is asleep.

You need to be able to raise your voice when speaking in a large room or when a number of people are listening. You may be the sort of person who feels very nervous about speaking to a group of people. Perhaps you've never had to do this. There may well be a day when you do have to, though, and there are some practical things you can do to help yourself sound confident. One is speaking loudly enough!

Speed

Do you ever wish people would slow down so that you can work out what they're saying? Some TV presenters seem to speak very quickly. Can you pick out everything they say? On the other hand, some people speak so slowly you wish you could wind them up! It helps to think about how quickly you speak. When you're nervous you may tend to speak too fast. You need to take a few slow breaths and remember to breathe while speaking. Have you ever run out of breath mid-sentence?

Varying the speed can make what you're saying sound more interesting. Slowing down can make something sound more serious. Speeding up can make something sound more exciting. You can also add pauses for effect.

Activity 7 Fast talking

Allow about 10 minutes

Listen to the two short audios below. What is the difference between the two?

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

In the first, it's hard to understand what the person is saying as he talks too fast. He does not pause at all between sentences so they run into each other, making it difficult to understand.

The second audio is easier to understand as the person speaks more slowly and uses short pauses between sentences.

Activity 8 Practising speaking

Allow about 5 minutes

Have a go at recording yourself speaking in different ways. Most people don't like the sound of their own voice, but it can help to hear what you sound like when you talk at different speeds and volume. You could try answering the question, 'Why are you doing this course?' in various ways – slowly, quickly, loudly, quietly, clearly and not clearly. Just have a play!

You can try doing this on your phone or you can use the built-in voice recorder below, although this does not work on mobiles or in Safari on Macs or some other browsers. Recordings saved in the voice recorder are completely private.

Voice Recorder is not available in this format.

1.3 Listening

Listening is as important as speaking. Remember – you probably hear more words than you speak. You do not remember every word, phrase or discussion, so how do you know what to use or remember, or what is important?

You probably listen attentively to the things that matter to you and 'filter out' the things that don't matter so much. When you're listening to things for entertainment, it may be just a bit annoying if you miss something, but in other situations it can be very important to hear all the right information.

Activity 9 What affects your listening?

Allow about 10 minutes

Select True or False for each of these statements.

1. Your thoughts can interfere with your listening.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
2. You may resist listening to others who criticise, blame or get angry with you.
 - ☐ True

- ☐ False
- 3. You are more likely to listen to people with whom you feel comfortable.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
- 4. If you have something you can't wait to say you are likely to listen well.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
- 5. Some people use listening as an excuse for not revealing anything about themselves.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
- 6. If you are feeling emotional about an issue you are likely to listen more attentively to other people.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
- 7. Angry people are rarely good listeners.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
- 8. Talking is more important than listening.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
- 9. You are less likely to listen when someone agrees with your views than when someone challenges your views.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
- 10. Fatigue never affects the quality of your listening.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False

It may be useful to keep these points in mind during any kind of discussion. They are listed in the box below.

10 useful things about listening to keep in mind

1. Your thoughts can interfere with your listening.
2. You may resist listening to others who criticise, blame or get angry with you.
3. You are more likely to listen to people with whom you feel comfortable.
4. If you have something you can't wait to say you are not likely to listen well.
5. Some people use listening as an excuse for not revealing anything about themselves.
6. If you are feeling emotional about an issue you are likely to listen less attentively to other people.
7. Angry people are rarely good listeners.
8. Listening is as important as talking.

9. You are more likely to listen when someone agrees with your views than when someone challenges your views.
10. Fatigue can affect the quality of your listening.

When should you listen carefully?

As you have seen, lots of things can affect your listening. Often the main factor is whether or not you are interested in what is being said. It really is worth considering what you should listen to and when it is particularly important to listen carefully. Although there are times when things are interesting *and* important, this is not always the case. Being able to pick out what is important can save you time, money and sometimes your life.

Activity 10 When to listen carefully

Allow about 5 minutes

Can you think of occasions when listening carefully is important? Take a few minutes to write down some ideas.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You might have thought of some of these:

- When someone is sharing personal things
- When being given instructions at work
- When planning something with other people
- During legal proceedings
- When discussing financial details
- When being told evacuation procedures
- When being given health and safety instructions.

Responding appropriately

You may be very good at listening to other people and sometimes it is not necessary to say very much at all in response. For instance, if a distressed person is telling you their troubles, they probably just want you to listen in a way that shows them you care.

At other times you need to say quite a bit in response and say something relevant. An instance of this would be when planning an event like a birthday celebration or something at work. Other people need you to join in with what's being said.

In a formal setting, like an appraisal at work, you need to speak positively and be careful how you respond, especially if you feel that you're being criticised.

Some situations are more serious. When asked to give evidence in court or asked questions about an incident, you need to be careful not only to word things very carefully,

but also to consider how much information to give. It is not a time for making jokes or trying to make things seem unimportant.

Active listening is an easy way of showing someone that you are listening and of encouraging them to continue. Active listening includes things like:

- nodding
- short verbal prompts (such as 'hmm' or 'yep')
- eye contact
- asking questions
- a positive body position (such as leaning forward).

1.4 Body language

Your body language is very important for both listening and speaking. It gives a lot of information to others about how you are feeling, if you are concentrating and if you are interested, among other things. Non-verbal communication can make up a high proportion of what you communicate. Clearly body language is something you should be very aware of when you are speaking to other people. You will look at this in more detail later.

Activity 11 Read the body language

Allow about 5 minutes

What does the body language, expressions or gestures in each of these pictures tell you?

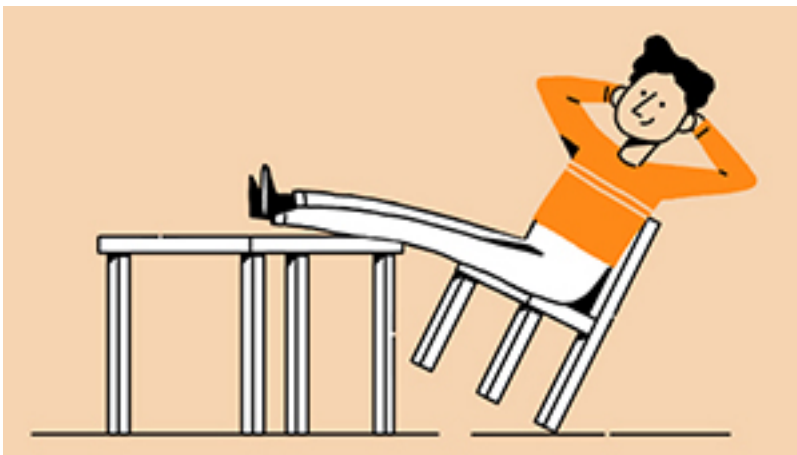


Figure 3 Body language (a)

Provide your answer...



Figure 4 Body language (b)

Provide your answer...



Figure 5 Body language (c)

Provide your answer...



Figure 6 Body language (d)

Provide your answer...



Figure 7 Body language (e)

Provide your answer...



Figure 8 Body language (f)

Provide your answer...



Figure 9 Body language (g)

Provide your answer...



Figure 10 Body language (h)

Provide your answer...



Figure 11 Body language (i)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

See if you agree with the ideas below on the messages that each person's body language sends.

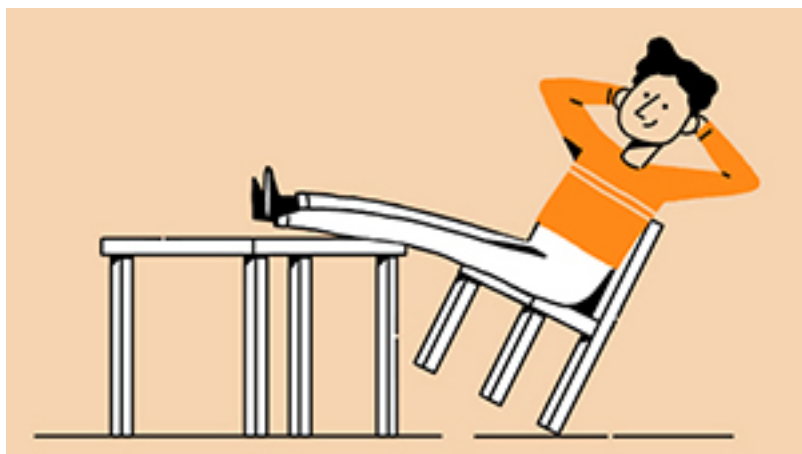


Figure 12 Body language (a)

This person looks very relaxed and at ease, with their feet on the table and their hands behind their head.



Figure 13 Body language (b)

She seems to be concentrating hard and is focused on what she is doing.



Figure 14 Body language (c)

He is leaning forward and looks interested and engaged.



Figure 15 Body language (d)

She looks angry and frustrated.



Figure 16 Body language (e)

He looks shocked and dismayed by something that's just happened - possibly because the other side have just scored!



Figure 17 Body language (f)

She looks rather fed up and annoyed.



Figure 18 Body language (g)

He looks nervous and anxious.



Figure 19 Body language (h)

She looks tired and rather worried.



Figure 20 Body language (i)

He looks full of energy and happy.

1.5 Discussions

You will consider discussions in more depth in Section 4, but it is worth thinking about them in the light of what you have looked at regarding everyday speaking and listening. Discussions combine both speaking and listening.

If you are preparing for either a **Functional Skills English Level 1** or an **Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1** qualification, you will practise and be assessed on your ability to take part in discussions. This means being able to speak and listen, ask questions, give opinions, state facts and express feelings, among other things. This is slightly different to everyday discussions, which are usually less structured and more unpredictable. To communicate successfully you need to be able to take part in both short and long discussions, which can be formal or informal.

Activity 12 Everyday discussions

Allow about 5 minutes

Think about the types of discussion you have every day. Who do you have them with? How long do they last for? What are they about?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Your everyday discussions might include something like the following:

Colleagues – what you are working on today (10 minutes)

Parents – how they are and what they have been doing (20 minutes)

Friends – what you are doing at the weekend and with who (20 minutes).

Children – what they did at school (a few minutes)

Your answers are likely to be very personal and depend on your own preferences when speaking and listening.

The next activity is a quick recap of what you've covered so far. It will help you to remember what you've learnt.

Activity 13 Check what you've learnt: speaking and listening in everyday life

Allow about 10 minutes

1. What three things should you consider when speaking to ensure you are understood?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You should think about your:

articulation (clarity)

speed/pace

volume.

2. Give an example of a situation when it would be vital that you are understood.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some examples.

Speaking on the phone

Speaking to someone in authority

Speaking to someone for whom English is not their first language

Speaking in a meeting.

3. Give an example of a situation in which you would need to speak loudly.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some examples of when you would need to speak loudly.

Speaking to a group

Speaking to someone who is far away

Speaking in a large room
Speaking when there's background noise.

4. What things can affect how well you listen?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some things that can affect how well you listen.

Your emotions
Knowing the speaker
Agreeing with the speaker
Wanting to say something
Your concentration
Tiredness
Your reason for listening, for example as part of a general chat or to gain specific information.

5. Give an example of a time when you would need to listen very carefully.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some examples of when you would need to listen very carefully.

Being given directions
Being given work instructions
During legal proceedings
Discussing financial information
Planning something with others.

6. Give an example of an active listening technique.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some examples of active listening techniques.

Nodding
Verbal prompts
Eye contact
Positive body position
Asking questions.

7. What does eye contact with someone you are talking to show?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It shows that you are involved, engaged, listening, interested.

2 Formal and informal language



Figure 21 A formal and informal situation

The term 'formal language' can sound intimidating. When told you have to take part in an assessment of your formal discussion skills, your immediate response might be to avoid it. However, a formal discussion does not mean you have to be involved in a discussion where you have to speak as though you are in a courtroom or the Houses of Parliament. You just need to be able to take part in a sensible, thoughtful, serious discussion. It is the type of discussion you might have in the workplace rather than in the pub. In this section, you look at what makes a conversation formal or informal.

2.1 Register

The formality of language is called **register**. You use different registers depending on who you are speaking to. For example, you speak to your boss differently to the way you speak to your friends. You speak to your children differently to the way you speak to your grandparents.

You adapt your register to suit the situation you are in and do so without really thinking too hard about it. The activities below will help you to do this more deliberately and consciously.

Activity 14 Formal or informal?

Allow about 5 minutes

Take a few minutes to think about the people you speak to every day. Do you think you speak to them formally or informally?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

For example:

Formal: colleagues, boss, teacher, grandparents.

Informal: pets, partner, siblings, friends.

Do you agree with these suggestions?

It is useful to think about the difference between spoken and written English. Due to the changes in the way people communicate in everyday life, the world is generally becoming more informal.

Spoken language is generally more flexible and informal than written language. However, texts, tweets and other posts often do not follow the old rules and therefore written language is becoming less formal. For example, it is getting more and more common to hear people say 'OMG' or 'LOL' rather than the actual words.

Formal spoken language is different from formal written language. In most situations that require formal speaking, if you spoke in exactly the same way as a formal letter is written, it would appear strange. In most cases it would sound too formal.

There are still times when you need to speak more formally than you do with friends or family. A typical example is when you talk to someone you do not know – you would not be informal and risk being rude. Phone conversations in a workplace are often more formal than face-to-face conversations. When you answer the phone you do not know who you will be speaking to so you start by being formal and polite.

2.2 Tone

In relation to language, tone is the mood or feel of something that is said or written. The formality of language affects the tone. As noted earlier, you usually speak formally and politely when answering the phone, when at work or when talking to someone you don't know. But being overly formal can become rude in certain situations. Speaking too formally to a friend in the pub would be out of place and might be considered rude.

It's usually quite easy to tell the difference between formal and informal language. Formal language often uses longer words, like 'depart' instead of 'go' and 'commence' instead of 'begin', and sometimes a less friendly tone – 'We regret we cannot assist you', not 'I'm sorry I can't help'.

Activity 15 Matching formal and informal

Allow about 10 minutes

1. Match the informal word to the formal word that means the same.

go down

tell

ask

saw

at the end

go

Match each of the items above to an item below.

descend

report

request

observed

finally

depart

2. Now identify the formal phrase in each of the following pairs. Drag the relevant phrase to 'Formal' or 'Informal'.

Can you explain why one is formal and the other informal? Is there one word in each phrase that shows this?

Could I have a coffee, please?

Could you grab me a coffee?

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Formal

Informal

Discussion

'Please' is often formal.

'Grab' is informal.

Morning, mate.

Good morning, sir.

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Informal

Formal

Discussion

'Mate' is informal.

'Sir' is formal.

Can I have a word?

We need to discuss this further.

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Informal

Formal

Discussion

'Have a word' is informal in this case.

'Discuss further' is more formal.

I don't feel so bad.

I am well today.

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Informal

Formal

Discussion

'I am well' is quite formal.

'I don't feel so bad' is informal.

Usually it is obvious when language is formal or informal, but when speaking it is easy to slip into slang without really noticing, such as 'oh my goodness' rather than 'that is surprising'.

Activity 16 Formal situations

Allow about 5 minutes

Think of situations in which you might have to speak quite formally. See how many you can note down below.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have thought of some of the following:

- interviews
- presentations
- meetings
- classes/lectures
- work reviews
- 1-1s.

2.3 Being informal

Generally you tend to be more informal with people that you know, in places where you feel comfortable.

It is not just language that tells you when a discussion is informal. Body language is also part of this. For example, if someone has their feet on the table it is not likely to be a formal situation. We keep coming back to body language so it seems right that you will look at non-verbal communication in more detail in the next section.

A Functional Skills English Level 1 or an Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 formal discussion won't be like an overly formal business meeting. Likewise, a Functional Skills English informal discussion should not be as informal as friendly banter in the break room or the pub. The Functional Skills English assessed informal discussion is more relaxed than the formal one, but there are still lines that must not be crossed. You need to minimise slang and you should certainly not swear.

Remember that, if you are preparing for an Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 qualification, you will only be required to take part in one assessed formal discussion, not an informal discussion as well.

Activity 17 Informal situations

Allow about 5 minutes

How many discussions or situations that would be thought of as informal can you name?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You might have thought of some of the following:

- Catch-up chats with friends
- Discussing the day with your kids
- Telling stories or describing memories
- Discussing hobbies
- Planning holidays
- Having arguments with your family.

Activity 18 Language changes (1)

Allow about 5 minutes

Think of people you know well and the way you speak when you're with them. Think of examples of words that you say informally or examples of slang words you use.

Then listen to the audio below. See if you can identify slang words or words that are spoken informally. You may want to pause the audio after each sentence to write them in the box.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some of the informal words that were used:

'Grab me coat, wudja?': 'me' is used instead of 'my' and 'wudja' is used instead of 'would you'.

'I'm goin' out tonight': 'goin' is used instead of 'going' and the 't' at the end of tonight is not pronounced.

'What time dyou wanna meet?': 'do you' run into each other to become 'dyou' and 'want to' becomes 'wanna'.

'Are you boaf goin out?': 'th' becomes 'f' so 'both' becomes 'boaf'

'Ello mate!': the 'h' at the beginning of 'hello' and the 't' at the end of 'mate' are not said.

'Ow you doin', fella?': the 'h' is not said in 'how', 'doing' becomes 'doin' and the informal 'fella' is used.

'Can I 'ave a cuppa, please?': the 'h' in 'have' is not said and 'cuppa' is used for 'a cup of tea'.

Activity 19 Language changes (2)

Allow about 5 minutes

Three informal statements are given below. Think about how you would say them in a more formal way.

If you like, try recording yourself doing this, either on your phone or using the voice recorder below. The voice recorder does not work on mobiles or in Safari on Macs or some other browsers. Recordings saved in the voice recorder are completely private.

1. Pass us the butter, wudja?
2. What on earth was all that this morning?
3. What d'you make of that report?

Voice Recorder is not available in this format.

Here are some examples of saying the three statements in the last activity more formally:

- 'Would you pass the butter, please?' is a more formal version of 'Pass us the butter, wudja?'
- 'What was going on this morning?' is a more formal version of 'What on earth was all that this morning?'
- 'What do you think about that report?' is a more formal version of 'What d'you make of that report?'

You've now thought about the differences between formal and informal language. Another important way of working out what someone is communicating is through their body language.

3 Non-verbal communication

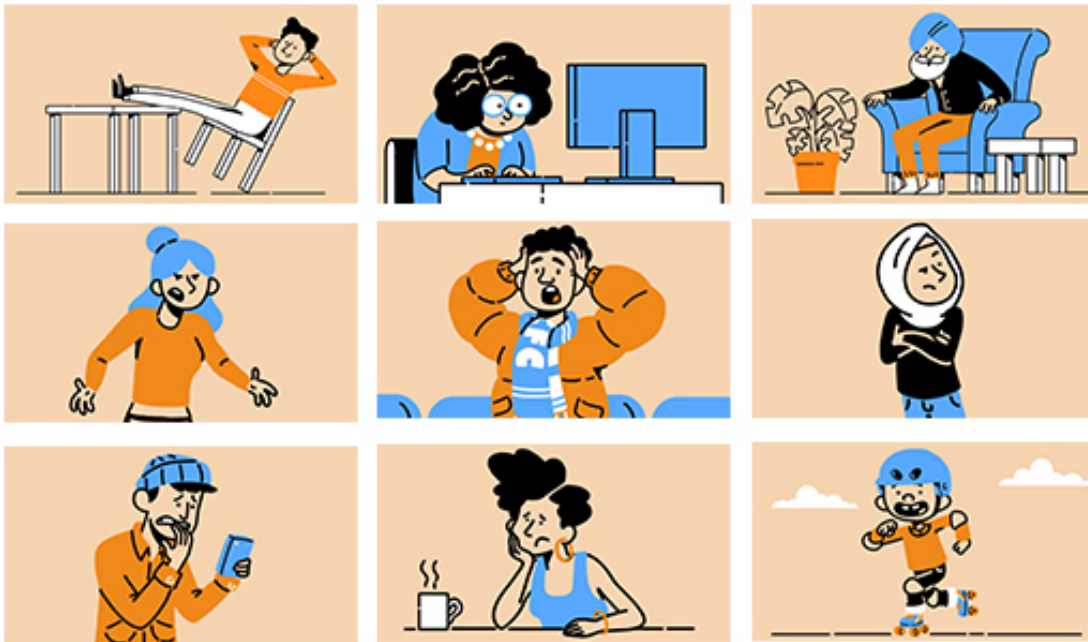


Figure 22 Examples of body language

Much of what you communicate is not through words at all but through your tone of voice, facial expressions and body language.

You now look at these different ways of communicating and specifically at how non-verbal communication can show others whether or not you are listening and have understood, and whether you agree with them.

3.1 Expressions

If someone frowns while you're speaking, you will probably assume that they don't understand what you've said. Of course, it could also mean that they have a stomach pain or are thinking about something else entirely! You can't always assume that you know what is meant, but expressions usually help you to know what is going on. They add meaning.

Activity 20 Common expressions

Allow about 10 minutes

1. Take a few minutes to note down some common facial expressions or gestures that people use when talking with others.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have thought of some of the following:

Nodding
Smiling
Frowning
Shrugging your shoulders
Rolling your eyes
Pointing
Shaking your head
Raising your eyebrows.

2. Now try to add meaning to the list of expressions and movements you created. Write down next to each what you think it usually means.

Discussion

Here are some common gestures and what they usually mean:

Nodding — agreeing
Shaking head — disagreeing
Raising eyebrows — showing surprise or disapproval
Shrugging — I don't know
Rolling eyes — disbelief/frustration/dismissing an idea.

Sometimes people can say one thing with words and another thing with their expression or tone of voice. For example, they may tell you that they are very excited but they actually look bored and speak as if they are reading the phone directory. What conclusion would you draw?

Perhaps such a person wants you to believe that they are excited because they want to make you happy, but are not really excited at all.

Activity 21 Real-life situations

Allow about 5 minutes

In the video below, various people make a statement and then repeat it using a different expression, tone of voice and body language. How does this change the meaning of what the person says?

