

Examiner's Report on the November 2010 EFL exam.

The candidates who sat the November 2010 EFL exam did not seem to have been markedly different to previous ones if the pattern of positive and negative aspects in the overall performance is used as a criterion. We feel obliged to reiterate past comments about preparation for this exam, namely that preparation courses seem to focus on teaching grammar to the exclusion of helping candidates to improve their ability to think in English and use the language with ease.

Nevertheless, it was gratifying to note that considerably more candidates proved successful during the last session.

Section A: Language analysis

Candidates seemed well prepared and handled this section well; most showed a knowledge of grammatical structures and were able to identify basic and more complex grammar points. However, the harder questions which required candidates to apply their knowledge to new or unfamiliar structures of English grammar caused difficulties.

Phonology

Answers demonstrated that candidates were better prepared for the Phonology section than in a number of recent examinations. Preparation seems to be focusing much more on Phonology and convincing candidates that a basic knowledge of phonology and a sound familiarity with the Phonemic script are essential to the EFL teacher. Most candidates demonstrated an acceptable recognition of words in phonemic script.

Naturally, it is still clear that the main area of difficulty for candidates in this section is the part where they are required to transcribe lexis in normal spelling into phonemic script. It is also regrettable that a small number of candidates, less than 5%, chose to ignore the Phonology section completely.

Section B

Part 1: Odd-one-out

This exercise proved to be decisive in candidates achieving a pass or fail in this section as it carries 40 out of 100 marks.

On a positive note, a considerable number were able to identify which item among the four was different to the rest (this is where the ability to apply grammatical knowledge proved to be an asset). All candidates were given credit for giving a correct answer.

However, a considerable number were simply unable to say how and why the item differed from the others. (This confirms what was said in Section A: that candidates are unable to apply knowledge to new or unfamiliar structures or situations).

Sometimes candidates ignored completely the underlined words which were meant to help them focus and produced irrelevant and wrong answers.

The other 2 exercises in this Section were handled better.

Cloze: most students grasped the gist of the text and so usually inserted grammatically appropriate answers; in some cases, the idiom was less familiar, so students sometimes chose non-typical examples, which while they worked grammatically, were less appropriate, idiomatically.

In fact this has been a recurrent comment in past Examiners' Reports. Many candidates are simply unaware of everyday, colloquial English. They are good at learning what is taught them but are unfamiliar with common usage and current idiom.

Error Correction: most candidates were able to identify most of the errors.

Section C

Parts 1 and 2 exemplify what has just been noted.

The Phrasal Verbs section

It is encouraging to notice that candidates' performance in this section generally ranged from Very Good to Excellent, with a considerable number of students obtaining full marks.

The Idioms section

On the contrary, the overall performance of candidates on this section was poor. It is evident that candidates need to read much more widely in order to increase their exposure to modern and colloquial English, and consequently become more familiar with this important aspect of every day English.

The section on Register was quite well handled on the whole and a good percentage of candidates did well.

Collocations: all students except one understood the rubric and followed instructions. Most candidates found this task easy enough although there is evidence that some collocations were unfamiliar.

Writing: overall the level was acceptable, although some scripts demonstrated a poor knowledge of the language. Some candidates chose to write at excessive length which usually earned them lower marks because they lost cohesion, rambled out of point and became careless with sentence construction. Those who followed instructions generally did quite well. Students are reminded to read the context carefully when preparing their essay, as marks are awarded for appropriate register, forms of address and so on.