Video content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some of the ways in which facial expression, tone and body language seem to change the meaning of what's said.

I'm sorry about what I said earlier. In the first clip, she frowns and has her arms folded. You wonder if she really means it. In the second clip, she reaches out with her hands as if to emphasise that she really is sorry.

I saw someone run a key down the side of your car. In the first clip, she looks down while she's speaking and has her arms folded. It makes you doubt her story and wonder if she was the person responsible for scratching your car! In the second clip, she looks at you as she speaks and she sounds concerned.

Have a lovely time tonight. In the first clip, he looks down, has his arms folded and sounds rather bored and unhappy as he says it. But in the second clip, he looks at you, has a brighter tone of voice and sounds as if he means it.

So tell me, what do you think of my idea? In the first clip, she has her arms folded and frowns as she asks the question. You get the impression she's not actually that interested in what you think. In the second clip, her expression is more open, as is her body language, and it seems as if she really *does* want to hear your thoughts.

I'd love to go to the cinema with you tonight. In the first clip, she leans back with her arms folded and you're not sure whether she means what she says. In the second clip, her facial expression and her outstretched hands suggest that she really *would* like to go out.

3.2 Verbal signals

One example of when you can't see the other person is when you're talking on the phone. When you're on the phone, you can find other ways of signalling to the other person while they are speaking. These tend to be little words or sounds like:

yes, no, mmm, oh, ah-ha, go on

or they may be longer phrases, like:

Does that mean ...?

Can you repeat that?

What do I do if ...?

These are some of the ways that you can ask people to clarify what they've said or check that you've understood correctly.

Activity 22 Spot the signals

Allow about 10 minutes

Listen to the audio below. In the box note down all the verbal signals used in the exchange.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are the verbal signals the woman uses in the conversation. Some of them are short words or phrases just to show that she was listening:

Right
Oh no
OK

Others are follow-up questions, encouraging the speaker to continue his story:

Did you make it?
What did you do?
Was it raining?

3.3 Body language

You can also communicate how you feel by the way you sit or stand, and you can give signals to other people by your movements.

Sitting back in a chair when talking to someone indicates that you feel relaxed. You may tend to sit forward when you're a bit tense, such as when you're trying to give a good impression, express interest or concentrate.

Moving from a relaxed position to sitting upright may indicate that you're about to get up or leave. It may also mean that something has just grabbed your attention.

Of course, you tend to adapt your body language according to the situation you're in. You probably take a much more relaxed position when you're with friends and family, but even with these people you may change your behaviour at a formal occasion like a wedding.

Society has expectations about the way people sit and move at different occasions and in different places. There is also an accepted 'personal space': norms for how close we get to each other.

Activity 23 More real life

Allow about 5 minutes

Consider the following situations.

1. How would you feel if someone moved to stand between you and the door (facing you) when you have just stood up to leave?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Depending on how well you know the person, you might feel a bit intimidated. You would feel that they were deliberately trying to stop you going. They may want to talk to you about something before you leave.

2. How do you feel if someone moves into your personal space and asks you for a favour?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You would probably feel that you were being intimidated or manipulated into doing what they want.

3. You are at a friend's house having a chat and about 10 minutes ago you said that you must leave. You're still sitting. Your friend stands up. What message does that give you?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You would probably feel that they want you to go.

4. You are in a job interview. The interviewer has been sitting on a wooden chair with one leg crossed over the other. While you are answering a question they suddenly shift to a leaning-forward position. What message does that give you?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You would probably feel that they were either disapproving or particularly interested in what you had just said.

Activity 24 Check what you've learnt: body language

Allow about 10 minutes

1. A friend of yours is in trouble that you didn't know about. A mutual friend comes to you to tell you about it. You are very concerned and want to help. How will you show, without using words, that you are interested?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You would probably look at your friend intently and nod gently. You may frown a little and raise eyebrows to express surprise.

2. What gestures, expressions or body language would be appropriate for you in the following situations?

a) A young child is telling you about something that happened to them at school today.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You would lean towards them. You would smile and make little comments to encourage them to tell you.

b) You are being introduced to the personnel manager at the place where you have just arrived for a job interview.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You would stand up straight, look them in the eye and offer a hand to shake. You would hopefully not be too nervous to remember to smile!

c) Your doctor's receptionist has just given you an instruction and you're not sure you understood.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You would frown a little. If she didn't respond to that you would have to ask her to explain again.

d) You are in a group doing some training at work. You don't understand a procedure.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Again, you would probably frown or maybe shake your head a little. If the instructor didn't respond you may raise your hand a little to get their attention.

e) You are in a group training session and you've just asked a question of the trainer. While they start to answer, you realise that you know the answer.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You would probably nod your head very obviously.

4 Taking part in discussions



Figure 23 A family discussion

A discussion is simply when people talk about something and tell each other their ideas or opinions. It may also (but not always) have a purpose, such as to make a decision on something.

Discussions vary considerably according to what they're for and who is taking part. You will be involved in discussions at some time or another, even if it's only a family discussion about what kind of takeaway to have. This kind of discussion is aimed at a decision being made. Some discussions are more relaxed or leisurely and do not need to reach a decision or conclusion.

4.1 Types of discussion

Some discussions arise naturally. For instance, you may be with a group of people discussing last night's football match or a scandal involving a celebrity. These sorts of discussions are for sharing views, but no conclusion is necessary. They help people to get to know each other better.

Other discussions are more formal. These would include discussions at meetings such as:

- staff or team meetings at work
- your local residents' meetings
- neighbourhood crime prevention meetings
- committee meetings of a society you belong to
- AGMs (Annual General Meetings)
- parent-teacher meetings
- school governor meetings.

In meetings, items are presented for discussion. The chairperson may ask you to state your point of view.

The purpose of these discussions vary and may be:

- to reach a decision such as when and where to have a staff party
- to feedback ideas to people with more authority
- to get reactions to a proposal.

Some discussions are arranged especially for interest or entertainment. They may be arranged so that people who feel strongly about something have the opportunity to share their views. Examples of these would be discussion programmes on the television or radio.

When you are involved in a discussion, it helps to know what the purpose is. It also helps if everybody involved knows what the purpose is. This helps the discussion to stay on target.

In a formal discussion, if other issues are raised, it's best to agree to discuss them later.

4.2 Asking questions

How you ask questions depends on what you want and who you're talking to. Even with people you know well, you may think twice before asking them to do things for you. You may be afraid to ask them for information if you think they won't want to tell you. You may feel that some subjects are off limits.

When you are with people you don't know, you usually have to ask questions to get information. You may find it difficult to find the right words to use.

In an assessed discussion for a **Functional Skills English Level 1** or an **Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1** qualification, you are expected to ask questions as well as answer them.

Asking questions is arguably more difficult than answering them as you need to think of what you want to know and how you want to ask it. Often asking questions requires you to be more proactive and thoughtful than answering questions.

Asking for information

This is a key part of any discussion, but also something you have to do almost every day.

Activity 25 When do you have to ask for information?

Allow about 5 minutes

Try to think of as many different situations as possible in which you might have to ask for information. Make a note of them below.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some suggestions:

asking for directions when you don't know where to go
asking for information at the local Citizens Advice
asking the nurse in a hospital about a sick relative
asking for information on benefits or jobs at the local job centre
asking about something at work
asking a child why they're upset
asking your partner about their day at work
asking a passer-by what the time is
asking about courses at your local college.

Sometimes you might ask questions that the other person is embarrassed to answer or that make them feel uncomfortable. Knowing when a question is appropriate is a useful skill.

Activity 26 Being appropriate

Allow about 5 minutes

Decide whether each question below is appropriate or inappropriate.

1. You are at a school parents' evening. You ask how your son gets on with other children.
 - ☐ Appropriate
 - ☐ Not appropriate
2. You're paying for goods at a checkout. You ask the assistant what they think of their manager.
 - ☐ Appropriate
 - ☐ Not appropriate
3. You're in the canteen at work. Your supervisor comes in and you ask why your friend was turned down for promotion.
 - ☐ Appropriate
 - ☐ Not appropriate
4. Your car has broken down. The breakdown service arrives after you've waited for two hours. You ask them what took so long.
 - ☐ Appropriate
 - ☐ Not appropriate
5. You meet someone at a party and discover that they have seven children. You ask why they have so many.
 - ☐ Appropriate
 - ☐ Not appropriate

4.3 Answering questions

Different situations involve different kinds of question. Answering questions appropriately means understanding the situation and working out what kind of response to give. In familiar settings this may be easy, but when you're with people you don't know so well, you may have to weigh things up quite quickly.

You might be asked questions in all sorts of different settings, from children asking 'Why?' to being asked for information by the police.

Types of answers

Questions take on different forms. Sometimes the person wants a very short, simple answer like 'yes' or 'no' or they want you to choose between very few options like tea or coffee. These are called closed questions.

At other times, people ask questions in order to let you speak. These are questions like 'What do you think about ...?' These are called open questions.

Sometimes a question may pose as both. The question 'How was your day?' could be given a one-word answer or could be given a full answer. It is up to you to work out what kind of answer the person wants.

Activity 27 Open or closed?

Allow about 5 minutes

Look at the questions below and decide whether each is open or closed.

1. Did you come by train?
 - ☐ Open
 - ☐ Closed
2. What are you doing at the weekend?
 - ☐ Open
 - ☐ Closed
3. How many children do you have?
 - ☐ Open
 - ☐ Closed
4. Are you married?
 - ☐ Open
 - ☐ Closed
5. Are you enjoying your course?
 - ☐ Open
 - ☐ Closed
6. What did you think of the film?
 - ☐ Open
 - ☐ Closed
7. Shall we go out for lunch?
 - ☐ Open

- Closed
- 8. Where were you last night?
- Open
- Closed

Deciding how to respond

Sometimes it's easy to know what kind of answer you should give. This is particularly true when you're with people you know well. You will be used to communicating with each other.

The same is true of very formal situations. You know what kind of answer to give when, for example, a nurse is asking about your medical history. The context tells you how to answer.

You can be asked the same question in different contexts and be expected to give very different answers.

For example, think about the question 'How are you?' What kind of responses might you be expected to give?

Sometimes 'How are you?' can just be another way of saying 'Hi' and you're expected to say no more than 'Fine, thanks'.

If a doctor asks you how you are, you are expected to tell them what's wrong.

If you've been unwell and your friends ask how you are, you're expected to reply that you're getting better or that you're fine now.

If someone knows you've been having a hard time, they're expecting you to tell them about your situation or how stressed you feel.

Someone you're very close to may want you to share quite deeply about your feelings.

If you meet someone in the street and they say 'How are you?' it might be totally inappropriate to start telling them all your troubles!

Activity 28 Responding appropriately

Allow about 5 minutes

Think of different people who might ask you what you did last night. What would be an appropriate response to each? Try to think of three examples.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You could be asked by your family or friends. You might give a short answer or you might tell them in detail.

You could be asked by a colleague at work, especially if you look a bit tired! You would probably give them an honest but short account.

You could be asked by a police officer. You would immediately wonder why they wanted to know and you might be very wary of the answer you give. You would be careful to be accurate about times and places.

4.4 Disagreeing

When you feel strongly about something, it can be difficult to keep your cool when stating your views. You need to remember that everyone is entitled to their opinion and learn to disagree agreeably. Most people don't want to cause hard feelings because of a disagreement, but unfortunately it's very easy to do!

Activity 29 Disagreements

Allow about 5 minutes

Think of some disagreements you've had with people.

1. How do you feel when people disagree with you?
2. How do people express their disagreement with you?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Your answer will be somewhere between feeling quite comfortable and able to discuss things in a friendly way, and feeling really upset and getting angry.
2. Disagreement can be expressed through irritability, silence, interruptions, repetition and anger.

Handling disagreements and debate is an important part of a discussion. How you react to disagreement reflects the way in which people have responded to you and your experiences in the past.

Activity 30 Responding to disagreement

Allow about 2 minutes

Think about what you do when someone says something you disagree with or when someone disagrees with something you have said. What do you do? How do you feel? Think about the last time you disagreed with someone. How did you both express your views? What was the result?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

People respond in different ways when someone disagrees with something you've said. Would any of the following apply to you?

You take their view as a personal attack and respond defensively.

You go silent and avoid any conflict.

You put your view forward very strongly.

You disagree with the view and still manage to make the person feel good about themselves.

How do other people feel when you tell them that you don't agree with them?

When you disagree with someone it's important to try to make them feel that you're not disapproving of them or rejecting them.

You can say something to show appreciation and then put forward your view:

'I appreciate what you're saying, but have you thought about ...'

'I see that that may work in some situations, but what about ...'

'I understand what you're saying. What would you do if ...'

'I realise that you've given it a lot of thought, but there is another way of looking at it.'

'I'm sorry, but I don't agree with that.'

You will notice that the examples above show respect for the person but disagree with the view they've put forward. Notice, 'I don't agree with that,' **not**, 'I don't agree with you.'

Always try to avoid being personal!

There are other things to avoid. Certain things people say in the heat of the moment can't possibly be true:

'You always ...' or 'You never ...'

None of us are that consistent! Using words like 'always' and 'never' raises the emotional temperature and they don't help to maintain relationships during disagreements.

'You make me feel ...' is another phrase which isn't true. Other people are not responsible for the way you feel.

4.5 Taking turns

Discussions where one person does most of the talking are not enjoyable for most people. The one person who may enjoy it is the person who won't stop talking!

Good discussions are ones in which everyone gets a chance to speak and no one is afraid of saying what they really think. Discussions should make you think about the views you have. You can change the way you think by listening to what others have to say. They may help you to think about things that you hadn't noticed before.

There are different ways of 'not listening' in a discussion.

When one person keeps putting their view across and refuses to let others get a word in, it is not a proper discussion!

Sometimes a discussion group may be dominated by the sort of person who doesn't let anyone finish what they're saying. This person has to comment on everything everyone says. Less confident people will have a lot of difficulty taking part in this kind of situation. Some people can be very insensitive to others when sharing their views on controversial or sensitive subjects. For example, they may put forward an extreme view about how young offenders should be punished when there is someone in the group whose son is in trouble with the police.

4.6 Encouraging others

You may be in a discussion where one person sits quietly, saying nothing. You may know the person and know that they have some views on the subject or some experience to share. Or you may not know what they have to contribute, but you're aware that they've not spoken.

The short video below shows different ways that you can encourage someone to speak in a discussion.

Video content is not available in this format.

The points made in the video are summarised in the box below.

Ways of encouraging others to speak during a discussion

- Address them directly and invite them to share their experience. 'Martha, tell us about your experience with ...'.
- Address them directly and ask what they think. 'Gary, what do you think about ...?'
- Use less direct, more subtle way of giving them a chance to speak:
 - catch their eye just as you finish what you're saying
 - give a little nod in their direction
 - open your hand towards them
 - smile towards them.

4.7 Making your point

Whenever there is a group of people together there will be some who have more to say than others and some who are comfortable letting others do the talking. All of them have views that are equally valid. You will look now at how to get people's attention when you want to say something.

Imagine the situation: a discussion is in full swing, you keep opening your mouth to speak, but no one seems to notice. You feel you have something important to say. What do you do?

Some people have the knack of getting attention when they open their mouths. Some have to think about strategies to use.

Two people you know are involved in an intense discussion. You need to interrupt to ask one of them to give you a lift later in the day. You go up to them hoping that they'll notice you want to speak, but they just carry on talking.

You will probably say something like:

'Sorry to bother you but ...'

'I don't want to interrupt; I just want to ask quickly ...'

In this way you acknowledge that their conversation is important but still get to say what you want.

Likewise, there are times when you want to get your own point across in a discussion but everyone else is talking and you don't get a chance. There are ways of interrupting:

'May I make a point here?'

'I've been listening to all that's been said. I think ...'

A loud 'er' can be very effective!

Depending on what stage the discussion is at, you may need to use different strategies. It may be that you've been wanting to say something and have been waiting for an opportunity. Now the discussion has moved on, but you still think that what you have to say is important. You could say:

'May I return to the point you were making earlier about ...? I think ...'

Always make sure that you are following the discussion and that your points are relevant. It helps to get other people's attention if you introduce what you are going to say, for example:

'There are two points I think we need to consider here ...'

Activity 31 Self-reflection

Allow about 5 minutes

Think carefully about how you behave when discussing things with other people. How do you feel? What do you do? What do you say?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You might recognise yourself in one or more of the following:

- I have a lot to say and I say it.
- I enjoy listening to different points of view.
- I'm conscious of how other people are reacting even if they don't say anything.
- I prefer to sit quietly and let other people speak.
- I feel embarrassed speaking in a group.
- People don't listen to me. I can never get a word in.
- I have strong opinions.
- I'm easily influenced by others.

After working through this section, how do you think you need to change when discussing things with people?

4.8 Speaking and listening assessments

This section specifically introduces the discussion assessments for **Functional Skills English Level 1** and **Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1**. However, if you are not studying for these qualifications you will still find the activity useful so please read through the section, watch the film and try out Activity 32.

To pass a Functional Skills English Level 1 assessment, you need to take part successfully in two discussions. To pass an Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 assessment, you need to take part in one formal discussion.

Functional Skills English Level 1 speaking and listening assessments

Of the two group discussions you need to take part in, one is formal and the other is informal. They both last for about ten minutes, although different exam boards have slightly different rules, so this might vary depending on where you do the course.

One of the discussions you take part in will be on an unfamiliar topic. This will be a topic that you have little or no knowledge of. The topic will be agreed with everybody before the discussion takes place. It means you will need to do some research on the topic as preparation for the discussion. This research can be done on a computer or even your phone and you will need to make notes on the topic so that you can contribute with relevant information, ideas and opinions.

The other discussion will be on a familiar topic, so you will not have to research it. You still need to prepare and make notes on what you want to say.

Below is an outline of the kind of things you need to do or show to pass the assessments. All exam boards are different, but these are typical things that your teacher needs to see you do well.

You need to do (and show) the following things to pass the Functional Skills English Level 1 discussion assessment.

Functional Skills English Level 1 discussion assessment criteria

- Prepare for discussions of ideas and opinions.
- Contribute to discussions of ideas and opinions.
- Make relevant contributions to discussions.
- Make extended contributions to discussions.
- Allow for others' input – listen to others' contributions.
- Respond to others' input.
- Make different kinds of contributions – ask questions, answer questions, ask for things to be clarified or repeated if necessary.
- Present information and/or points of view clearly.
- Use appropriate language.

- Use appropriate body language, gestures and facial expressions, and maintain eye contact.

Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 speaking and listening assessment

You will need to take part in a formal discussion on a given topic. You will be asked to read a document about the topic (which may be unfamiliar to you) and make notes about what you want to say during the discussion based on what you have read.

The discussion will be with at least two other people. It will last for a minimum time of 10 minutes with 3-6 people in the group and a minimum time of approximately 20 minutes for larger groups. You will be able to use your notes during the discussion.

Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 discussion assessment criteria

You need to do (and show) the following things to pass the Essential Skills discussion assessment.

- Say what you think/feel about the subject, expressing your ideas in an appropriate way.
- Provide information about the subject, using appropriate language throughout the discussion.
- Make clear and relevant contributions.
- Use appropriate phrases or gestures in order to join in the discussion.
- Respect the turn-taking rights of others.
- Use strategies to support what you are saying, such as eye contact and positive body language.
- Pay close attention to what others say and respond to them appropriately.
- Ask others in the group about their opinions.

Activity 32 Observing a discussion

Allow about 20 minutes

Watch the video below of a discussion about drones. Observe closely the participant on the right-hand side. Using either the Functional Skills discussion criteria or the Essential Skills discussion criteria above, evaluate her performance. Do you think she does all of the things needed to pass an assessment?

Video content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The participant on the right meets the criteria to pass both assessments.

- She had clearly **prepared** – saying she had looked online – and she shared the information she had found.
- She **contributed** regularly throughout the discussion, taking the lead role and opening and closing the discussion and asking questions of each of the others more than once.
- She **offered facts, opinions and ideas** about drones and made more than one **extended contribution**.
- It was clear she was **listening** to others as she prompted and agreed when others were speaking, and nodded and smiled appropriately.
- She **allowed others to speak** and if she did add comments they were often **supportive** and **encouraging**.
- Her **use of language** was suitable for the topic and the situation; it was considered, audible and clear at all times.
- Her **body language** was positive – she sat upright and used hand gestures positively throughout.

It was a strong performance.

5 This session's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-session quiz.

[Session 1 quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then return here once you've finished it.

6 Summary

Here are the key learning points from this session.

- For most people, speaking and listening is the **part of English they do the most**.
- Being able to speak clearly and confidently and to listen are **vital for success** in any workplace.
- In order for people to understand you, you need to speak at the appropriate **volume** and **speed** and to speak **clearly**.
- **Listening** is as important as speaking.
- Lots of things can **affect your ability to listen**, such as how relevant the subject is to you, how strongly you feel about it, and feeling tired or angry.
- **Active listening** can show someone that you are listening. It includes things like nodding, short verbal prompts, eye contact, asking questions and a positive body position.
- **Body language** can be used to support clear communication. Be aware of how body language can change the meaning of what you say.
- It is useful to be aware of the differences between **formal and informal** conversations. Generally, the world is becoming more informal but there are still times when you need to speak formally such as in meetings or interviews.
- You can improve the way you **take part in discussions** by following some practical strategies for asking and answering questions, taking turns, disagreeing with someone without it becoming personal, and encouraging others to speak.
- The key to improving your speaking and listening skills is to **practise** using them in day-to-day life.

Speaking and listening are **considered very important** in Functional Skills English and Essential Skills Wales Communication qualifications.

Reading

Introduction

Video content is not available in this format.



Although technology in the world today means there is less and less paper, there seem to be more words than ever and reading remains a vital skill. Words are everywhere. Being able to choose which ones to read, to read and understand them, and to find the information you need are all vital to living, working and studying successfully.

In this session you will develop these skills by looking at different types of written material and their purpose, format and structure.

Much of what you read every day is short and involves single words, phrases and short sentences. But being able to read, understand and use longer texts is just as important. Being able to tell the difference between facts and opinions is also important, particularly in a world of social media and 'fake news'.

Reading is a skill that needs practice. Although this session concentrates on functional or practical reading for life, work and study, reading for pleasure is a great way to practise. It does not matter what you read but if you can make even a small amount of time every day to read something you enjoy, the benefits are huge. It does not have to be fiction, but it should be something you find interesting, funny or entertaining.

1 The texts you read

Figure 1 Different kinds of text

A text is any kind of written material. The word has only recently come to mean a 'text message' on a mobile phone. There are lots of different kinds of text. They were all written for a particular reason. Almost all texts are meant to be read by other people.

In this section you look at different types of text, what they aim to do and how to pick out what's important.

1.1 What do you read?

Reading is something you do every day. What you actually read depends on who you are, what job you do, your age, your interests and the reason for reading a particular text.

Activity 1 Your average day

Allow about 5 minutes

Think about your average day. Take a few minutes to note down as many things as possible that you usually read.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Your list might have included some of the following:

- Text message
- Tweet
- Facebook post
- Email
- Newspaper
- Fiction book
- Text book
- Magazine
- Shopping list
- Website
- Note from a family member
- Letter
- Poster
- Road signs
- Adverts
- TV guide.

1.2 Why do you read?

The reasons for reading something affect how you read it. For example, you probably ignore most road signs if you know where you're going, but if you are looking for somewhere in particular you pay more attention.

Some things have to be read more carefully than others. They may take longer to read. You may have to read them in a set time if you are taking a test.

These could be things like:

- a textbook on a subject you are studying
- a job application form
- a letter from a car insurer
- instructions for recording a TV programme
- a passport form
- a rail timetable.

Sometimes you can read things more quickly. You don't need to read every word really carefully. You may just be reading for pleasure.

These kinds of texts could be:

- a football report in the newspaper
- an advert in a magazine
- a chapter of a story
- a letter from a friend
- a text message on your phone.

Activity 3 Why you read what you read

Allow about 5 minutes

In Activity 1, you noted down the things you read on an average day. Try to briefly explain why you read each of them in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some examples:

- Newspaper or news website: to get the news for the day
- Text message: because it has come from a friend, family member, colleague
- Facebook post: to see what friends are doing

1.3 Being an active reader

Becoming more aware and active as a reader is the most effective way of improving your reading skills. You are bombarded by words all the time and deciding what to read is very important.

The following questions will help you decide whether a text is important:

- What is it?
- Where does it come from?
- What is it for?
- Why was it written?
- Who is it for?

Try to follow these tips when reading a new text:

- Read the **title** of the text. This helps you to decide what it is about.
- Look at the **cover, pictures and logo**. These may help you decide what it is about, too.
- Think about whether you **need** to read it. Ask yourself if it is likely to contain helpful information.
- Look quickly at the **main part** of the text to see if it seems to be written in a style that you can understand and with the level of detail that you need.

Some of these features are shown in the advert below. Notice how the **title** helps you decide what it's about, as well as the **images**, both in the **logo** and the main **picture**. The **detail** below the main picture consists of key words to show what the company is offering. All these features help you decide quickly whether it's something you need or are interested in.

Figure 2 An advert for gardening services

This leads nicely on to other important questions when reading a text: what is its purpose and who is its intended audience?

Your reason for reading a text is important when deciding whether or not to read it in the first place and then how carefully and how quickly to read it. But equally, it is important to be able to work out and understand the reason it was written and who it was written for.

1.4 The purpose of texts

Every text is written for a reason. For example, every text message you send has a purpose, whether that is to let your mum know when you will be home or to share a joke with a friend.

If someone sends you an invitation to a party, for example, they are telling you what time to arrive and what the sender is celebrating, and they might even suggest what to wear.

Figure 3 A party invitation

An electricity bill may be less welcome than a party invitation. It tells you how much electricity you have used, how much you have to pay and when the money is due.

Everyone deals with many kinds of written texts. Some texts are printed: books, magazines, leaflets and memos. Other types of texts are handwritten: letters, notes and

lists. Some texts are on a screen: web pages and emails, texts, Facebook posts, tweets and blogs.

Most people see the same kind of text each day, like:

- newspapers and magazines (online or printed)
- advertisements (usually just called 'adverts')
- sets of instructions (how to do something)
- texts full of information like Wikipedia or a dictionary
- personal texts like letters, cards and notes
- texts that are read for pleasure, like novels, short stories and poems.

Writing can be broadly broken down into fiction and non-fiction. A fictional text's main purpose is to entertain its readers. It does other things as well, but its main purpose is to entertain. Functional Skills English and Essential Skills Wales Communication only require you to read non-fictional texts, so that is what you will concentrate on here.

Activity 4 Newspapers

Allow about 15 minutes

You need a newspaper for this activity. It doesn't have to be today's, it can be local or national, and it can be printed or online.

Although the newspaper is one big text, it contains lots of smaller texts, too.

Find each of the following types of text in your newspaper (you can cut them out if you have a printed newspaper):

- cartoon
- front-page news item
- letter to the editor
- job advert
- weather forecast
- sports article.

Try to say why each of these texts was written.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some ideas as to why each of these texts was written:

- **cartoon:** to entertain you or make you laugh
- **front-page news item:** to tell you what is happening in the world
- **letter to the editor:** to share an idea or opinion with other readers
- **job advert:** to let people know about a vacancy so they can find a job and an employer can recruit staff
- **weather forecast:** to tell you what weather to expect today and/or to tell you the forecast for tomorrow
- **sports article:** to give you the latest sports news.

There are four main purposes of non-fiction texts:

- to **instruct**
- to **describe** or **explain**
- to **persuade**
- to **inform**.

1.5 Texts that instruct

Instructions are everywhere. Whether you choose to follow them is another matter entirely. Instructions can be anything from how to open a box of cereal to the step-by-step details of how to put together a flat-pack piece of furniture.

Instructions contain imperatives (bossy verbs) – commands which tell you what to do or what not to do, such as ‘shake the packet’ or ‘do not leave the box open’.

Activity 5 Safety instructions

Allow about 5 minutes

Read the following text and note down:

- who it is written for
- why it was written
- what makes its message successful.

Road safety checklist

DO	DON'T
ALWAYS wear a seatbelt	DON'T leave valuables in a parked car
ALWAYS plan your route and have a map	DON'T leave your driving licence in your car
DO tell someone where you are going	NEVER leave your car unlocked
DO join a national breakdown service	NEVER leave children alone in the car
DO park in well-lit places	NEVER pick up hitchhikers

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Who? The text is written for drivers and people who travel by car.

Why? The purpose of the text is to instruct people on how to keep safe when travelling by car.

What makes it successful?

The way the text is laid out highlights the key points that you are likely to remember.

It tells you what you *should* do and what it is best *not* to do.

The instructions are very clear and easy to understand.

The first words – ‘ALWAYS’, ‘DO’, ‘DON’T’ and ‘NEVER’ – are in capital letters so that you notice them.

It uses short sentences.

It uses imperatives to tell you clearly what to do and what not to do, such as plan, tell, leave and pick.

The purpose of texts like these is to tell somebody what to do or how things should be done. You get instructions if you buy a new piece of equipment like a food processor. Instructions are often in a particular order and may be numbered or in bullet points. They are often arranged under subheadings.

1.6 Texts that describe or explain

Descriptive texts tell you about what has happened or about people and situations. This means that they don't try to tell you what you should do or think; they leave you to make up your own mind.

These texts tend to be longer because they are not just giving information but explaining or describing something in more detail. Newspaper, magazine and internet articles are good examples of this.

Descriptive texts often contain describing words to help build up an image in the reader's mind. They may draw upon your five senses (seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and tasting) to help you to imagine what something is like. For example:

The white sandy beach stretched around the gently curving cove.

The familiar smell of bonfire smoke hung in the cold air.

Activity 6 Descriptive texts

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the texts below and decide which one is descriptive.

Text A

The cottage was probably built in Tudor times. It has a thatched roof and black beams. Surrounding the cottage is a small garden with old wooden

fencing. There is a narrow entrance from the lane and a small apple orchard at the back.

Text B

Have you ever thought how wonderful it would be to live in a country cottage? Away from the fumes and smoke of the city you could enjoy a happier life in a real community setting. People in the country always have time to stop for a chat, not like in the town, where nobody knows or cares about their neighbours.

Text C

You should renew a thatched roof about every 80 years. Remove the old thatch and replace any rotten joists. Then lay the new layer of thatch onto the roof. Reed thatch lasts far longer than thatch made from wheat straw, but is much more expensive. Norfolk reed makes the best thatching material.

Which text is descriptive?

- ☐ Text A
- ☐ Text B
- ☐ Text C

Discussion

Text A is descriptive as it describes the cottage and its surroundings. It uses describing words like thatched, black, small, old and narrow.

Text B sounds like a text that persuades, as it tries to persuade you that life in the country is great!

Text C sounds like a text that instructs, as it tells you how to replace a thatched roof.

1.7 Texts that persuade

Persuasive texts are all around, from the company logos on almost everything you buy to the letters from the bank offering loans, which appear formal and serious but are really just adverts. A major benefit of being an aware and active reader is understanding the influence and techniques of persuasive texts.

Persuasive texts try to 'talk you into' doing something. It may be joining a club, sending some money to charity or buying a new car. They are written to make you agree with a point of view. They usually give you good reasons to do what they want.

Texts can use different methods to persuade you to do something:

- The layout and style of the text catches your eye.
- They use language in a way that makes something sound exciting or worthwhile.
- They may even make you feel that you'll be left out if you don't do what they say: 'Do you want to be the only family without a new computer?'
- They may make you feel sad in order to persuade you to give money.

Activity 7 Persuasive texts

Allow about 5 minutes

Look at the advert below and answer the questions that follow.

Figure 4 An advert for children's charities

1. What is this text trying to persuade its readers to do?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It's trying to persuade readers to donate money.

2. How does it try to persuade readers to do this?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The poster speaks directly to the reader – 'YOU'.

It also draws on the reader's emotions – it uses the image of a child and says, 'please help'.

Activity 8 More persuasion

Allow about 5 minutes

Look at the following advert carefully. What layout, presentation and language features does it use to try to persuade its readers to go to the car boot sale?

Figure 5 An advert for a car boot sale

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The advert uses bigger and bigger letters and capital letters – 'MASSIVE', 'MONSTER', etc. – so that it seems really big and exciting.

It uses bullet points to list the events so that they stand out.

It tells you about the money you could save: 'bargains', 'cheapest prices', 'free parking', 'free valuations'.

Later on you will see this advert in a very different format.

1.8 Texts that inform

These texts give the reader information about something. They contain facts and avoid repetition. They can be very short, such as a street name sign, or longer, like a news article. The longer a text is, the more likely it is to describe or explain rather than inform. The difference is not always clear.

Think about the persuasive advert for the car boot sale you saw earlier. The same information is presented in the text below.

Big car boot sale to be held at the Bridgnorth Leisure Centre, Northgate, Bridgnorth on 25 Sept 2019. It opens at 6.30am. £5 per car. Parking available. Cheap prices. Special '£1 only' stall. Farm shop and café. Dog show. Seconds direct from manufacturers. Telford Marching Band display at 11am. Representative from the Antiques Roadshow. Entertainment for children.

This text contains the same information, so it still tells you:

- when the car boot sale will be held
- where it will happen
- what attractions there will be.

But now it seems dull, so not so many people will be persuaded to go along. It is giving information rather than persuading.

1.9 Intended audience

The intended audience is linked closely to the purpose of the text. If a text is trying to persuade its readers to buy children's toys, it is likely to be aimed at children and parents and perhaps grandparents. If an advert is trying to sell beer it will not be aimed at under-18s. At least, legally it shouldn't!

When it comes to entertainment, audiences watch or read the things they enjoy. Arsenal fans watch Arsenal and Tom Cruise fans watch Tom Cruise films. People who love poetry read poetry and cycling fans read cycling magazines. Interestingly, the writer's intended audience isn't always the one that reads the text. For example, the Harry Potter books were initially aimed at older children and young teenagers, but they have been read by millions of adults around the world.

Audiences can be categorised by age, gender, interests/hobbies, work and language, among other things. The reason you are reading this text is because you are interested in studying and improving your English. You are the intended audience of this text.

Activity 9 Match the audience

Allow about 5 minutes

Match the intended audience to the appropriate text.

Students on an Introduction to Psychology course

Football fans

Pop music fans

Vegetarians or those cooking for them

Match each of the items above to an item below.

And do the same for these ones:

- Older people
- Young children
- A manager
- Parents

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Activity 10 Check what you've learnt: the texts you read

Allow about 10 minutes

1. For each of the following texts, select its **main** purpose from the options given.

a. Advertisement for a car

- ☐ instruct
- ☐ persuade
- ☐ inform

b. Instructions for a new printer

- ☐ instruct
- ☐ describe
- ☐ persuade

c. Leaflet with flat-pack furniture

- ☐ instruct
- ☐ describe
- ☐ persuade

d. OXFAM appeal advert

- ☐ instruct
- ☐ describe
- ☐ persuade

e. Review of a new film

- ☐ instruct
- ☐ describe
- ☐ inform

f. Letter from a friend telling you about her new flat

- ☐ instruct
- ☐ describe
- ☐ persuade

2. Read the following two texts.

Can you identify the format of each text (or where it might have come from), its purpose and the intended audience?

Text A

Figure 6 Text A

Provide your answer...

Discussion

This is a postcard. Its purpose is to inform and the intended audience is friends or family.

Text B

Figure 7 Text B

Provide your answer...

Discussion

This comes from a passport information leaflet.

Its purpose is to inform.

The intended audience are people travelling to the country in question.

Now that you've thought about different types of text and their intended audience, you'll now look at deciding what and how to read.

2 Ways of reading



Figure 8 Working out what you should read

Different types of text have different purposes and different audiences. But how can you work out what you should read or how carefully you should read it? How can you pick out what's important?

You don't read every single word of every text you see each day. You have a number of ways of filtering texts. These mean you can find the information you need from a text to decide if you should read more of it or not.

2.1 Skimming or skim-reading

Skimming means looking at a whole page quickly, to find out:

- the main topic
- whether you need to read it all or just some important parts of it
- how much time you might need to spend on it.

Skimming helps you to find out information quickly. It helps you to decide if something is going to be useful to you. When you skim, you might look at the title, headings and pictures to get a sense of what it's about and whether it's worth looking at it in more detail. You might skim the information on the packaging of a product to see if it is what you need to buy.

Activity 11 Choose your text

Allow about 2 minutes

Imagine you are standing in the newsagent's shop looking at the rack of magazines and newspapers.

Which one would you buy?

Figure 9 A choice of magazines

Why would you choose that one? What did you do to make that decision?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

How did you skim the texts to decide which one you would choose? Did you skim the titles to see which one interested you or did you skim the pictures for something that stood out? You would perhaps do things slightly differently if you were looking for something new rather than something based on your interests. If you were choosing something for someone else you might have to be a bit more careful or skim more slowly.

Sometimes you will need to read a longer text, like a book. You may need to look up information in a reference book. You may want to read an article on a website or a large leaflet or booklet.

Reading a whole booklet or book takes up a lot of time. You need to be sure that you are reading the right thing at the beginning.

Activity 12 Choose your book

Allow about 2 minutes

Imagine you are in a bookshop or a library and are choosing a book to read. Books don't have as many clues to help you choose which to read as newspapers and magazines. How would you pick a book to read?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You could look at the description of the book on the back cover.

The picture on the front cover may look interesting.

You may have read another book by the same person.

Perhaps you have seen the film of the book.

Activity 13 Practise skimming

Allow about 10 minutes

Find a book that is close to you. It does not matter what topic or style. Quickly read the front and back covers and the inside of the covers. How much do you now know about the book?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

From a quick skim, you probably now know:

- what it's called
- who wrote it
- what it's about
- who published it
- how much it costs
- if it has had good reviews
- whether or not you would read it.

It is amazing how much information you can pick up in a few seconds of skimming.

2.2 Scanning

If you decide that you need to read a text more carefully, you begin to scan it.

Scanning is looking at a text to discover what information it contains that you may need and whether it has key words linked to the topic you're interested in. You scan a text when you have an idea in your head beforehand about what you are looking for.

Scanning is another quick way of getting information from a text without having to read it all through.

Activity 14 Practise scanning

Allow about 10 minutes

Take a look at the questions below. Then read the text, a bit faster than you normally do. Scroll down the page so you can't see the image and see if you can answer the questions.

1. What is the cost of the holiday phonecard?
2. Where can you buy a holiday phonecard?
3. Name two advantages of a holiday phonecard.

Figure 10 An advert for a phonecard

Here are the questions again:

1. What is the cost of the holiday phonecard?
2. Where can you buy a holiday phonecard?
3. Name two advantages of a holiday phonecard.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The phonecard costs £10.
2. You can buy it from a main Post Office.

3. Its advantages are that you can call from almost any phone, you can use it in almost 50 countries and you get low-cost call rates.

There was something in how the main points were laid out in the phonecard advert that might have helped you pick them out: they were laid out with bullet points. These make it easier to spot the important things.

2.3 Finding the main points

It's often harder in a longer text to pick out the main points as they will not always stand out like they do when they are bulleted. It can help to practise spotting the main points in a paragraph of text.

Activity 15 Find the main points

Allow about 15 minutes

Below is a text from a leaflet on safety in the home.

Read the questions first so that you know what to look out for. This means you will be reading the text in an active way, looking for information. You need to find the answers to the following questions:

1. How much do the cheapest smoke alarms cost?
2. How does the smoke alarm let you know when a fire has started?
3. If you are living in a rented house or flat, does your landlord have to fit a smoke alarm for you?
4. How can you be sure that the smoke alarm you choose is a good quality one?

Try to read the text quite quickly.

Smoke alarms for the home

Smoke alarms are cheap, easy to get hold of and, used properly, they are lifesavers. There's no excuse for not having one.

Smoke alarms save lives. David and Michelle Clarke and their two young children owe their lives to their smoke alarms. In April 2018, an electrical fault started a fire in their home while the family were asleep. Luckily, the smoke triggered the smoke alarms fitted in both the downstairs and upstairs hallways and the family escaped safely. 'I can't believe that some people still don't have smoke alarms', adds Dave. 'What's £5 when it comes to your family's lives?'

A smoke alarm is a warning device that detects smoke at the earliest stages of a fire. If there is a fire in your home it sounds a piercing alarm to warn you. Many people killed in house fires are asleep at the time. A smoke alarm will wake you up and give you vital extra time to escape.

Smoke alarms cost from as little as £5. They are available from DIY stores, electrical shops, many supermarkets and other high-street retailers.

Many people believe that if you are living in rented accommodation the landlord has the responsibility for fitting and testing smoke alarms. This is not completely accurate; your safety is your responsibility. Your landlord must fit the smoke alarms but you need to test them monthly to make sure you are protected.

There are several models of smoke alarm to choose from. The officers from the local fire service will always be happy to help you to choose the best one for your home. Whichever kind you choose look out for the British Standard Kitemark so that you know it is manufactured to the highest standards, and follow the manufacturer's instructions when fitting the smoke alarm.

Now try the questions. Here they are again:

1. How much does the cheapest smoke alarm cost?

Provide your answer...

Answer

As little as £5.

2. How does a smoke alarm let you know when a fire has started?

Provide your answer...

Answer

It sounds a piercing alarm to wake you.

3. If you are living in a rented property does your landlord have to test the smoke alarms for you?

Provide your answer...

Answer

No. You should test the smoke alarms yourself.

4. How can you be sure that the smoke alarm you choose is a good quality one?

Provide your answer...

Answer

By buying one with a British Standard Kitemark.

Now look again at the article. As it is about fire safety, many of the words and phrases (groups of words) are linked to this subject.

Note down all the words and phrases that you think are connected with fires, alarms or safety.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Did you find the following words?

smoke, alarms, lifesavers

Did you find these phrases?

owe their lives
house fires
electrical faults
local fire service
save lives
escaped safely
warning device.

Being able to find words and phrases that are linked closely to the subject of a text is a useful skill. It means that you can find important information quickly by scanning. It also allows you to work out what the text is about and understand the main points.

Activity 16 More scanning practice

Allow about 15 minutes

Read the following text quickly and answer the questions that follow. Try to scan rather than reading it in detail.

The European Computer Driving Licence

The ECDL is an internationally recognised qualification that allows people to demonstrate their ability to use a computer for all kinds of tasks.

It is the best-known IT certificate in Europe and will soon become the most widely studied computer qualification in the rest of the world.

The ECDL is split into two parts: Level 1 and Level 2. It is designed to cover the key concepts of computing and its practical uses at home, in education and in the workplace.

Registration for the ECDL takes place at any college or school that is a Test Centre. Each student is given a logbook to record his or her progress. As the students pass the tests the results are recorded in their logbook. When all the tests have been completed and passed, the logbook is handed in. Then the full ECDL Certificate is issued to the student.

Most leading companies and other employers understand the importance of the ECDL. They know that any of their workers who has an ECDL Certificate has shown that they have an up-to-date computer qualification. The

employers also know that the ECDL is a well-organised course that helps their workers to use computer skills in their jobs.

When you check your answers, note that they may use different words from the answers given but should basically be the same.

1. What do the initials ECDL stand for?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The European Computer Driving Licence.

2. How many parts of the course have to be studied to gain the full Certificate?

Provide your answer...

Answer

There are two parts: Level 1 and Level 2.

3. What is recorded in the logbook?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The logbook is used to record the student's progress on the course.

4. What happens when the logbook is completed?

Provide your answer...

Answer

When the logbook is completed it is handed in and the ECDL Certificate is issued.

5. Why do employers like their workers to have an ECDL Certificate?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Employers like their workers to have an ECDL Certificate because it will improve the computer skills of their workers.

2.4 Reading in depth

Reading in depth means reading a text more carefully. This does not mean that you have to read every word out loud or stop every time you come to a word you do not know or even read very slowly. It *does* mean that you should take enough time and focus to make sure that you truly understand what the text is saying.

Many people feel nervous or worried about reading official letters or filling in long forms.

Figure 11 Examples of an official information sheet and letter

The best way to deal with these sorts of texts is a three-step method:

1. Read sections of the text in a steady way without stopping.
2. Go back for a second reading.
3. If you are reading something on paper, use your pencil to mark out any words or short sections of the text that you don't understand. You can go back to these sections and read them again or get someone else to help. You can also use a dictionary to check the meaning of any unfamiliar words. If you are reading something online, you can make a note of any parts you don't understand.

Activity 17 Three steps

Allow about 15 minutes

You'll now practise the three-step method.

Read through the whole passage below at your normal speed, without stopping. Even if you come to difficult words that you don't understand, just keep going.

Regular Car Maintenance

It is very important to maintain your car properly, especially in the winter months and if you make many long journeys on motorways. Proper car-care and regular servicing are essential elements to protect you and your passengers.

Getting to know your car

Familiarise yourself with your vehicle. Check the handbook to know exactly what the warning and hazard lights signify. Ensure that you know the location of the spare wheel and jacking points. Never jack up a car except at the proper jacking point. It is not safe to prop up a car on bricks or planks of wood; it may fall over, or roll onto you or someone else.

Tyres

Make weekly checks on the tyre pressures and visual examinations for sharp and penetrative objects in the treads of the tyres. Ensure that you replace tyres that do not meet the minimum legal requirements. Failure to do so could result in prosecution, but might also endanger you and other road users. Never drive on tyres that are below the legal limits as you could skid.

Coolant system

Ensure that the coolant system is topped up to the correct level with the correct coolant. Never attempt to add coolant whilst the engine is hot as this may result in scalding accidents.

Oil

Check the oil level at least every month and under your car where you park regularly to make a visual inspection for leakages. Use the dipstick to ensure that the oil is topped up slowly to the correct level – the vehicle handbook will help – and only add extra oil when the car is safely parked on a level surface, and when the engine has been switched off for at least ten minutes. Never leave patches of spilt oil on the ground as these could cause accidents.

Now try the three-step method.

You have already done **Step 1** which is to read sections of the text in a steady way without stopping.

So, now try **Step 2**. Read it through again.

Then **Step 3**. Note down any words or short sections of the text that you don't understand. You can look up any words you don't know in a dictionary later.

Provide your answer...

2.5 Finding your way around texts

Did you notice in the last text how the title and subheadings helped you to find information?

Titles and subheadings are like signposts that help you to find your way around roads. They break the text into sections and help you to find specific information on a particular topic. A subheading also summarises the section that it covers, to give you an idea of what to expect. You will look at layout and presentation features in more detail in Section 3.

Activity 18 A lack of headings

Allow about 15 minutes

In the following text, the title and subheadings have been deliberately left out. This makes it more difficult to decide on the subject of the text. Read the text quite quickly and answer the questions that follow. Your answers may be slightly different from the ones given.

Make sure that children are secured in the correct kind of car seat or seatbelt for their age and weight.

Remember that it is the driver's responsibility to ensure that all the passengers under 14 years old comply with the seatbelt laws.

Always buy new car seats unless you are very sure that second-hand ones are safe and undamaged. Your garage will usually check them for you. No restraint which has been involved in the stress of a collision or violent stop should be used again, until it has been checked by a professional.

Pregnant women should still continue to wear a seatbelt, but making sure that the lap belt does up under the 'bump', across the hip bones. The diagonal belt should be worn across the chest, as usual.

Children may become bored on long journeys. Plan your route carefully to allow times to stop and let them stretch their legs in safe surroundings. Providing them with some kind of in-car entertainment would be a good idea, too, but it must not be distracting for the driver.

1. What is the passage about?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The passage is about safety in cars.

2. Who is responsible for making sure children are safely 'belted-up' in the car?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The driver of the car is responsible for making sure children are safely 'belted up'.

3. Who will be able to check the safety of second-hand car seats?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The staff at the garage will be able to check the safety of second-hand car seats.

4. How should pregnant women wear their seatbelts?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Pregnant women should wear their seatbelts with the lap strap below their 'bump' and the diagonal strap across their chest, in the usual way.

5. Can you suggest two ways to make sure children don't become bored on the journey?

Provide your answer...

Answer

By planning the journey so that the children can stretch their legs every now and again and by providing some in-car entertainment for them.

6. Can you suggest a suitable title for the text?

Provide your answer...

Answer

A good suggestion would be 'Seatbelts for safety'. Using two 's' sounds might make it stand out more for the reader. Perhaps they would remember it better. Lots of adverts use letter sounds this way, like 'Typhoo Tea', 'Rolling Rock' or 'Pretty Polly'. Can you think of any more examples?

7. Would you use a sub-heading for each paragraph?

Provide your answer...

Answer

You probably wouldn't use a subheading for every paragraph as they are quite short. However, some of them could have one. For example, the last paragraph could be headed 'Beating boredom'.

Activity 19 Check what you've learnt: ways of reading

Allow about 10 minutes

1. What kind of reading are you doing when you skim a text?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

When you skim a text, you look through it very quickly to try to get an idea of what it is about. You might use skimming when you're looking at a book to decide whether to buy it.

2. What kind of reading are you doing when you scan a text?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

When you scan a text, you read it quickly to find information that you need; you scan when you have an idea in your head beforehand about what you are looking for. You would use scanning to look more carefully at a text before deciding to read it more deeply.

3. What kind of reading are you doing when you read in depth?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

When you read a text in depth, you read it carefully to get as much information as you can. You would need to read in depth if the text was very important or complicated.

4. What method of reading would you use for the following tasks?

- a. Picking a magazine to read on the train.
- b. Reading the telephone bill to check that it's correct
- c. Reading a novel
- d. Reading a job description when applying for a job

Provide your answer...

Discussion

- a. To pick a magazine at the newsagent's you would skim or possibly scan it if it was very expensive, to be sure you wanted to buy it.
- b. To read the telephone bill, you would skim or scan if you didn't recognise some of the telephone numbers.
- c. To read a novel, you would usually read in depth.
- d. To read a job description, you would read in depth because it is important to know exactly what you would have to do in a new job.

3 Structure, presentation and layout

As you have already seen in this session, texts are written with a particular audience in mind. The way the writer of the text arranges their message can add extra meaning.

Some texts have a title that tells you what they are about. Some will also have smaller headings. These are like signposts to help you find information in the text. For example, the headings in this online session are listed in the menu on the left. They act as signposts to particular parts of the session and allow you to find what you want easily.

The way the text is written will usually tell you who is meant to read it and why it was written.

3.1 Structure

Structure is the way something is put together.

When someone talks about the structure of a house, they mean the way it is built. The foundations come first. They anchor the whole house into the ground, so they have to be firm and strong. The floor and walls are built next. Then the roof and chimney are added at the end.

Texts are built the other way round – from the top.

They begin with a **title**, which is the name of the text. The title usually tells you what it is about.

For example, look at the cover of this book, called *Smart Money*.

Figure 12 A book cover

This book also has a **sub-title**, which tells you more about the title. The sub-title is 'Shortcuts to becoming rich'.

The book also shows the **name of the author**, the person who wrote the text:

George Taylor.

Sometimes the author is more than one person. It could even be an organisation, like the author of a report called:

Pollution in the West Midlands by the West Midlands Health Authority.

The **contents page** of the text tells you about what it contains. If the text is a book, it may have chapter numbers and page numbers:

Smart Money: shortcuts to becoming rich

Contents		
Chapter 1	You can get rich quickly	page 6
Chapter 2	Choose a way to make your fortune	page 25

Chapter 3	Wise investment strategies	page 37
-----------	----------------------------	---------

etc...

Each chapter may be divided into **sections**. The sections in Chapter 1 of *Smart Money: shortcuts to becoming rich* are:

- Decide what you do best
- You may have top-executive skills
- Learn how to earn money quickly
- Take positive action today.

Activity 20 Finding out a book's structure

Allow about 10 minutes

Find a non-fiction book and find the following information about it:

- Title
- Sub-title (if there is one)
- Author
- Chapters (if they are not named, how many are there?)
- Are the chapters divided into sections?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You can find out a lot about a book from its cover and even more, quite quickly, without even having to read any of the main text. If you know where to look, it takes very little time to find key information that allows you to decide if you need or want to read the book.

3.2 Layout and presentation

There are many layout and presentation features that writers use to make texts easier to read or more attractive, or to highlight the message they are trying to get across.

Layout and presentation features that make texts easier to read

- **Headings/titles** tell you what the overall topic is
- **Subheadings** break up the text, tell you what each section is about
- **Pictures/photos** give visual information related to the topic, attract readers, add interest
- **Captions** give information about pictures or photos
- **Straplines** give further information about the text, sometimes a short summary

- **Logos** advertise or show the company involved
- **Bullet points/numbered points** list or summarise key information
- **Paragraphs** break up the text into readable sections
- **Spacing** makes the text attractive, interesting and breaks it up
- **Colour** adds interest and makes the text attractive
- **Text size** highlights key words, phrases or points
- **Different fonts** add variety and highlight words, phrases or information
- **Bold, underling and italics** also highlight words, phrases or information
- **Text boxes** separate particular pieces or sections of the text
- **Graphs, charts and tables** show mathematical information

Activity 21 Presentation features

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the text below and answer the questions.

Figure 13 A sign in a college room

1. Who is the notice written for, and why?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The notice is written for students to tell them how they should use the computer room.

2. Who might have written it?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It was probably written by the computer room staff.

3. Can you identify any layout features?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Layout features include bold text, underlining, various fonts and uppercase/capitals.

Typical layout features vary according to the kind of text. Longer texts, like novels, reports or text books, are usually broken down into chapters and sections to help you cope with the information. Shorter texts, like text messages or greeting cards, often have pictures to add interest or meaning.

Activity 22 Layout and structure of texts

Allow about 10 minutes

What kind of layout and structure would you expect to find in the following types of text?

Short story
School text book
Birthday card
News article
Bank statement
Poster about a school fete

Here are some ideas you can choose from: cartoons, colour, chapters, columns of figures, diagrams, headlines, logo, paragraphs, pictures, sections, short message, short paragraphs, short words, title, verse

The first example has been added to help you think about the texts.

Short story: title, paragraphs:

Discussion

Here are some of the layout features for the different kinds of text.

Short story – title, paragraphs
School text book – sections, chapters, diagrams
Birthday card – short message, picture, verse
News article – headline, picture, short paragraphs
Bank statement – columns of figures, logo
Poster about a school fete – headline, short words, cartoons, colour

Different types of layout and style can be used to make the important points stand out, like bullet points (see example below) and subheadings.

Most texts in newspapers and magazines use:

- different font sizes
- bold, underlining and italics.

A good example of something which uses a presentation style designed for its audience is a story book for young children. A storybook uses simple sentences and lots of coloured pictures. This encourages young readers to practise their reading skills. There may only be three or four words on each page.

Activity 23 Appropriate presentation

Allow about 5 minutes

Take a look at the pages from two children's books below.

Version 1 was written for children who are just learning to read. Version 2 is for children of 7–8 years of age.

Figure 14 Version 1 of a children's book

Figure 15 Version 2 of a children's book

Find four differences between the ways these two stories are written and printed. Then think about why the stories are presented in these ways.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Text 1 has a larger font, is in bold, has a picture, uses short words and is separated into short sentences.

Text 2 is in italics, uses a smaller font and is in a whole paragraph.

The versions are different because they are adapted to be suitable for the age and ability of the reader. Older children who read more confidently can cope with the challenge of smaller fonts and longer words, sentences and paragraphs. Children just learning to read need fonts that are easier to read and a structure that helps them practise but doesn't put them off.

Activity 24 Web pages

Allow about 10 minutes

Take a look at the features of web pages listed below. Then see if they are present on this Open University web page (open the link in a new tab or window):

[Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell wins physics prize](#). Tick each one that you can see.

Then take a look at the [Open University Courses](#) web page (again, open the link in a new tab or window). Can you see features that aren't used in the previous example?

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Discussion

The first web page has:

- a logo, to show the reader they are on an Open University website
- a short, clear heading, so it is immediately clear what the page is about
- links to other web pages within the article and along the side of it
- pictures, both under the heading to draw readers in and within the article to add interest.

It doesn't have a subheading, but it has a summary of what the article is about. It doesn't have boxes, but the section down the right-hand side of the page separates out the links to other articles.

You may have noticed that the second web page has many of the other features, like boxes and sections, coloured backgrounds, coloured fonts and different sized fonts. These make it easy to find your way around the page and make it look attractive.

3.3 Images



Figure 16 Different kinds of images

All of the following are types of image:

photographs, charts, maps, illustrations, cartoons, diagrams, graphs, logos and symbols.

Many people spend hours each week watching television and films or playing computer games. You will be used to seeing all kinds of images. Your computer and phone screens are full of images. These are the symbols that tell you which apps you can open.

Often a picture can tell you much more than a written text. You may have heard of the saying, 'A picture is worth a thousand words.'

This means that it can be very difficult to explain what something is like or how to do something, whereas one simple picture can make something easy to understand.

You now look at why images and symbols are used in texts and how images can add extra meaning.

Activity 25 Images around you

Allow about 5 minutes

1. Take a few minutes to think about all the images you see on a typical day and note down as many as you can. Include the images you see around you right now.
2. There are two examples below. What do these road signs mean?

Figure 17 Two road signs

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The kind of images you see every day include the following:
 - company logos
 - app logos
 - road signs
 - ID badge photos
 - health and safety signs
 - pictures on packaging.
2. The first road sign means warning or caution.
The second road sign means 'Danger of driving off the road'.

Activity 26 Symbols and meanings

Allow about 5 minutes

Now look at the following symbols. What does each one mean to you? Drag each symbol to the meaning you usually give to it.

Match each of the items above to an item below.

pirates, danger
a Red Cross organisation, first aid
Christianity
correct, good or finished
Olympics, unity
United States of America

Signs and symbols are important because they:

- can be understood by people who do not speak the language of the text
- can help to explain how to do something
- add meaning to written texts
- can make texts more interesting and keep your attention.

In summary, you can tell a lot about a text from the way it looks and how it is laid out.

You now turn to reading a text: reading carefully and finding the information you actually need.

4 Reading for detail

Being able to read texts carefully to find the information you need is a vital skill for life, work and study. When you can read for detail confidently, you can study new subjects, learn new information and understand key texts for both work and general life.

At a very basic level, reading a text carefully keeps you safe. The sign below is very short, but the information it provides is vital for people's safety. It allows you to answer the question, 'Where do I go if there is a fire?'

Figure 18 A fire point sign

Similarly, the sign below gives information about what you should wear to be safe in a particular area. What *should* you wear?

Figure 19 A safety sign

4.1 Reading longer texts

The two signs you just looked at are very short texts. Most of the texts you have read to this point have also been quite short. You are now going to practise reading and understanding longer texts and finding specific information in them. The ability to do this well really can make a huge difference in your work, study and everyday life.

Activity 27 Practise reading for detail

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the following text and answer the questions:

Rocking horses have been made since at least 1600, for a painting of the young King Charles I shows him playing with one when he was an infant. They were very popular in Victorian times, when they had flowing manes and tails made of authentic horsehair. Various types of wooden horses for children to sit on and propel themselves with their feet, known as 'dobbins', were also made in Europe by wood-turners, mainly for the children of their employers and for affluent families.

1. How do you know Rocking Horses have been around for over 400 years?

Provide your answer...

Answer

There is a picture of King Charles on one painted around 1600.

2. What does authentic mean? Can you work it out?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Authentic in this case means real or genuine.

3. What about affluent? If you do not know its meaning, can you guess based on the information in the text?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Affluent means rich or wealthy.

Now you look at some more detailed or complex texts and practise reading for detail.

Activity 28 More practice in reading for detail

Allow about 15 minutes

Read the following text and answer the questions.

From the back cover of a best-selling book about John Peel:

A tribute biography to the immensely popular DJ and broadcaster, John Peel.

John Peel was born in Cheshire in 1939 and was educated at Shrewsbury School before going on to do National Service. After that, he went into broadcasting while travelling in America.

In 1967 he returned to the UK and joined Radio 1 at its start. His late-night radio shows quickly became cult listening for music fans of all ages, and he was the first national DJ to play records by bands such as the Undertones, Pulp, the Smiths and Joy Division. Many bands admit that without his support, they would never have become famous. While Radio 1 changed, he remained a constant factor in its schedules. In 1998 he was awarded the OBE for his services to broadcasting. It was in that year that he also began his multi-award-winning show Home Truths. Now, Saturday mornings will never be the same.

1. What did John Peel do for a living?

Provide your answer...

Answer

He was a DJ and broadcaster.

2. When did he return to the UK?

Provide your answer...

Answer

1967

3. Where did he get involved in broadcasting?

Provide your answer...

Answer

In America.

4. Why did he get an OBE?

Provide your answer...

Answer

For services to broadcasting.

5. Name two bands he supported.

Provide your answer...

Answer

You could have chosen from: the Undertones, Pulp, the Smiths, Joy Division.

4.2 Answering the question

It is important to be able to read texts and find the information you need confidently and accurately. It is as important to be able to record that information clearly.

In a **Functional Skills English Level 1** assessment, you need to write your answers down and it is very important that you only give the required information. It is very easy to misread questions and provide an incorrect answer. It is also very easy to write too much if you are unsure of the answer. You may lose marks if you do this. To answer correctly you must always read the question carefully.

The **Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1** reading assessment has two parts:

- Part 1 is the controlled task element. You have to read two source documents of about 250 words and identify the main points. You then use some of the information gained to complete two pieces of writing. You also use some of the information from one source document to take part in a discussion.
- Part 2 is a confirmatory test. You read texts and answer a range of questions based on the information in those texts. The questions are all multiple choice.

Activity 29 Read the question (1)

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the following text carefully and answer the questions. Read the questions carefully to ensure your answers are correct.

FLOODS AND GALES BATTER SOUTH COAST AND DAMAGE PIER

Violent wind and rainstorms swept across southern England yesterday causing severe disruption to road and passenger transport. The end of the pier at Bognor Regis was washed away, homes were flooded and holidaymakers had to move to more sheltered accommodation.

Severe gale warnings were in place on the coast last night after force 8 south-westerly winds were forecast for the rest of the weekend, an Environment Agency spokesman said. A Sussex police spokesman said about 60 feet of Bognor Pier had been washed away, causing more than one million pounds' worth of damage, but no-one has been reported injured.

Similar storms were recorded in this area in the winter of 1934, and in November 1965 22 people were drowned in a storm of similar intensity in Bognor, which lasted for two days.

1. What part of England did the storm hit?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The south.

2. What is the cost of the damage likely to be?

Provide your answer...

Answer

More than £1 million.

3. What happened in 1934 and 1965?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Similar storms.

Activity 30 Read the question (2)

Allow about 15 minutes

Now practise again. Read the following text carefully and answer the questions.

The Anglo-Saxons

Today we use the term 'Anglo-Saxon' to describe the part of history between 450 AD and 1066, when the Battle of Hastings established the Norman Kings in England. This is the period generally referred to as the Dark Ages in British history.

Although the early part of Anglo-Saxon history would have been unsettled and only partly civilised, people still lived productive lives. Though urban centres tended to fall into decay in the fifth century, trade still continued with Europe. Mediterranean pottery was imported and grave goods found with cremation and urn burials from the time include imported bronze, glass and ivory. Pottery sherds and flint adze heads show that although new technologies were being introduced, older tools from the Bronze Age were still in use, particularly in more remote areas of Britain.

Glossary:

Adze blade A type of stone tool designed for woodworking by our very ancient ancestors. An adze blade differs from an axe in that it is mounted on a shaft at a 90-degree angle. It was probably used for stripping bark from timbers. This helped to produce a smoother surface for sinking piles or posts and helped to preserve the wood by removing wood-worms, moulds and fungi.

Ages The terms 'Bronze Age', 'Iron Age' and so on are used by archaeologists as easy and quick ways for talking about the time periods of the past. In fact, the changes from one period to the next would have been far more gradual than it seems. After all, our prehistoric ancestors didn't stop using stone tools on 31 December 2301 BC and switch to bronze tools overnight!

Anglo-Saxons 'Anglo-Saxon' is used as a general way to refer to the peoples who invaded and settled in England in large numbers during the fifth and sixth centuries AD. As well as the Angles (who came from the southern part of the Danish peninsula and eventually gave their name to England) and the Saxons (who came from the north German plain to the west), there were also Jutes from Jutland as well.

Dark Ages A way of speaking of the centuries after the Roman period, from about 400 AD, when it is very difficult to know what was happening in Britain in terms of farming and settlement. In most of Britain, people stopped using and making pottery, did not mint any new coins, built in wood (which has rotted away) rather than stone and left little trace of the past.

Sherd A broken piece of pottery.

1. What three types of people made up 'Anglo-Saxons'?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Angles, Saxons and Jutes.

2. Where did the Saxons come from?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Germany.

3. What is the period between 460 AD and 1066 AD often called?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The Dark Ages.

4. What material did people during this time mainly build with?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Wood.

5. Who controlled or ruled Britain (i) before and (ii) after the Dark Ages?

Provide your answer...

Answer

(i) the Romans (ii) the Normans

6. True or false? An adze is the same as an axe.

Provide your answer...

Answer

False

7. Why were the Dark Ages called this?

Provide your answer...

Answer

No one knows much about them.

This section has given you some practice in reading carefully and picking out the important parts of a text. You will now extend those skills and look at how to *use* the information you read.

5 Using the information you read

As you have seen, all texts have an audience and a purpose. Sometimes this means that the reader has to do something about what they have read. Understanding what a text is about and its purpose is key to deciding whether you need to do anything more. You now look at how you make those decisions and develop those good habits around reading texts and using the information they contain.

5.1 To read or not to read

As you saw in Section 2, there are techniques you can use to decide whether or not to read a text. By skimming and scanning texts you can see quite quickly whether you want or need to read further.

For example, every text message you receive requires you to make a decision: do you need to reply or not? This will depend on the purpose of the message. If the text is from a friend asking how you are, you will probably reply. If it is from a friend telling you when they can meet you later, you may not need to reply. In both cases you are deciding what to do with the information.

When an advert for a takeaway lands on your doormat you have to decide whether to keep it or throw it away. This decision will depend on whether you like that kind of food or always go to another restaurant. Alternatively, you might ring them immediately and order food. In this case their persuasion has worked perfectly.

Other texts must be dealt with in some way. You *have* to respond to the letter that is sent to all homes each year by local councils asking for confirmation about voters in the house or you might be fined.

The email or letter you receive from your car insurance company telling you when your insurance will be renewed can be ignored if you are happy with your current insurance or you can decide to reply and cancel it and shop around.

You make decisions like this every day without really giving it much thought. Being an active and aware reader means that you should pay a little more attention to these texts and the decisions you make about what to do with the information they contain.

Activity 31 Skim, scan, read, ignore?

Allow about 5 minutes

Look at each of the labels below and decide whether you would most likely read it in full, skim or scan it, or ignore it. Then drag it to the relevant column.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

Take a look at your three columns. Are there any texts in the 'Ignore' column that perhaps need more attention? Or any in the other two columns that perhaps need *less* attention?

5.2 Facts and opinions

Many texts contain true and accurate information called facts.

Other texts tell you what the writer believes, even if it is not always true. These kinds of text contain opinions that are biased. This means that they tell what the writer thinks.

Sometimes the writer thinks something that isn't true.

It can be quite difficult to decide what is a fact and what is an opinion. Sometimes facts and opinions are mixed up together in a text.

Being able to tell facts from opinions is important, because:

- Factual information tells the reader what they want to know and is accurate.
- Reading biased texts can mean you are reading information that is not always true.
- In reading someone else's views, you are really being persuaded to believe something.
- It helps you to decide what to do with the information in the text.

Activity 32 Fact or opinion?

Allow about 15 minutes

This activity will help you to understand the difference between facts and opinions.

Read the following advert for a new kind of fruit cordial. Using the two different highlighting colours, highlight two facts and four opinions.

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What is the purpose of the text? *To persuade you to buy the cordial.*

To give you an example, here's one fact and one opinion:

- **Fact:** The cordial is made from 100% crushed fruit.
- **Opinion:** The cordial is a key ingredient for all your recipes. (This is not a fact. The cordial could be useful in *some* recipes. It probably won't be the most important ingredient.)

Discussion

Here is another fact and three more opinions:

Fact: The cordial is made from spring water.

Opinion: Using the cordial will help you to save time.

This is not a fact. Yes, it may save you having to crush some raspberries, but how much time will that really save?

Opinion: It is 'super-concentrated'.

What does 'super' actually mean? Is it more concentrated than all other cordials? Or is it just more concentrated than others they used to make?

Opinion: This cordial is 'the best you can buy'.

This is only their opinion. You may prefer some other cordial that is cheaper and better value for money.

Adverts are designed to get you to buy products. They have hidden messages to persuade you. Sometimes the opinions are hidden very subtly. You have to look carefully to find them.

Activity 33 Opinions or facts?

Allow about 15 minutes

Highlight three facts and three opinions in the following extract from a letter.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

See if you spotted any of these.

Facts

- I've lost 48 pounds in 4 months.
- I can now wear size 12 dresses
- She is following the Sherwood Weight Loss Plan.

Opinions

- It's all down to the marvellous new Sherwood Weight Loss Plan. (This may be true, but there may be some other reason or reasons. She could be walking to work instead of going by bus.)
- You'll be green with envy. (The reader may not care at all!)
- No other time of day will do – it [exercise] needs to be before the biggest meal of the day for maximum benefit. (This is not likely to be true. She will burn up the same number of calories whenever she takes her walk.)

5.3 Finding and using information

For some texts it is obvious if and how you will use the information. When you buy a new phone or television, you may well need the instructions to help you set it up. You might not read every part in detail. You will select what to read carefully and what to skim over quickly.

What you do with a text often depends on if its purpose matches your needs.

Activity 34 Information to match your needs

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the following text and answer the questions.

QuickMail helps you keep in touch

Weight not over	Europe	World Zone 1	World Zone 2
10g	£1.25	£1.32	£1.32
20g	£1.42	£1.78	£1.78
40g	£1.55	£2.12	£2.47

1. What is the purpose of this text?

- ☐ To instruct readers how to weigh a letter
- ☐ To inform readers about world postage prices
- ☐ To describe how airmail helps keep people close

2. Why would you need to read this text?

- ☐ To find out where to buy stamps
- ☐ To find out how much your letter weighs
- ☐ To find out prices to post packages abroad

3. You want to send a present to your brother in Germany. It weighs 36g. How much would it cost?

- ☐ £1.55
- ☐ 42p
- ☐ £1.05

4. Your sister lives in Brazil, which is in World Zone 2. You send her the same present. How much would this package cost?

- ☐ 47p
- ☐ 68p
- ☐ £2.47

5. The package to your brother in Germany is actually 46g. How much would that cost?

- ☐ 60p
- ☐ 80p
- ☐ The information is not there.

Activity 35 Instructions

Allow about 15 minutes

Read the following text and answer the questions relating to it.

Instructions for building a garden wall

Foundations

By far the most important part of any wall is its foundations. If it is not possible to lay foundations you will have a hard job producing a stable and long-lasting wall.

Always cut your foundations horizontally. On sloping ground this may involve stepping them to accommodate the slope. Make each step

equivalent to a whole number of bricks, plus mortar. Make sure the foundation is strong enough to bear the weight of the wall.

For a light garden wall, 30 cm deep should be sufficient if the soil is firm and well drained. On unstable or weak ground, make the depth 46 cm. Make the trench twice the width of the brickwork. Lay a concrete footing of about 1 part cement to 6 parts ballast to a depth of about 15 cm (6 inches) in the bottom of the trench.

1. What is the purpose of the text?

Provide your answer...

Answer

To give instructions on how to build a wall.

2. Why would you need to read the text?

Provide your answer...

Answer

If you were planning to build a wall.

3. What should you do with your foundations on sloping ground?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Step them.

4. How deep in inches should your footing be?

Provide your answer...

Answer

About 15 cm (6 inches).

5. Is there really enough detail in the text to build a wall? If not, what would help?

Provide your answer...

Answer

There is probably not enough information. Some of the vocabulary is not explained - what is 'ballast' or 'stepping'? How do you make mortar? Pictures would help.

When you study a subject, you use texts to learn new information. You have to read carefully to ensure you understand all of the information you need. You are using this text to develop your English skills.

In both **Functional Skills English** and **Essential Skills Wales Communication** assessments (and other courses you might study), the questions you are asked about a text may not simply be a case of finding information. Sometimes you need to decide what is relevant to the question and judge how much you need to include in the answer.

Activity 36 Careful reading

Allow about 15 minutes

Below is a letter from a friend of yours. Read the letter and answer the question.

Yesterday I went to a job interview that had been arranged through the Job Centre. I went to the place I was told to go to, but when I arrived I was sent to a different building about 5 minutes' walk away. I arrived just in time, to be told that the person who was going to see me had been called out and would be back shortly. I waited for nearly an hour!

When the interviewer finally arrived, I was ushered into an office where at least four people were working. Phones kept ringing and people kept interrupting. I found it really difficult to concentrate and answer questions.

I suggested that the interview be postponed to another time when the interviewer was less harassed. This did not go down well and the interviewer got really angry! I was accused of wasting time and told to get out if I didn't want the job. I tried to reason but decided it wasn't worth it.

Help! I'm really concerned I'll lose my benefits for failing the interview. I need your advice – what do you think I should say to the Job Centre, who set up this interview for me?

If you were replying to your friend, what key points would you suggest she make when she reports back to the Job Centre?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You might suggest the following key points:

- You were given incorrect information about the place and time for the interview.
- The interview wasn't private.
- You made a positive suggestion for improving the situation, but got a hostile response.
- You are worried about losing benefits.

You have had practice in this section with working out the purpose of different texts, recognising what is fact and what is opinion, and picking out important points. These are all really useful skills which you can try using in whatever you read.

6 Reading different texts

Improving your reading means that you can more easily:

- understand the main points of a text
- get to grips with the details of a text
- understand what the person who wrote the text is trying to tell you.

You can also make better use of your reading time.

If you are a **student**:

- you can learn more easily as you study
- you can quickly pick out the main points of anything you read
- you can understand what you read more easily.

If you are at **work**:

- you can read instructions more easily
- you can understand memos and reports more quickly.

If you are **looking for a job**:

- you can cope better with job adverts
- you can fill in long forms more easily.

If you are a **parent**:

- you can help your children with their reading skills
- you can enjoy reading with your children.

In this section, you think about your reading habits and look at ways of making the most of your reading.

6.1 Reading for fun

Reading is a functional requirement of everyday life, but it is also a leisure activity. It can be something that is enjoyable to do. If you enjoy it, you are likely to do it more and get better at it.

Activity 37 Your reading

Allow about 10 minutes

List any texts you can remember reading for pleasure during the last week. These are texts that you didn't *have* to read. Try to name four different kinds of texts.

If you can remember, note down the time of day and the place where you read each item.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here is some of the reading I did last week:

Text	Time	Place
News website	Morning	Bus to work
Crossword puzzle	Morning	Doctor's waiting room
Magazine	Morning	Lounge
Facebook	Break	Coffee shop
Novel	Evening	Sitting in bed

Activity 38 Reading review

Allow about 5 minutes

The labels below show examples of texts that people read for pleasure. For each label, think about how often you read it and drag it to the relevant column.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

Take a look at your three columns. Does anything surprise you? I didn't expect so many things to end up in my 'Not at all' column!

This and the previous activity have encouraged you to review your reading habits. It's always worthwhile trying something new. You could think about skimming and scanning some of the other types of texts. You might find that you enjoy them more than you expect.

Most people have to make time to read. Others are put off by longer texts. They might enjoy skimming and scanning the newspaper or a magazine, but they don't want to tackle a whole book.

Here are some tips for dealing with longer texts:

- Skim and scan the text before you begin to see if you might enjoy it.
- Look at the synopsis (the summary, usually on the back of a book or inside its front or back cover). This tells you what the whole book is about.
- Don't forget that you don't need to understand every word to enjoy a text.
- Read a whole section of the text first, but don't feel you have to stop and go back to check up on something. This will spoil your reading 'flow'.

6.2 Highlighting the main points

When reading is necessary for work or study, a helpful way of making important information in a text stand out is to mark it with a pen. Using a highlighter pen in this way helps you to:

- think carefully about the main points in the text
- focus on the important information
- mark the main points to make it easy to read the text again.

Students often mark the important points in a text in this way when they study for an exam.

Each text is made up of paragraphs. Each paragraph is about one topic of information. Finding the main point in each paragraph makes the text easier to understand.

You can ask yourself:

- What does this paragraph tell me?

Activity 39 Highlighting the main idea

Allow about 10 minutes

This gives you practice in picking out the main idea in a paragraph.

1. Read the paragraph below fairly quickly.
2. Highlight the sentence that sums up the information in the paragraph.
3. Note down a title for the paragraph.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

The paragraph is about the first moon landing in 1969. The best sentence to sum up the subject content is 'Man had landed on the Moon.'

A title could be: **The First Moon Landing.**

Activity 40 More highlights

Allow about 10 minutes

Let's try another. Read the text below and highlight the most important sentence. This is the one that sums up what the whole paragraph is about.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

The paragraph is about the flu epidemic after the First World War. The first sentence gives the main point of the paragraph:

'After the First World War a terrible flu epidemic swept Europe.'

Activity 41 Highlighting a longer text

Allow about 15 minutes

In the text below, highlight the sentence in each paragraph that sums up the main point of that paragraph.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

The important sentences are:

1. Forget travel agents; the new way to pick up a cheap break is by entering a holiday auction on the internet.
2. Getting a holiday by auction is quite different, and much more exciting, than booking up in the normal way.
3. Most of the holidays on offer are cut-price breaks.

Often the first sentence of a paragraph contains the main point. This is sometimes called the topic sentence.

Being able to pick out the main points in a text is very useful. It saves time and helps you to understand a text more quickly. It makes you a more effective reader.

6.3 Reading important texts

You now look at using active reading skills to cope with important and official texts.

When you read an important text it may be longer than the usual ones you read. You need to be able to follow the content of the whole text.

What kinds of important and longer texts do you read? You'll think about this next.

Activity 42 Important texts

Allow about 5 minutes

List any longer and important texts that you have read in the last few weeks. Also include any that you may need to read fairly soon.

The first one is given as an example. Try to list as many as you can.

Income tax form

Discussion

Here are some examples of longer, important texts:

- A letter from the local council or water company about water rates
- A house insurance form
- A letter from school about subject options
- A job application form
- A survey on a new house

These kinds of texts may be difficult to cope with because:

- they may use difficult language
- they are sometimes quite long
- they may have lots of important points
- they may need a reply quite quickly.

Use your active reading skills to first:

- skim the text to get an idea of what it is about; then
- scan it to get the gist and
- decide if you need to read it more deeply.

When reading longer, important texts, you need to think about the following sorts of questions. They will help you to make sense of what you read.

- What is the purpose of the text? Why has it been sent to you? What is it about? What do you expect it to tell you?
- What do you already know that will help you? Look for 'clues' in the text to help you understand the meaning.
- What action do you need to take? Does it need a reply?

Activity 43 Confirmation letter

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the following letter and answer the question:

Jay's Removal and Storage Company
Winwood's Corner
Hagley
Worcs
DY10 8KJ

Dear Madam

Thank you for your acceptance of our quotation. We have pleasure in confirming the following schedule for your removal:

Monday 13 December, arrive at 8.30 am. Pack and load furniture.

Tuesday 14 December, arrive at 8.30 am. Deliver to new property.

We acknowledge receipt of payment and enclose a receipted invoice for your attention.

Assuring you of our best attention at all times.

Jay's Removal and Storage Company

What three pieces of key information in the letter show that it is important and needs to be read carefully?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The three key pieces of information are:

- The company is confirming the removal job.
- The letter contains times and dates.
- The company is confirming they have already been paid.

Sometimes important texts are much longer. The next activity will give you practice in dealing with a longer text.

Activity 44 Texts for study

Allow about 15 minutes

Everyone remembers playing as a child. This means that you already know something of what this text is about.

It is from a psychology textbook about child development.

1. Quickly scan the text. Look at the section headings to get a feel for what the passage is about.
2. Then read the text more deeply, section by section.
3. Highlight the sentence that sums up the information in each section.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

If you were reading this text for an exam, you might decide to make notes. You could use your highlighter pen to pick out the main points as you read through the text.

I highlighted the following sentences:

For a child, playing is their work.

Playing is an activity which seems only to occur in mammals.

Play is a special activity because it allows young mammals to practise actions which they will need in adult life, but in such a way that they will not come to any harm if things go wrong.

By reading these topic sentences – sentences that sum up what a text is about – you can quickly grasp the general meaning of the text.

6.4 Topic sentences

The following activities give you more practice in recognising topic sentences.

Activity 45 Recognising topic sentences

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the following text and answer the questions below:

Generally, people all over Britain speak the same form of English. Many forms of English use dialect words, however, which may not be easily understood by English speakers in other parts of Britain. One example concerns the shoes that school children wear for sport. In the south they are known as 'daps'; they are 'pumps' in the Midland counties and usually known, more formally, as 'gym shoes' in the rest of Britain.

1. What is the text about?

Provide your answer...

Answer

It's about the use of the English language across Britain.

2. What sentence tells you this (the topic sentence)?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The first sentence.

3. Suggest a title for the text.

Provide your answer...

Answer

'The English Language in Britain' is one possibility.

Activity 46 Topic sentences in a longer text

Allow about 15 minutes

Read the following text and highlight the topic sentence in each paragraph.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Now answer these questions in the box below:

- What is the text about?
- What do you think is the purpose of the whole text?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

- These are the topic sentences I highlighted:
Operations for removing children's tonsils used to be very popular
Small children have many coughs and colds, especially in the winter months
The young child's tonsils are usually very large and seem to fill the throat, especially when they are sore and inflamed; after the age of about seven, as the child grows larger, the tonsils seem smaller in proportion.
- The text is about children and tonsillitis.
- The main purpose of the text is to inform parents and other adults about tonsillitis and why taking out a child's tonsils is less common now than in the past.

6.5 Guidance on reading assessments

This section specifically introduces the reading assessments for Functional Skills English Level 1 and Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1. However, if you are not studying for these qualifications you will still find the activity useful, so please read through the section and try out Activity 47.

Functional Skills English Level 1 reading assessments

The way you approach the reading assessments is really important. You can know all the things you need to know, but if you are unfamiliar with the assessment you may not be able to show your knowledge and skills.

Different examining organisations use different formats for their assessments. This means that there can be different styles of questions or a different number of questions, or the total mark can be different. However, some things are the same and so general guidance can be given.

Texts

In a Functional Skills English Level 1 reading assessment you will be required to read and answer questions on two different texts. The topics of these texts could be anything, but they generally relate to the real world in some way. They will be based on situations or subjects that should not be completely unfamiliar to you, such as work, interests or hobbies.

Available marks

Regardless of the type of question or the topic, you will be told how many marks each question is worth. It is important that you consider this information and ensure that your answer is detailed or complete enough to get all the marks. For example, if a question is worth four marks the answer will need to contain four things. This could be four separate pieces of information or two answers and two bits of evidence from the text.

Question formats

Different examining organisations use different types of questions. The two main types of questions you will come across are multiple choice and those that need short written answers.

In both cases you need to take care with your answers and check you have given the answer you intended. In answering multiple choice questions, it is very easy to tick the wrong box. It is also likely that two answers will be quite similar and therefore hard to choose between. If you can eliminate the two that are almost certainly wrong, you give yourself a better chance of working out the correct answer.

It is important with questions that need short written answers that you only give the information required. If four facts are needed, write down four facts. If you don't need to explain something in detail, don't. Lots of waffle could lead to you losing marks rather than picking up extras.

Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 reading assessment

The Essential Skills Level 1 Communication qualification consists of two parts: a confirmatory test and a controlled task.

- In the **confirmatory test**, you are asked to read documents and answer multiple choice questions on them.
- The **controlled task** also assesses your reading skills, alongside your speaking and listening and writing skills. In the controlled task, you have to read two given documents (of about 250 words) and pick out the main points, such as by highlighting and/or making notes. You use the information from one of the documents to take part in a discussion and complete a piece of writing of about 250 words. You use the information from the other document in a second piece of writing.

Activity 47 Practising assessment questions

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the following text, which you first read earlier on in this session, and answer the questions.

Smoke alarms for the home

Smoke alarms are cheap, easy to get hold of and, used properly, they are lifesavers. There's no excuse for not having one.

Smoke alarms save lives. David and Michelle Clarke and their two young children owe their lives to their smoke alarms. In April 2018, an electrical fault started a fire in their home while the family were asleep. Luckily, the smoke triggered the smoke alarms fitted in both the downstairs and upstairs hallways and the family escaped safely. 'I can't believe that some people still don't have smoke alarms', adds Dave. 'What's £5 when it comes to your family's lives?'

A smoke alarm is a warning device that detects smoke at the earliest stages of a fire. If there is a fire in your home it sounds a piercing alarm to warn you. Many people killed in house fires are asleep at the time. A smoke alarm will wake you up and give you vital extra time to escape.

Smoke alarms cost from as little as £5. They are available from DIY stores, electrical shops, many supermarkets and other high-street retailers.

Many people believe that if you are living in rented accommodation the landlord has the responsibility for fitting and testing smoke alarms. This is not completely accurate; your safety is your responsibility. Your landlord must fit the smoke alarms but you need to test them monthly to make sure you are protected.

There are several models of smoke alarm to choose from. The officers from the local fire service will always be happy to help you to choose the best one for your home. Whichever kind you choose look out for the British Standard Kitemark so that you know it is manufactured to the highest standards, and follow the manufacturer's instructions when fitting the smoke alarm.

1. What does the text say many people are doing when they are killed in fires? (1 mark)

- ☐ Testing smoke alarms
- ☐ Sleeping
- ☐ Escaping
- ☐ Cooking

2. What three pieces of advice does the text give about ensuring your smoke alarms are fit for purpose? (3 marks)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Test them monthly.
2. Buy alarms that have the British Kitemark.
3. Follow manufacturer's guidance when fitting.

7 This session's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-session quiz.

[Session 2 quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then return here once you've finished it.

8 Summary

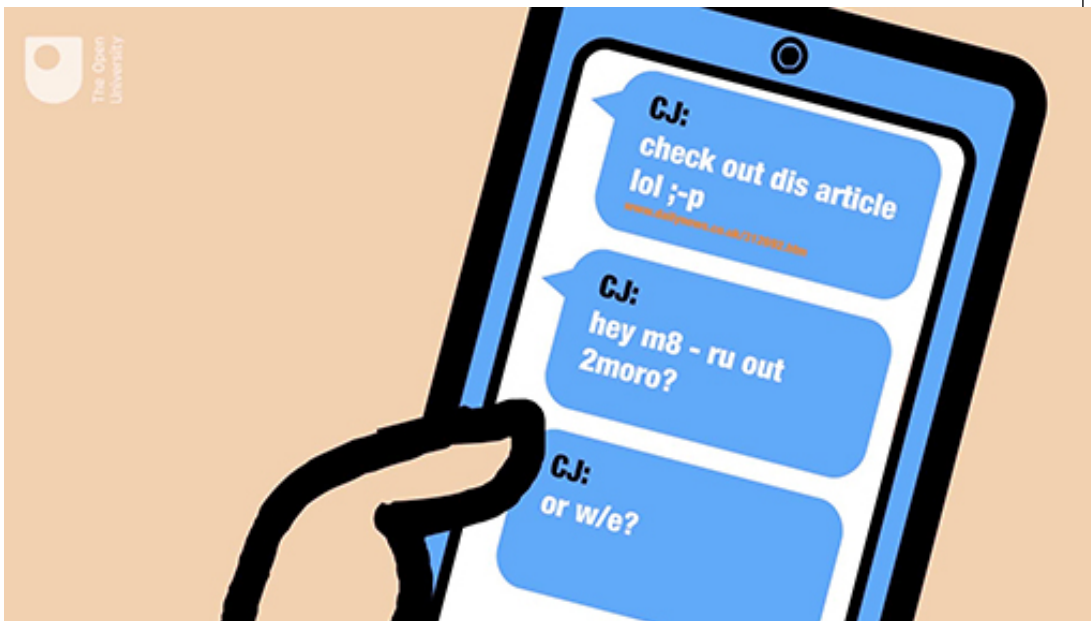
Here are the key learning points from this session.

- In today's world, there is so much you could read that it's important to be able to choose what to read, to identify what you don't have to, and then to be able to read and understand.
- Much of what you read every day, often on your phone, is short and involves single words, phrases or brief sentences. But being able to read, understand and use longer texts such as letters, emails and forms is just as important.
- Being able to tell the difference between facts and opinions is also important, particularly in a world of social media and 'fake news'.
- You can become more aware and active as a reader by asking yourself, when reading something, why it was written, where it comes from and who it is for.
- The four main purposes of non-fiction texts are: to instruct, to describe or explain, to persuade or to inform.
- Skimming can help you to see whether a text is relevant to you and how carefully you should read it.
- Scanning can help you to see what information a text contains and whether it has the key words that you are seeking.
- Structure, presentation and layout make a big difference to how easy a text is to read and how well it gets its message across. Layout features include pictures, logos, bullet points, paragraphs, colour, graphs, charts and text size and formatting.
- Heading and subheadings are like signposts that help you to find your way around. They give you an idea of what to expect in each section.
- When answering a question about a text in a Functional Skills English or Essential Skills Wales Communication assessment, it is very easy to misread the question and give an incorrect answer. You should always read the question carefully.
- The same goes for reading in everyday life. When you extract information from a text for a particular purpose, make sure you extract the information you really need.
- Reading is a skill that needs practice. Reading for pleasure is a great way to practise. It does not matter what you read, but it should be something you enjoy and find interesting, funny or entertaining.

Writing

Introduction

Video content is not available in this format.



Writing has changed a lot already during this century. For many people, what they write, how they write and where they write are completely different from a decade or two ago. Shopping lists are no longer scribbled on bits of scruffy paper; they are tapped into the Notes app on our phones. The work Christmas party is no longer organised by memo but by email. Fewer people write their thoughts in a diary; they now tend to tweet or blog or post online in another way.

A lot of this writing is now short, quick and informal, and therefore expectations around being accurate all the time have changed. For example, 'hi m8 omg last nite' is perfectly acceptable in a text message now. It has no capital letter, no full stop, no other punctuation, an acronym, a number to rhyme with *ate* and night misspelled. In the past you would not have considered writing this in a note to a friend for a second.

These changes do present a challenge. The need for complete accuracy all the time may no longer apply to modern daily writing, but the rules for written English have not changed. Being clever with English to fit 280 characters is a real skill, but if you cannot also write for other, more formal, situations you have a problem.

If you know the rules and can both follow those rules when you need to and break them when you want to, you have the tools for modern writing.

In this session you look at the key parts of writing that you need to know about and use to be able to write appropriately and accurately whatever the text or situation.

1 The writing process



Figure 1 Different ways of writing

Everybody has their own habits when writing. Some of these will be good and some not. This section encourages you to think about your own habits and to develop good ones. The main thing is to be attentive and aware when writing – check, review and re-read all the time so that your writing is as good as it can be.

1.1 What you write down

It might surprise you how much you actually write every day. A lot of our communication is now written.

Activity 1 Daily writing

Allow about 5 minutes

Make a list of the things you might write during a typical day. See if you can think of at least six and then make a note of what you use to write each one.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Your list probably included some of the following:

- Text message – mobile phone
- Email – computer or mobile phone
- Social media posts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) – mobile phone
- Shopping list – phone, pen or, pencil
- Telephone message – pen or felt-tip or pencil
- Letter – computer or pen
- Form – pen or online

Cheque – pen
Instructions – pen or felt-tip or pencil
Notes – pen or felt-tip, tablet or computer, pencil
Essay – computer or pen

You might have included some that aren't on the list. You may well have found that you actually write more than you thought you did!

When you write a shopping list, you might use your phone, or a scrap of paper or the back of an envelope and write with whatever comes to hand – pencil, pen, felt-tip. However, if you write an important letter to apply for a job you are likely to use a computer. If you wrote by hand, you would need to be incredibly neat. In fact, handwritten formal letters are very rare. For most people, writing a job application letter by hand is out of the question.

How often, and how much, you write probably depends on how confident you feel about your handwriting and spelling. You may feel quite happy about sending a text to a friend but feel less confident if you have to write a formal letter or fill in a form.

Activity 2 Your writing

Allow about 5 minutes

Go back to the list you made in Activity 1 and note down whether you feel confident (C), quite confident (Q) or not confident (N) about writing in each of these ways.

Discussion

Did you notice a pattern in your answers? Maybe you found that you were confident writing emails and texts, but less so with business letters and forms. You probably felt most confident with those things that you write most often or that are going to be read by family and friends.

1.2 Planning writing

Much of what you write every day doesn't need to be planned. However, when writing longer or important texts, planning is vital to ensure your writing does what you need it to do.

Planning before you start writing helps you make sure that you include all the information that you need to. When you plan you need to consider why you are writing, who you are writing for and what that person needs to know.

There are generally two useful ways of planning: making notes or drawing a diagram. These diagrams are sometimes called spider-diagrams, mind-maps or thought-showers.

Figure 2 A spider diagram

For example, when you write a formal letter, you need to plan it carefully. Planning will make sure that:

- you include all the important information
- you put your points in the right order
- your letter makes sense

- your letter uses the right language and tone.

Activity 3 Planning a letter

Allow about 15 minutes

Imagine this has happened to you:

You bought a new vacuum cleaner on 25 September from Ultra-Cool Electrical Products but it has stopped working. It has lost all suction power.

The machine cost £75 and you want the shop to give you a replacement. You are going to write explaining what has happened and telling them that you will come in on Saturday to bring it back and collect a new one. You need them to let you know if they won't have a replacement in stock because you don't want a wasted journey.

The address of the shop is 54 West Street, Anytown, Allshire, ABC 345 and the manager's name is Steve Trent.

Use one of the planning methods suggested above – making notes or drawing a diagram – to create a plan for a formal letter of complaint to the store. Do not write the letter.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Your plan may have looked something like this:

- Address of shop
- Name of manager
- Do they have one in stock?
- Will they replace it?
- What has happened?
- When it was bought
- When you will come in
- What the product is
- Your details

There is no right way of doing this, but all the main points need to be included. They don't have to be in any particular order.

If you drew a spider diagram, it may look something like this:

Figure 3 A spider diagram for the vacuum cleaner letter

Activity 4 More planning

Allow about 15 minutes

You have been asked to help plan a family party and you need to design the invitations. Read the details below and then make a note of the points you will need to include on the invitation.

John and Sylvia are going to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on 1 June with a party at the Village Hall in Bridham. They are hoping that all the family will be able to come and expect that there will be about 60 guests. There will be a buffet supper and disco. The party will start at 7.30 p.m. and carry on until midnight. They need to know by 1 May how many people are able to come. Replies will need to be sent to you.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Well done if you included the following points:

- Who:** John and Sylvia
- What:** 40th Wedding Anniversary Party
- Where:** Bridham Village Hall
- When:** 1 June, 7.30 p.m. – midnight
- Details:** buffet supper and disco
- RSVP:** 1 May
- Your contact details** for people to send their replies to.

When you plan your writing, you should think about what you are writing, who is going to read it and its purpose. Planning helps you focus on the main points and think about the style and tone that you will need to use for your final piece of work. Use your plan to check that you have included all the necessary information.

1.3 Drafting

In an ideal world, every time you write a longer text you would plan it and then draft it before writing the final version. This would give you the best chance of writing a text that was as good as it could possibly be.

However, in everyday life this does not happen. This is partly because computers allow you to read and edit your writing as you are doing it, so you write it once and then adapt it if you need to. Drafting also takes time and this is something that you often do not have.

Time is something you have to be aware of in any kind of writing assessment. In a **Functional Skills English Level 1** writing assessment, you may not have time to write a draft. In the **Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1** controlled task, you must produce a draft or you will lose marks.

In general, drafting is a worthwhile activity and can only add quality to your writing.

Activity 5 Drafting a letter

Allow about 10 minutes

Elements of the letter that you planned in Activity 3 are given in the interactive below. Drag the points into a sensible order for a letter.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

Your points might be ordered something like this:

1. Address of shop
2. Name of manager
3. What the product is
4. When it was bought
5. What has happened
6. Will they replace it?
7. Do they have one in stock?
8. When you will come in
9. Your details

Activity 6 Further drafting

Allow about 10 minutes

Now write a sentence or add the details for each of the numbered points. Here's the list again:

1. Address of shop
2. Name of manager
3. What the product is
4. When it was bought
5. What has happened
6. Will they replace it?
7. Do they have one in stock?
8. When you will come in
9. Your details

And here's the original information you were given:

You bought a new vacuum cleaner on 25 September from Ultra-Cool Electrical Products but it has stopped working. It has lost all suction power.

The machine cost £75 and you want the shop to give you a replacement. You are going to write explaining what has happened and telling them that you will come in

on Saturday to bring it back and collect a new one. You need them to let you know if they won't have a replacement in stock because you don't want a wasted journey. The address of the shop is 54 West Street, Anytown, Allshire ABC 345 and the manager's name is Steve Trent.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are suggestions for each point:

1. Ultra Cool Electrical Products, 54 West Street, Anytown, Allshire ABC 345
2. Steve Trent
3. The product is a vacuum cleaner.
4. It was bought on 25 September 2018.
5. After three weeks the cleaner stopped working. It turns on but does not have any suction power and will not pick anything up.
6. Please confirm that as the product is under guarantee you will replace it.
7. Before I make the journey to the shop please can you let me know if you have another cleaner in stock as I do not want to have a wasted journey.
8. I will come into your shop on Saturday 2 October to collect the replacement.
9. My telephone number is 01357 234789.

You now have a basic draft of the letter. Notice that for the draft you do not need to put in your address. When drafting you don't need to use the full structure of a letter. Addresses can be added when you write the final version.

1.4 Editing your writing

Editing means checking, improving, re-reading or proofreading your writing. It is the point at which you correct errors and make changes so that it looks and sounds as good as it can. It should be something you do whenever you write anything – you should really read every text message you send as it is easy to say something you don't mean.

Checking or proofreading what you have written is a vital part of the writing process. This means reading your work carefully to find any errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. If you are not absolutely sure that something is correct it is important that you check it, to make sure mistakes are found and corrected. Obviously in an assessment or exam you will lose marks for errors if you don't check your work, but in real life there are equally serious consequences. If there are errors in your writing, at best the reader might think you are lazy; at worst they may think you do not have the knowledge or skills to get it right. In both cases you are judged negatively. If you are applying for a job, your chances of getting it will shrink.

Activity 7 Proofreading

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the draft of the letter below. Using the highlighting tool, highlight as many errors as you can.

Then write the correct spellings of the misspelt words in the box.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Check how many of the errors (shown in bold) you found and your corrected spellings (in square brackets):

On 25 **Seppmbeber** [September] I bought a **vacum** [vacuum] cleaner, model Ultra Cool ZX3 costing £75, from your shop.

After three weeks the **the** cleaner stopped working. It turns on but does not have any **sucktion powder** [suction power] and will not pick anything up.

Please confirm that as the product is under guarantee you will **replase** [replace] **it.** I will come into your shop on Saturday 2 October to collect the replacement. **Before** I make the journey to the shop please let me know by telephone if you have another cleaner in **stoke** [stock].

My telephone number is 01357 234789.

Note the corrected spellings: September, vacuum, suction, power, replace, stock.

Notice also that the longest paragraph needed to be broken up into three sentences, like this:

Please confirm that as the product is under guarantee you will replace it. I will come into your shop on Saturday 2 October to collect the replacement. Before I make the journey to the shop please let me know by telephone if you have another cleaner in stock.

Activity 8 More proofreading

Allow about 10 minutes

The text below explains how the 'Chip and PIN' system works. There are several spelling errors. Highlight the misspelled words. Then in the box below, write the correct spellings of the words you've highlighted.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Check if you found all the errors – here are the correct spellings:

introduced
for
offers
security
debit
identification
typed
required
receipt.

Here are the errors in the paragraph along with the corrected spellings:

In 2004, banks introduced **[introduced]** a system for **[for]** payment called 'Chip & PIN'. This offers **[offers]** greater security **[security]** than a signature when a debit or credit card is used for payment. Card fraud cost around £2 billion in the UK in 2018. Debt **[debit]** and credit cards are issued with a 'smart' chip that contains the cardholder's PIN (personal identification **[identification]** number). When the card is used for payment the PIN number is typed **[typed]** into a keypad at the till and a signature is not required **[required]**. In some situations, customers will still need to sign a receipt **[receipt]**.

1.5 Final version

In everyday writing (and for Functional Skills English and Essential Skills Wales Communication assessments), your final version of a written text is the most important part. It is the bit that gets marked or judged. You should have corrected all the errors up to this point so that your final copy is exactly as you want it to be.

Activity 9 Final letter

Allow about 15 minutes

Use your plan and draft from Activity 6 to write a final version of the letter about the vacuum cleaner. You can do it either in the box below or in a word processing app like Word.

Here's your draft from Activity 6:

Display of content entered previously

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Did you remember that you need to put your address and the date on the letter? As this is a business letter, you should also include the address of the person you are writing to.

The letter must start and finish appropriately. If you don't know the name of the person you are writing to, start with 'Dear Sir or Madam' and finish with 'Yours faithfully'. If you do know their name, start the letter with 'Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs ... (add their name)' and finish with 'Yours sincerely'.

Your final version should look similar to this:

123 My Street

Anytown

Allshire

AB1 2CD

Tel 01234 234789

28 September 2019

Steve Trent, Manager

Ultra Cool Electric Products

54 West Street

Anytown

Allshire

ABC 345

Dear Mr Trent

On 25 September I bought a vacuum cleaner, model Ultra Cool ZX3 costing £75, from your shop.

After three weeks the cleaner stopped working. It turns on but does not have any suction power and will not pick anything up.

Please confirm that as the product is under guarantee you will replace it. I will come into your shop on Saturday 2 October to collect the replacement. Before I make the journey to the shop please let me know by telephone if you have another cleaner in stock.

Thank you for your help with this matter.

Yours sincerely

A. N. Customer

You've now gone through the process of planning, drafting and producing the final version of a formal letter. You've had some practice at proofreading. You'll now go on to look at the different kinds of text you may have to write.

2 What you write

Figure 4 Different kinds of text: a speech, a report, an email and a letter

When you think of writing while doing an English course you think of spelling, punctuation and grammar. These will be covered later, but another important aspect is *what* you write.

A **Functional Skills English Level 1** assessment requires you to write texts of around 200 words. The **Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1** controlled task requires you to write two documents, one of which will need to be at least 250 words long.

The types of text you could be asked to write in the writing assessments are letters, articles (newspaper or magazine, printed or online), emails, speeches or reports. How these texts look on the page and how they are put together is really important.

In reality most people don't actually write texts as long as articles, speeches or even letters very often. Your everyday written communication probably revolves around shorter texts and often there is no need for perfect spelling, punctuation and grammar.

In this section you look at the key texts that you should be comfortable writing and their format, content and purpose.

2.1 Letters

Most people struggle to remember the last time they wrote a letter, whether formal or informal. Formal letters are usually written for work or to complain or apply for a job. In many of these cases, emails, tweets and other social media posts are taking over. For example, people often tweet about bad customer experience or post a picture of poor food on their social media accounts.

Informal letters are more likely to be to someone you know, for example to thank them. Again, messaging is used more and more for this.

Activity 10 Writing letters

Allow about 2 minutes

Can you remember the last letter you wrote (other than the one you've just written about the vacuum cleaner!)? Was it informal or formal? Who was it to? What was it about?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

If you struggled to answer these questions, this section might be particularly helpful to you. Improving your writing comes with practice and if you do not write a lot of letters, this section gives you the opportunity to develop skills that you will need to pass a Functional Skills English or Essential Skills assessment.

Formal or informal?

A letter can be formal or informal. Which one it is depends on its purpose, content and intended audience. This is similar for other types of writing, but letters are a good way to show the differences between formal and informal writing.

When you write anything, your reader understands its meaning in two different ways: what the text says and how it is written.

The words in the text give you information, but the tone of the language is also important. This tells you whether the text is serious or funny, friendly or official, angry or light-hearted. It tells you about the purpose of the text. It also gives you clues about who it is meant for.

Whenever you begin to read a text, especially a letter, you usually know straight away whether it is:

- formal – from an organisation like the local council or a college
- informal – from a friend or relation.

This is because you notice clues like these in the text:

- the style of address: how the letter begins.
- the kind of language that is used: very formal or friendly and personal.
- the way it ends: for example, 'Yours faithfully' or 'Best wishes'.

Activity 11 Informal language

Allow about 10 minutes

The information in Texts A and B below is the same, but the style and language used is quite different.

In Text B, highlight examples of:

- slang words
- a friendly/casual style
- use of capital letters.

Text A

Dear Sir/Madam

Owing to unforeseen circumstances, it will be necessary to make an 8% increase in water rates in your area from April 2019.

Yours faithfully

Fred Bloggs

Hampshire County Council Water Rate Manager

Text B

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

Here are examples of the three signs of informal language from Text B:

Slang words: 'dosh', 'cause'

Friendly/casual style: 'Stay cool, man!'

Capital letters: 'RIGHT NOW'

You would not use this kind of language in a formal letter of complaint or a job application letter.

You can probably picture a letter in your mind, but what does a piece of writing actually need in order to be considered a letter?

Elements of a letter

The letter below is a formal letter of application.

Figure 5 The elements of a letter

There is some flexibility as to where certain parts of a letter go. For example, the writer's address can also be in the top left of the letter and you may also see it run along the top of the page. However, following the traditional format ensures that you do not run the risk of the reader missing key information or losing marks for using the wrong format in an exam.

Below is the usual format of a formal letter:

- The writer's address in the top right-hand or top left-hand corner
- The date underneath that address
- The address of the person/company being written to is lower down on the left-hand side
- The greeting is underneath that address
- The body of the letter follows the greeting
- The closing or sign-off is on the left-hand side, underneath main text
- Your signature (if hand-written) underneath
- Your name underneath

The greeting and closing/sign-off

The usual greetings used in a formal letter are 'Dear Sir/Madam'. If you know the person's name, it's 'Dear' and then their name.

If you use Sir/Madam, the closing should be 'Yours faithfully'.

If you use their name, the closing should be 'Yours sincerely'.

It is becoming more acceptable to break these rules and it is quite common to end even formal letters with 'Kind regards' or 'Yours truly'. However, when asked to write a formal letter it is sensible to follow the traditional rules.

Activity 12 Informal letters

Allow about 5 minutes

Informal letters are less likely to stick to the rules. Can you think of some examples of why you might write an informal letter and who you might write one to?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You might have thought of thank you letters to family members or friends, pen-pal letters or catch-up letters to friends living far away.

2.2 Emails

You could be asked to write a formal email for a Functional Skills English Level 1 or an Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 assessment.

In general, emails have taken over from letters in everyday life. Emails are usually more informal than letters but can be formal. A formal email is less formal than a formal letter, but you still need to ensure that the correct parts of an email are present. Below is an example of a formal email of complaint, based on the same case as in the letter you wrote earlier.

To: steve.trent@ultracool.com

Subject: Faulty Vacuum

Dear Mr Trent

On 25 September I bought a vacuum cleaner, model Ultra Cool ZX3 costing £75, from your shop.

After three weeks the cleaner stopped working. It turns on but does not have any suction power and will not pick anything up.

Please confirm that as the product is under guarantee you will replace it. I will come into your shop on Saturday 2 October to collect the replacement. Before I make the journey to the shop please can you let me know by telephone if you have another cleaner in stock? My telephone number is 01234 567890.

Thank you for your help with this matter.

Kind regards

A N Customer

This is the usual structure of an email, although not all will be exactly the same:

- the recipient's address (this needs to be selected or written)
- the subject of the email
- the greeting
- the body of the email
- the closing/sign-off.

Greetings and closings in an email are much more flexible than in a letter.

If you are writing a formal email (for a job application, for example), you can still use the formal 'Dear Sir/Madam' used in a letter. However, you are more likely to know the name of the person you are writing to, so to set a friendly tone the name of the person is usually used in the greeting. It is also acceptable to write 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon'.

If the email is formal and you don't know the person you are emailing well, use 'Dear'. If the email is not formal and you know the person, 'Hi' is often fine.

You can use 'Yours faithfully' to close an email, but 'Kind regards' or 'Best regards' are much more common.

2.3 Articles and news reports

Articles and news reports are similar kinds of writing. They both give information, ideas and opinions on a particular topic. They can be a variety of lengths, from short summaries to detailed descriptions.

Articles and news reports are written for newspapers and magazines, both printed and online. In terms of format, they must have a title, heading or headline, and the author's name may be included at the beginning or the end. They often include pictures or other images to add information and interest.

The text below is an example of a short article. Notice how it has a title or heading and gives information on a particular topic.

The European Computer Driving Licence

The ECDL is an internationally recognised qualification that allows people to demonstrate their ability to use a computer for all kinds of tasks.

It is the best-known IT certificate in Europe and will soon become the most widely studied computer qualification in the rest of the world.

The ECDL is split into two parts: Level 1 and Level 2. It is designed to cover the key concepts of computing and its practical uses at home, in education and in the workplace.

Registration for the ECDL takes place at any college or school that is a Test Centre. Each student is given a logbook to record his or her progress. As the students pass the tests the results are recorded in their logbook. When all the tests have been completed and passed, the logbook is handed in. Then the full ECDL Certificate is issued to the student.

Most leading companies and other employers understand the importance of the ECDL. They know that any of their workers who has an ECDL Certificate has shown that they have an up-to-date computer qualification. The employers also know that the ECDL is a well-organised course that helps their workers to use computer skills in their jobs.

2.4 Speeches

In work or studies (including in a Functional Skills English Level 1 assessment), you may be required to write a speech, that is, the written version of something that someone would present. Because a speech is written for someone to speak, you have to take account of the fact that it will be spoken, so it can be a little less formal than a report or article.

When a speech is written down, it can look similar to an article. For example, they both need a title, but rather than having the author's name at the beginning or the end, in a speech the presenter introduces him- or herself at the start. For example:

'Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Sara and I am here today to talk to you about business loans.'

At the end of the speech there will be some form of ending. Again, the speaker mentions the audience in some way:

'Thanks to you all for listening today. If you have any further questions I will be here for a little while when we finish, or feel free to contact me by email.'

Activity 13 Check what you've learnt: what you write

Allow about 5 minutes

1. What type of text is most likely to have a headline?
 - ☐ Speech
 - ☐ Article
 - ☐ Email
2. If a letter ends, 'Yours sincerely', is it likely to be formal or informal?
 - ☐ Formal
 - ☐ Informal
3. Which is likely to be more formal: a speech or a report?
 - ☐ Report
 - ☐ Speech
4. Name one place articles are published.

Provide your answer...

Answer

Newspapers or magazines, printed or online.

5. In what type of text are you most likely to use the sign-off 'Kind regards'?
 - ☐ Email
 - ☐ Letter
 - ☐ Article
6. Readers read articles, but audiences _____ to speeches.

Provide your answer...

Answer

Listen.

3 Spelling

There is no proven link between spelling and intelligence, but people often read a text with lots of spelling mistakes and make a connection anyway. There are many reasons for spelling mistakes, from tapping the wrong key to learning difficulties such as dyslexia. However, there are times when it is vital that your spelling is correct. Exams are a good example of this, but also when writing formally such as in work emails, job application letters and essays.

There are two parts to good spelling: being able to spell the words you want to spell in the first place and, more importantly, checking your spelling to make sure it is correct.

Spelling is something that you never stop learning. You will never be able to spell every single word correctly every single time, but there are ways to get better at it.

3.1 Look Say Cover Write Check

This is one of the most basic and common methods used to improve spelling. It does not work for everybody, but no method does. This one can be very powerful when learning spellings.

Activity 14 Look Say Cover Write Check

Allow about 10 minutes

Think of three words that you know you have difficulty spelling correctly and find the correct spelling for each one.

Now follow the Look Say Cover Write Check process for each word: **look** at it; read it a few times and **say** it carefully and clearly three times; **cover** it over so you cannot see it (don't cheat!); **write** it out; **check** it. Repeat this three times for each word.

Discussion

This method can be very effective when focused on key words that you need to spell. Often it can take more than one session to really get the correct spelling to stick in your memory. So it will be worth doing this activity, with your three words, again over the next few days.

3.2 Commonly misspelled words

It is easy to find a list of the most commonly misspelled words. Spelling errors follow general patterns and looking at just ten of the most commonly misspelled words shows this.

Ten of the most commonly misspelled words

separate: often spelt 'seperate'

accommodate or **accommodation**: often an 'm' or 'c' or both are missed

a lot: often spelt as one word
definitely: often spelt 'definatly'
unnecessary: often two 'c's are put in or an 'n' or 's' is missed
embarrass: one 'r' or 's' or both are often missed out
acknowledge: the 'c' or 'k' is often left out
receive: often spelt 'recieve'
until: often double 'l' put on the end
occurred: a 'c' or 'r' or both are often left out
government: the 'n' is often not included

These words tend to be commonly misspelled either because the way they sound doesn't exactly match the letters used or because they have double-letter patterns that are tricky to remember.

If you can identify the common words that you misspell, you can learn ways to remember them such as with rhymes or memory prompts.

3.3 Memory aids

One way to remember how to spell a word is to find something in the word itself that makes it memorable. In the examples below, note how the letters in bold type can help you remember how to spell the word.

Ways of remembering some spellings

Separate – Pull **a**part (to pull things apart is to separate them)
Stationery – **P**aper (paper is one sort of stationery); or an **e**nvelope is an item of stationery
Stationary – **C**ar (when a car is not moving it is stationary)
Accommodation – **t**wo cots and **t**wo mattresses
Secretary – a good **s**ecretary keeps a **s**ecret
February – **brrrrrr** it's cold in **F**ebruary
Necessary – **o**ne collar, **t**wo sleeves

Another way of remembering spelling is by associating each letter with a word. For example, here's one way of remembering how to spell 'necessary':

Never **E**at **C**ake **E**at **S**almon **S**andwiches **A**nd **R**emain **Y**oung

Even just thinking of cake and salmon sandwiches should help you remember that the word has one c and two ss.

Here's one for rhythm:

Rhythm **H**as **Y**our **T**wo **H**ips **M**oving.

And because:

Big Elephants Can't Always Use Small Exits.

Activity 15 Word play

Allow about 10 minutes

You might know ways of remembering how other tricky words are spelt. If so, make a note of them in the box below.

Then choose one of the words you identified earlier that you find difficult to spell. See if you can make up some word play to remember it.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There are at least two other good examples for necessary:

the **cess**pool in the middle

the shirt prompt for the c and the ss - one collar, two sleeves.

If you can make up your own rhymes or prompts for the words you struggle to spell, you are far more likely to remember them. This is a flexible and fun way to remember correct spellings.

Chunking

If a word is very long you can break it down into small chunks like this:

Environment: Env – iron – ment.

Then remember that there is an 'iron' in the middle!

3.4 Homophones

Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings. They are often mixed up. Below are the ten most commonly mixed-up homophones:

two, to, too

there, their, they're

weather, whether

would, wood

sea, see

four, for, fore

our, are

hear, here

no, know

knew, new

Activity 16 Using homophones

Allow about 10 minutes

Select the correct homophone in the following sentences.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

Here are the correct sentences again:

1. They're over there in their car.
2. It's too late for the two of you to go.
3. There is no way you know her.
4. If we sit here we will be able to hear the radio.
5. We are going to visit our favourite beach tomorrow.
6. I just don't know whether the weather is going to improve.

3.5 Common spelling patterns and the exceptions

Another helpful strategy is to recognise patterns of letters that are always spelt the same way. These are generally easy to see when they come at the beginning or the end of a word. They are then called prefixes and suffixes.

Prefixes

Prefixes are patterns of letters that come at the beginning of a word.

Activity 17 'Pre' pattern

Allow about 5 minutes

How many words can you think of that start with the letters pre?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

How about present, preview, pretend, prefix, presume, precise? You may have thought of others.

Activity 18 More prefixes

Allow about 10 minutes

How many words can you think of that start with the following prefixes? Aim for two for each.

un, in, mis, re, anti, im, dis

un:

in:

mis:

re:

anti:

im:

dis:

Discussion

Here are some examples:

undo, unimpressive

instinct, intense

misunderstand, misinform

respect, resist

anticipate, antidote

impressive, imperfect

discount, disturb

Prefixes often have a specific meaning and can change the meaning of a word. For example, 're' means to do again (as in 'rerun') and 'im' means the opposite of (as in 'impossible').

When you add a prefix to a word, you don't change the spelling of the original word; for example, it is 'misspelling', not 'mispelling'.

Activity 19 Matching prefixes

Allow about 5 minutes

Match each of the following words with one of the prefixes from the previous activities to make a new word.

take, port, social, appear, likely, patient, member, sent

Here are the prefixes again:

un, in, pre, mis, re, anti, im, dis

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some examples. You may well have thought of others.

mistake, import, antisocial, disappear, unlikely, impatient, remember,
present

Suffixes

Let's look at word endings now. Lots of words end in -ing, but some other common endings are:

ment, tion, ally, ness, ly, ful

Activity 20 'ment' suffix

Allow about 2 minutes

How many words can you think of that end in 'ment'?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are some:

establishment, encouragement, agreement, apartment.

You probably thought of different ones.

Activity 21 More suffixes

Allow about 5 minutes

How many words can you think of that end with the following suffixes?

ally, tion, ness, ly, ful

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are a few:

basically, physically

recreation, intention
usefulness, calmness
hopefully, carefully
hopeful, careful.

You may well have thought of different ones.

3.6 New words

English is a constantly changing language. The meaning of words shifts and new words are used all the time.

Lots of words and names have come into the English language as people begin to eat new foods, for example:

Colby cheese, Feta cheese, Monterey Jack cheese, Guacamole, Jalapeño peppers

Other relatively new words include:

kebabs, tacos, chilli, pizza, pasta, latte, espresso.

A new invention or technology means someone has to think of a word to describe it, like internet, email, spam, WiFi, smartphone and selfie.

Some words have been combined with others to make new words:

brunch (breakfast + lunch)

smog (smoke + fog)

ginormous (gigantic + enormous).

English is sometimes called a 'living language'. This means that it is changing all the time, as new words are added and old ones go out of fashion.

Activity 22 New everyday words

Allow about 5 minutes

Take a minute to look at the picture and see if you can spot things that have had new words created for them or that use an old word in a new way. List them in the box below.



Figure 6 The technology in a modern living room

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You might have spotted:

- a smartphone
- headphones
- a laptop with a mouse and a memory stick
- an extension lead
- a CD or DVD in a case
- a WiFi router
- a television screen and a digital box/recorder.
- speakers.

There was a time when none of these things existed, so these words would not have been understood by anyone!

3.7 Correcting your spelling

As you've already noted, checking your work is vital. Proofreading is a key part of the writing process. It enables you to identify and correct spelling, grammar and punctuation errors. It also gives you the opportunity to improve the content, order and style if you need to.

When proofreading for spelling, the rule must be that **if you are unsure of something, check it.**

There are some easy ways of checking words you are not sure about:

- **Look it up in a dictionary.** You can use an online or book dictionary, or a dictionary app. Online or app dictionaries are not restricted by physical size so tend to have more words.
- **Use the spell checker** on your computer. It can check either as you write or specific words that you type in. Be aware that a spell checker may not pick up all your mistakes, such as incorrect use of homophones.
- **Use predictive text** on your phone messaging app.
- **Find other texts** that are likely to contain the word, and that you know are reliable, and check there.

It can be helpful to keep a **personal spelling dictionary** for you to log the words you find difficult to spell.

Activity 23 Finding spelling mistakes

Allow about 10 minutes

In the text below, highlight all the words that you think might contain spelling errors.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

Check to see if you found all of them:

February, worried, appointment, necessary, journey, accommodation, two,
received

4 Grammar

Grammar is basically the set of rules for the way words are put together to form sentences.

As you have seen in previous sessions, spoken language is more flexible than written language. In fact, everyday communication is becoming more and more informal and regularly breaks the rules. However, for formal or important written pieces you cannot break the rules as much. You have to be careful and accurate.

4.1 Proper sentences

A sentence is a group of words that are put together to give a complete piece of information. There are no rules for how many words there has to be in a sentence.

A sentence must make sense on its own, begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark.

Activity 24 Recognising sentences

Allow about 5 minutes

Read each group of words below. Check the box next to the ones you think are sentences.

- ☐ This is my favourite programme.
- ☐ The form fill.
- ☐ It will soon my birthday.
- ☐ Send me a text tomorrow.
- ☐ The pen is table.

Discussion

Only two of these examples are sentences: 'This is my favourite programme' and 'Send me a text tomorrow.' They are the only ones that make sense on their own.

A sentence can also ask a question or give a command. For example:

Where are you going?

Go away!

Activity 25 More recognising sentences

Allow about 5 minutes

Select which of the statements below you think are sentences.

- ☐ What time does the film start?
- ☐ Be quiet!
- ☐ We've the bus!
- ☐ How is it to the bus stop?
- ☐ He was late.

Discussion

The only three statements that make sense are 'What time does the film start?', 'Be quiet!' and 'He was late.' These are all sentences.

The other two statements seem to have words missing and don't make sense.

4.2 Subjects and verbs

Most sentences also need to contain a subject and a verb.

The subject

The subject tells you who or what the sentence is about. The rest of the sentence will give more detail about the subject.

For example, in

The driver took the wrong turn.

the driver is the subject.

Activity 26 Spot the subject

Allow about 5 minutes

Read the sentences below and see if you can pick out the subject. Write them in the box below.

The car needs more petrol.

I will ring the bank tomorrow.

Jane has bought a new digital camera.

Birmingham is a major city.

The stadium is quite new.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The subject of each sentence is in bold:

The car needs more petrol.

I will ring the bank tomorrow.

Jane has bought a new digital camera.

Birmingham is a major city.

The stadium is quite new.

Verbs

Verbs describe what is happening in a sentence. You may remember a verb being called a 'doing' word.

For example, in this sentence:

I read this web page last week.

'read' is the verb – it is the action that happened.

Activity 27 Spot the verb

Allow about 5 minutes

Look at the following sentences and this time identify the verb. Write them in the box below.

I always buy petrol from here.

She sent him a message.

They drive to London every weekend.

The team played at home.

Gardeners work outside.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The verb in each sentence is in bold:

I always **buy** petrol from here.

She **sent** him a message.

They **drive** to London every weekend.

The team **played** at home.

Gardeners **work** outside.

4.3 Longer sentences

So far, all the sentences you have looked at have been short. They are called simple sentences – there is only one part to them. Simple sentences can be joined together to make a compound sentence by using a conjunction.

Examples of conjunctions are:

and, so, but, because, although

A compound sentence could look like this:

I enjoy my job and I work near my house.

Each part would still make sense on its own: I enjoy my job. I work near my house.

Activity 28 Using conjunctions

Allow about 5 minutes

Look at the following short sentences and use a conjunction to make them into one compound sentence. Write your answer in the space underneath.

I am going on holiday. I am looking forward to it.

Provide your answer...

Mark has got a new job. It is a very long journey each day.

Provide your answer...

The computer is quite old. It is still reliable.

Provide your answer...

The shop is convenient for me. It is on the corner.

Provide your answer...

I am going to buy that coat. It is quite expensive.

Provide your answer...

Answer

You can see the conjunctions in bold:

I am going on holiday **and** I am looking forward to it.

Mark has got a new job **but** it is a very long journey each day.

The computer is quite old **but** it is still reliable.

The shop is convenient for me **because** it is on the corner.

I am going to buy that coat **although** it is quite expensive.

4.4 Past, present and future

The verb describes the action in a sentence. It also tells you when the action happens – in the past, the present or the future. This is called the tense.

For example, 'I walked' or 'I was walking' is past tense, 'I walk' or 'I am walking' is present tense and 'I will walk' is future tense.

Activity 29 Past, present or future?

Allow about 5 minutes

Read the following sentences and decide whether they are in the past, present or future tense.

1. I am walking.

- ☐ Past
- ☐ Present
- ☐ Future

2. You lost the match.

- ☐ Past
- ☐ Present
- ☐ Future

3. He will run in the race.

- ☐ Past
- ☐ Present
- ☐ Future

4. She posted it.

- ☐ Past
- ☐ Present
- ☐ Future

5. It was raining.

- ☐ Past
- ☐ Present
- ☐ Future

6. We are cooking.

- ☐ Past
- ☐ Present
- ☐ Future

7. You will be going on holiday.

- ☐ Past
- ☐ Present
- ☐ Future

8. They like singing.

- ☐ Past
- ☐ Present

- Future

Activity 30 Tenses in texts

Allow about 15 minutes

In the text below, highlight the ten mistakes in the use of tenses. Then rewrite the text correctly in the box underneath.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Here are the ten mistakes, in bold:

Last Tuesday I **will go** to the Post Office when I **see** a dog in the road. It **will bark** and **is** running in circles. I **will go** to talk to it when a lady came round the corner and **calls** 'Henry, Henry'. He **runs** up to her and she **will put** him on the lead.

Here is the corrected text:

Last Tuesday I **was going** to the Post Office when I **saw** a dog in the road. It **barked/was barking** and **was** running in circles. I **went** to talk to it when a lady came round the corner and **called** 'Henry, Henry'. He **ran** up to her and she **put** him on the lead.

Well done if you spotted some or all of these. When tenses get mixed up the result can be quite confusing.

4.5 Verb and subject agreement

Earlier you practised identifying the subject of the sentence. You have just looked at making sure the verb is in the right tense. What you are going to look at now is making sure that the verb and the subject agree so that the sentence makes sense.

Two of the most common verbs in English are 'to be' and 'to have'. Look at the following tables that show how these verbs are used in the past, present and future tenses.

'To be': past, present and future tense

Past	Present	Future
I was	I am	I will be
You were	You are	You will be

He/ she/ it was	He/she/ it is	He/ she/it will be
We were	We are	We will be
You were	You are	You will be
They were	They are	They will be

'To have': past, present and future tense

Past	Present	Future
I had	I have	I will have
You had	You have	You will have
He/ she/ it had	He/she/ it has	He/ she/it will have
We had	We have	We will have
You had	You have	You will have
They had	They have	They will have

Activity 31 Verb–subject agreement

Allow about 10 minutes

Look at the following sentences which all use the verbs 'to be' and 'to have'. They all contain errors. Rewrite them in the box using the correct form of the verb. Keep the tense the same; for example, if the original sentence is in the present tense, rewrite it in the present tense too.

The girls is tired.

Provide your answer...

I has a very bad cold.

Provide your answer...

They was late for the appointment.

Provide your answer...

He will had a birthday next week.

Provide your answer...

Answer

Here are the sentences with the correct tenses:

The girls are tired.

I have a very bad cold.

They were late for the appointment.

He will have a birthday next week.

Now try four more.

We is going to Liverpool on the train.

Provide your answer...

They will has a new person starting work next week.

Provide your answer...

The film were really good.

Provide your answer...

They has moved to a new house.

Provide your answer...

Answer

Here are the sentences with the correct tenses:

We are going to Liverpool on the train.

They will have a new person starting work next week.

The film was really good.

They have moved to a new house.

Activity 32 Correcting verb–subject agreement

Allow about 10 minutes

Rewrite the following sentences, changing either the subject or the verb so they agree. There might be more than one alternative that would make sense.

Six boys is looking for a lost memory stick.

Provide your answer...

They goes to the cinema on Wednesdays.

Provide your answer...

Sarah have left her book on the bus.

Provide your answer...

The last train leave at 7.30 pm.

Provide your answer...

I loves fishing at the weekend.

Provide your answer...

Answer

Here are some alternatives:

‘Six boys are looking for a lost memory stick’ or ‘A boy is looking for a lost memory stick.’

‘They go to the cinema on Wednesdays’ or ‘She goes to the cinema on Wednesdays.’

‘Sarah has left her book on the bus’ or ‘They have left her book on the bus.’

‘The last train leaves at 7.30 pm’ or ‘The last trains leave at 7.30 pm.’

‘I love fishing at the weekend’ or ‘She loves fishing at the weekend.’

You now move on to look at the other thing that can help you to write clearly: punctuation.

5 Punctuation

Like spelling and grammar, accurate punctuation is very important in communicating clearly in writing. Punctuation is the set of marks or symbols that help keep meaning clear and ensure the reader understands what is being communicated.

There are many complicated rules around punctuation that can be confusing and intimidating. In this section you will focus on the basic punctuation that ensures your everyday writing, and the writing you need to do for Functional Skills English or Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 assessments, is accurate and clear.

There are 14 punctuation marks commonly used in English – you will have heard of many of them. However, not all of them are vital for everyday writing, so you concentrate here on five of them: full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas and apostrophes. As you develop your English skills and work through the levels and qualifications, you will meet the other punctuation marks.

In this section you also think about the use of capital letters. Like punctuation marks, there are many rules and guidelines for the use of capitals. You look now at the key points to ensure your use of capitals is accurate for everyday life, work and study.

5.1 Capital letters

Capital letters are the ‘large’ versions of the 26 letters of the alphabet. Some letters change shape as a capital – **A** instead of **a**, **B** instead of **b**. However, some do not; they are just a larger version: **C** instead of **c**, **K** instead of **k**.

Capitals are also known as upper-case letters, while the smaller, standard versions are known as lower-case letters.

It is very important that when you use a capital letter, it is clear that it is a capital letter. For those letters that change their shape it is usually obvious. When only the size changes, you have to be careful. You may be forgiven for using capitals incorrectly in everyday writing, but in an exam you will lose marks. Also, like spelling errors, mistakes often mean that the reader will assume you either don’t know the rules or can’t be bothered to get them right.

The basic rules for capital letters are quite straightforward: use them at the start of sentences and for names (also called proper nouns).

You *must* use them at the start of sentences – this is very important. You should usually use them for proper nouns, although there are exceptions to this. It is more and more common for companies to use lower case at the start of their name. This is particularly common with online companies like ebay and also applies to some companies’ products such as Apple’s iPhone. Sometimes the only option is to check a written version of a name and copy that.

So, to summarise: capitals must be used at the start of sentences and they must be used for proper nouns (David, Birmingham, Scotland, Monday), but it is always worth checking! ‘I’ always needs a capital letter, wherever it appears in the sentence. Abbreviations – such as the OU, the BBC, the UK – also need capitals.

Finally, the best guideline to go by is that if you are unsure don’t use them. Follow the rules above and you should be accurate most of the time. Too many capitals rather than too few is more likely to suggest to the reader that you don’t know what you are doing.

The table below gives a summary of when capitals are needed.

When to use capitals

Type of word	Examples
Names of people	David Beckham, J. K. Rowling
Names of places	Manchester, Cardiff, Scotland
Days of the week	Monday, Tuesday
Names of months	January, February
To start a sentence	Usually I take the bus.
I	Sometimes I go by train.

Activity 33 What needs a capital?

In the box below, write the following sentences, putting in capital letters where necessary:

j. k. rowling wrote harry potter.
david beckham played for manchester united.
cardiff is in wales.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Your sentences should look like this:

J. K. Rowling wrote the Harry Potter books.
David Beckham played for Manchester United.
Cardiff is in Wales.

5.2 Ending sentences

There are only three ways to end a sentence: with a full stop (see the end of this sentence), a question mark (?) or an exclamation mark (!).

Full stops

The most common way of ending a sentence is the full stop. If you look back over what you have read in the last few minutes, you will see that most of the sentences end with one. In the grammar section you looked at what a sentence is, but in terms of the punctuation that shows a standard (not a question or exclamation) sentence has finished, a full stop is the only option.

Question marks

The rule for question marks is straightforward. If a sentence is a question, it needs a question mark at the end.

How are you?

What are you doing at the weekend?

Where did you go on holiday?

A helpful pattern to be aware of is that very often, sentences that begin with words such as *is, can, when, why, what, how, where* and *who* need a question mark.

Exclamation marks

Exclamation marks are the least common of the three sentence endings. They are used to show that the sentence contains some sort of strong emotion such as anger, surprise, joy or fear.

That's amazing!

Get out of here!

I don't believe it!

They can also be used at the end of commands:

Sit down!

Activity 34 Full stop, question mark or exclamation mark?

Allow about 2 minutes

Look at the sentences below. Add the correct mark to the end of each of them.

It is Saturday today

Is it Saturday today

Wow - it's Saturday today

What's your favourite kind of music

I mostly listen to talk radio

I can't live without music

Answer

Check your endings against these:

It is Saturday today.
Is it Saturday today?
Wow – it's Saturday today!
What's your favourite kind of music?
I mostly listen to talk radio.
I can't live without music!

Discussion

5.3 Commas

The rules for commas could fill a course on their own. They are often complicated and confusing. However, to write well you do not need to know all of them. In fact, there are probably only a few people in the world who genuinely do!

So what do commas do? Look at the following sentence:

I like to go out with friends on Saturday nights to the pub cinema or a nightclub
after I've been busy all day.

This is quite a long sentence and is much easier to read and understand if commas are added; they provide structure for the reader so that the meaning is clear:

I like to go out with friends on Saturday nights, to the pub, cinema or a
nightclub, after I've been busy all day.

Like capital letters, it is best to use a comma only when you are sure that one is needed.

If in doubt, leave it out.

With that guidance in mind, there are some key situations that definitely need commas.

One of these is in lists. The commas separate the things in the list. If you don't use commas the list could be unclear.

For example, look at the difference between these two sentences:

I went shopping and bought fruit, bread, chocolate, milk and eggs.
I went shopping and bought fruit bread, chocolate milk and eggs.

Putting the commas in different places changes the things that were bought.

Another situation where commas are needed is when you are adding information to a sentence.

In the example below commas are needed to separate the additional information:

My best friend Jane unlike me is always late.

My best friend Jane, unlike me, is always late.

Activity 35 Adding commas to lists

Allow about 5 minutes

Add commas in the correct places for each of the three sentences below.

To complete a study guide you will need a pen pencil paper and enough time.

The children were excited tired and noisy.

Every day before I leave the house I take the dog for a walk make my sandwiches and check my email.

Discussion

Check your commas against these:

To complete a study guide you will need a pen, pencil, paper and enough time.

The children were excited, tired and noisy.

Every day before I leave for work, I take the dog for a walk, make my sandwiches and check my email.

Activity 36 Commas for additional information

Allow about 5 minutes

Add commas in the correct places for each of the sentences in the box.

It was sadly the last day of term.

My dog who is completely crazy ran away yesterday.

The rain I was pleased to see was beginning to stop.

Discussion

Check your commas against these:

It was, sadly, the last day of term.

My dog, who is completely crazy, ran away yesterday.

The rain, I was pleased to see, was beginning to stop.

5.4 Apostrophes

Apostrophes do two things. They show that a letter (or letters) is missing or that something belongs to someone. Like commas, apostrophes are often used incorrectly.

Missing letters

Any time a letter (or letters) is missed out an apostrophe is needed to show this. In the box are common examples of words that use an apostrophe in this way.

Examples of apostrophes

does not becomes *doesn't*

you have becomes *you've*

do not becomes *don't*

cannot becomes *can't*

I have becomes *I've*

I will becomes *I'll*

I would becomes *I'd*

it is becomes *it's*

would not becomes *wouldn't*

Activity 37 Spot the apostrophe

Allow about 10 minutes

In the text below, highlight all the words that use an apostrophe to show a letter (or letters) is missing.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Answer

Check if you've spotted all the words with apostrophes:

wouldn't

you'd

didn't

it's

he'd

hadn't

didn't

I'll

Activity 38 Inserting apostrophes

Try putting in the missing apostrophes in the text below.

We didnt do well at football because the team hadnt had much time to play together. I wasnt very confident at all. The coach wouldnt allow us to chat to each other and I dont think he liked us much. Its a shame because we couldve been really good.

Discussion

Check your answer to see if you put in all the missing apostrophes:

We didn't do well at football because the team hadn't had much time to play together. I wasn't very confident at all. The coach wouldn't allow us to chat to each other and I don't think he liked us much. It's a shame because we could've been really good.

Activity 39 Matching shortened words with the full word

Match the shortened words below, which use an apostrophe, with the full word.

she didn't

they'll

you'd

I've

he won't

we wouldn't

Match each of the items above to an item below.

she did not

they will

you would

I have

he will not

we would not

Belonging

You also use an apostrophe when something belongs to someone. It goes after the name of the owner:

Matthew's bag

Emily's computer

My dad's coat

The cat's bed

The house's windows

Activity 40 Apostrophes for belonging

Allow about 5 minutes

Add the apostrophes in the correct place for the following sentences:

My sisters coat.

The dogs bowl.

The cars wheels.

Answer

Check where you've put your apostrophes against these answers:

My sister's coat.

The dog's bowl.

The car's wheels.

5.5 Punctuation practice

In the next activity, you have the chance to practise everything you've learnt about punctuation.

Activity 41 Practising punctuation

Allow about 15 minutes

1. Which of the following words should always have a capital letter?

- ☐ southampton
- ☐ table
- ☐ computer
- ☐ policeman

2a. Put the correct punctuation mark at the end of each of the sentences in the box.

Is it Saturday today

Merwen didn't come to work last week

Oh no, I'm too scared

Can you come to the cinema with me next week

Answer

Check your endings against these:

Is it Saturday today?

Merwen didn't come to work last week.

Oh no, I'm too scared!
Can you come to the cinema with me next week?

2b. Now add punctuation marks to the end of these sentences:

Don't do it
Jack has been in hospital for six weeks
Wow, I'm so happy
Is the new film out next week

Answer

Check your endings against these:

Don't do it!
Jack has been in hospital for six weeks.
Wow, I'm so happy!
Is the new film out next week?

3. Put the commas in the right place in each of the sentences in the box.

My hobbies include going to the cinema reading books and running.
My teacher who is very smart has helped me a lot this year.
I like autumn days that are sunny dry and bright.

Discussion

Check where you've put your commas against these answers:

My hobbies include going to the cinema, reading books and running.
My teacher, who is very smart, has helped me a lot this year.
I like autumn days that are sunny, dry and bright.

4. The following passage doesn't have any punctuation. See if you can add everything that is needed. Remember to include capital letters, full stops, commas and apostrophes. The text has been provided in a box for you to edit.

a lot of people try to get away from home for a few days each year for a holiday there are lots of things to choose from and where you go depends on how much money you have got to spend ideas for holidays include relaxing on a beach exploring cities and skiing one man wanted to go to australia but thought hed never have enough money to get there he will go to his brothers caravan at the seaside instead a young woman wanted to go clubbing in Ibiza as shed heard its a lot of fun

a lot of people try to get away from home for a few days each year for a holiday there are lots of things to choose from and where you go depends on how much money you have got to spend ideas for holidays include relaxing on a beach exploring cities and skiing one man wanted to go to australia but thought hed never have enough money to get there he will go to his brothers caravan at the seaside instead a young woman wanted to go clubbing in Ibiza as shed heard its a lot of fun

Discussion

Check if you spotted all the errors by comparing your edited text against this:

A lot of people try to get away from home for a few days each year for a holiday. There are lots of things to choose from and where you go depends on how much money you have got to spend. Ideas for holidays include relaxing on a beach, exploring cities and skiing. One man wanted to go to Australia but thought he'd never have enough money to get there. He will go to his brother's caravan at the seaside instead. A young woman wanted to go clubbing in Ibiza as she'd heard it's a lot of fun.

6 Writing for real

The kinds of thing you write every day are not necessarily what you will write in a Functional Skills English or Essential Skills Wales Communication writing assessment. The difference between a text message to your best friend and a formal letter to apply for a job is a big one.

Even if you never intend taking any kind of writing assessment, it is unlikely you will be able to avoid writing a text of some sort that requires you to stick to the rules you have looked at during this course.

In this final section, you look at some of the practical aspects of writing and points that you have not covered so far.

6.1 Paragraphs

In the session on reading, you looked at paragraphs as a structural or presentation feature. When you write, you have to think about them slightly differently.

Paragraphs break up a text into chunks that are more manageable to read. Each paragraph should be about the same subject.

It can be very easy to question and then confuse yourself when thinking about paragraphs. Basically, when something changes in your writing you need a new paragraph.

Paragraphs are important because they help the reader to know that they have moved onto a new topic. A new paragraph signals to the reader that they can concentrate on the new topic, making it easier to understand. A new paragraph might be used when a new character has begun to speak. Or you may be reading about a new place or subject.

A new paragraph starts on a new line to make it stand out.

Paragraphs are usually grouped together into sections with subheadings or into chapters.

Activity 42 Paragraphs in use

Allow about 10 minutes

Read the text in the box carefully. Try to break up the text into three paragraphs. The title of the text is 'Knowing all about octanes'.

In the UK petrol is categorised by its octane number. Standard unleaded petrol is 95RON. But some fuels have a higher level of octanes than that, and they claim to increase the performance of your car. Cars all have a 'compression ratio'. This means that there is a level already set in their engines at which the fuel and air mix in the cylinder. This process causes the petrol to ignite and the car engine to receive power. If the level can be set to make the petrol ignite at a very high pressure, it will produce extra power, and the car will be capable of more speed and a higher performance. Engine designers have to be careful, however, because all fuels have a certain point at which they will ignite under pressure. If the pressure in the cylinder gets too great, then the fuel will ignite before the spark plug is ready to fire. This will throw the engine of the car out of time and make it lose power. You will know when this is happening, because you will hear a knocking sound from the engine. Mechanics call this sound 'pinking'.

Discussion

Here is one way of dividing it up into three paragraphs:

[Paragraph 1 is an introduction to octane numbers:]

In the UK petrol is categorised by its octane number. Standard unleaded petrol is 95RON. But some fuels have a higher level of octanes than that, and they claim to increase the performance of your car.

[Paragraph 2 then gives details of how fuel and air mix in car engines:]

Cars all have a 'compression ratio'. This means that there is a level already set in their engines at which the fuel and air mix in the cylinder. This process causes the petrol to ignite and the car engine to receive power. If the level can be set to make the petrol ignite at a very high pressure, it will produce extra power, and the car will be capable of more speed and a higher performance.

[Paragraph 3 goes on to explain what can go wrong in car engines:]

Engine designers have to be careful, however, because all fuels have a certain point at which they will ignite under pressure. If the pressure in the cylinder gets too great, then the fuel will ignite before the spark plug is ready to fire. This will throw the engine of the car out of time and make it lose power. You will know when this is happening, because you will hear a knocking sound from the engine. Mechanics call this sound 'pinking'.

The topic of each paragraph is different even though the overall subject of the text is the same. It is the change in topic that means that a new paragraph is needed.

6.2 Handwriting

Despite all the writing that people do on their phones or tablets or using a keyboard, writing neatly is still something everyone needs to be able to do.

It is possible to do Functional Skills English or Essential Skills Wales Communication assessments on-screen or online, so your handwriting will not be an issue in that respect. In reality, if you really wanted to, you probably could avoid ever having to handwrite again by always using your mobile phone, tablet and computer.

However, there are likely to be times when you have no choice but to write by hand and if it cannot be read, you have a problem! If you write your shopping list by hand and then cannot read it, how will you know what to buy? If you leave a message for someone to feed your dog when they come home, but they cannot read it, the dog goes hungry. If you write a heartfelt birthday message in your best friend's birthday card, but they cannot read it, what would they think?

Everyone has their own unique style of handwriting with unique habits – both good and bad. It is always worthwhile to look at your own handwriting and ask yourself whether it could be made easier to read.

Activity 43 Your handwriting

Allow about 10 minutes

Use a pen and paper to copy a few lines of the text you have just read.

Now read it back, looking carefully at your handwriting. Be honest about it. Is it easy to read? Do you have any habits or patterns that make certain letters or words or sections unclear? Do you use random capitals where you don't need them?

Is there anything you could do to make sure that your handwriting is easier to read?

Discussion

It is possible to change your handwriting, so if you have noticed something that you could improve, make an effort to do so next time you are writing.

6.3 Writing for assessments

This section specifically introduces the writing assessments for Functional Skills English Level 1 and Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1. However, if you are not studying for these qualifications you will still find the activity useful, so please read through the section and try out Activities 44 and 45.

Functional Skills English and Essential Skills Wales Communication writing assessments

Functional Skills English and Essential Skills Wales Communication writing assessments are designed to assess your ability to write texts that can be understood by the reader they are written for. This means that any particular text needs to:

- be structured, or laid out, as it should be
- include the information it needs to, in a logical order
- contain accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.

It is important to remember that your writing does not have to be perfect. Perfect writing is impossible. Even if you make no spelling, punctuation or grammar mistakes, it is very unlikely that everyone who reads your writing will completely agree with everything you said or not think that there is a better way to say it.

This is why you do not need 100 per cent in assessments to pass. The pass mark is different for different exams, but the idea is that you write well enough to be understood and to communicate clearly.

To pass a Functional Skills English Level 1 writing assessment or the writing element of the Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 controlled task, you must be able to write a range of texts to communicate information, ideas and opinions, using formats and styles suitable for their purpose and audience.

Requirements to pass a Functional Skills English Level 1 writing assessment

The specific requirements are that you:

- write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail
- present information in a logical sequence
- use language, format and structure suitable for purpose and audience
- use correct grammar, including correct and consistent use of tense
- ensure written work includes generally accurate punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear
- do all of the above in more than one type of text.

Requirements to pass the writing element of the Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1 controlled task

The specific requirements are that you:

- produce a plan for each of your written documents, showing the main points you obtained from the source documents
- produce an annotated draft for each of your written documents
- write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail
- ensure the written document is of appropriate length
- use paragraphing appropriately to present information in a logical sequence
- use language, format and structure suitable for purpose and audience
- use correct grammar, including correct and consistent use of tense
- ensure written work includes accurate punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear
- do all of the above in more than one type of text.

If you are preparing for the Functional Skills English Level 1 qualification, the next activity is particularly relevant as it will help you to think about the requirements for passing the writing assessment, listed above.

If you are not studying for the Functional Skills English qualification, you may still find the activity useful.

Activity 44 You do the marking

Allow about 15 minutes

The speech below has been written in response to the following question:

Write a short talk, to be given to a group of new college students, about the importance of having good English skills.

Use the Functional Skills English Level 1 writing requirements, listed above and copied in the text box below, to review the speech and decide whether or not you think it meets the standards. Try to make comments or identify examples from the speech to show how it matches each of the requirements.

Good morning everybody. My name is Jay and I am here today to talk to you about why it is important to keep learning and improving your English skills, and to make sure you get your qualifications.

Until recently I didn't have any qualifications in English. I messed around at school and didn't pass my exams. This wasn't a problem for a while, but when I went for a promotion at work I was declined, because I didn't have the certificate to prove my skills.

So I came to college. I worked hard and learned a lot. I learned things I didn't even know I needed. I have since passed the English qualifications and got the promotion.

So my message to you is that without the right skills and qualifications in English you will find that things are harder. It is harder to do the things you need to do every day, but also harder to get the career you want. If you put in the effort now you will not be in my situation in a few years' time.

Thank you for listening. Does anyone have any questions?

Write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail.

Present information in a logical sequence.

Use language, format and structure suitable for purpose and audience.

Use correct grammar, including correct and consistent use of tense.

Ensure written work includes generally accurate punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear.

Discussion

The speech **does** meet the standards for Functional Skills English Level 1 writing.

- **Write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail:** It covers English skills and qualifications for work and life.
- **Present information in a logical sequence:** It presents the story from messing around in school to getting promotion.
- **Use language, format and structure suitable for purpose and audience:** The text starts with 'Good morning' – it opens like a speech.
- **Use correct grammar, including correct and consistent use of tense:** It uses the past tense for the past and the future tense when talking about 'a few years' time'.
- **Ensure written work includes generally accurate punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear:** This is fine – capitals and full stops are used accurately.
- **Do all of the above in more than one type of text:** This is only one text, but another text like this should be possible.

The key to a good piece of writing is that it communicates clearly what it needs to say. It does not have to be over-complicated or use long or complex words to try to sound clever. Emails are a good example of a type of text that is used millions of times every day to communicate.

Activity 45 Constructing an email

Allow about 10 minutes

In the interactive below, sections of an email are mixed up. Drag each section around so that they are in the correct order for it to make sense.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

The email below shows the sections in the correct order:

To: theboss@business.com

Subject: Pay Rise

Dear Mrs Carter

I am emailing you to request a pay rise. This is not the sort of thing I usually do, but I feel strongly enough in this case to do so.

I have worked at this company for two years now and have never had any kind of pay rise. I consistently work hard and have always met my monthly targets. Also, I have only had one day off sick in two years.

Considering all these things I really feel that I deserve a pay rise.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards

Jay Tanner

6.4 Self-assessing

You have now covered all the key aspects of writing that are relevant to Functional Skills English and Essential Skills Wales Communication Level 1, as well as everyday writing. Whether you choose to go on and complete the qualification or not, this course will have helped you to develop your knowledge and skills. You should now be able to demonstrate this by writing a text more confidently.

Activity 46 Writing a report

Allow about 20 minutes

Complete the task below. Then review your work carefully and honestly using the checklist.

You have been asked to write a report for The Open University about your experiences of studying English online. You need to include what you have studied, how long it has taken you, what have been the most important things you have learned and what suggestions you would make to improve the course – for example: was anything missed out? Finally, you need to explain how the course will help you in the future.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

7 End of course quiz

Now try the [end of course quiz](#) to test your learning of the entire course and hopefully gain your badge. Good luck!

8 Summary

The main learning points from this session are:

- Modern forms of communication mean that **you probably write more than you think you do**. It's important to understand the difference between informal and formal writing.
- To write something formal well, it's useful to **plan it** first, write a **draft**, **check** it and then produce the **final version**.
- **Different types of text** – letters, emails, speeches, articles – have **different structures**, say different kinds of things and start and finish in different ways.
- To write well formally, you need to **spell** correctly. There are ways to improve your spelling and to remember tricky words.
- Understanding some very **basic grammar rules** will also help you to write, because you need to write in sentences, use the right tense for verbs and be able to make longer sentences using conjunctions.
- The same goes for **punctuation**: understanding how to end sentences properly and how to use commas and apostrophes will help you write well.

End of course summary

Bringing it all together

Congratulations on completing *Everyday English 1*. We hope you have enjoyed the experience and now feel inspired to develop your English skills further.

Through this course you have developed your skills in the following areas:

- speaking clearly and confidently and at the appropriate volume and speed according to the situation
- understanding the importance of listening in communication, including active listening
- identifying when and why your ability to listen might be affected, for example through tiredness, anger or a lack of interest
- using body language to support positive and clear communication
- identifying formal and informal situations, and understanding how that affects the way you should communicate in both speaking and writing
- taking part in discussions, including asking and answering questions, taking turns, disagreeing and encouraging others to speak
- skimming a text in order to identify quickly whether it is something you should read
- scanning a text in order to search for information you are looking for
- reading, understanding and using different kinds of written texts, whether they are short, long, formal or informal
- telling the difference between facts and opinions
- identifying the purpose of different kinds of non-fiction texts, i.e. whether they aim to instruct, describe/explain, persuade or inform
- understanding how presentation and layout affect how easy a text is to read and how well it gets its message across
- planning, drafting and proofreading a text
- applying different structures to different types of text, including letters, emails, speeches and articles
- spelling, using certain kinds of punctuation and applying basic grammar rules
- an awareness of the importance of practising to improve all the above!

Next steps

You may now want to develop your everyday English skills further. If so, you will be pleased to hear that in March 2019, *Everyday English 2* will be released on OpenLearn. Check back [here](#) for further details. *Everyday English 2* will give you the opportunity to look at some of the topics you've explored here in more detail, as well as new content.

If you would like to achieve a more formal qualification, please contact one of the centres listed below and explain that you have done this course and gained an OpenLearn badge.

They'll help you to find the best way to achieve the Level 1 Functional Skills English qualification or the Level 1 Essential Skills Wales Communication qualification, which will enhance your CV.

England

Tresham College (Part of The Bedford College Group), Windmill Avenue, Kettering, Northants NN15 6ER

<https://www.tresham.ac.uk>

01536 413123

Middlesbrough College, Dock St, Middlesbrough, TS2 1AD

<https://www.mbro.ac.uk/>

01642 333333

West Herts College, Watford Campus, Hempstead Rd, Watford, WD17 3EZ

<https://www.westherts.ac.uk/>

01923 812345

Wales

Coleg Cambria

<https://www.cambria.ac.uk/>

Adult Learning Wales

<https://www.adultlearning.wales/>

Coleg Gwent

<https://www.coleggwent.ac.uk/>

NPTC Group of Colleges

<https://www.nptcgroup.ac.uk/>

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