

Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2006

Assessment Report

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to consolidate the Chief Examiners' observations on the performance of candidates who sat the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) in February/March, 2006.

General Observations

2. Candidates achieved different *proficiency attainment** rates in different papers. The proficiency attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading 85.5%; Writing 45.9%; Listening 74.3%; Speaking 37%; Classroom Language Assessment 92.7%.

Paper 1 (Reading)

3. Candidates performed well in this paper, with 85.5 % of the cohort of 953 achieving at least Level 3.
4. In general, candidates performed better where responses required the location and identification of specific information and less strongly where responses required interpretation of information.
5. There was some evidence that candidates had spent more time than suggested on one part of the paper, resulting in what appeared to be rushed responses in the other part. For example, some candidates who scored quite highly on the multiple choice cloze section did not complete answers for one or both reading comprehension passages.
6. There was some evidence of inappropriate copying from the passages in response to questions, where the candidates appeared not to fully understand either what the question was asking or what the meaning of the section copied actually was.

Part 1: Multiple choice cloze

7. Candidates performed quite strongly in this section, and slightly better in Passage A than in Passage B. Candidates were quite successful in selecting correct verb forms/tenses and prepositions. They performed less strongly in choosing appropriate expressions, including those in items where the structure following a blank should have acted as an indicator. For example,

* Scoring Level 3 or above in the Reading and Listening papers, and Level 2.5 or above on any one scale and Level 3 or above on all other scales in the Writing, Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) papers.

many candidates selected 'worried' for 'do not be __ to bring in', instead of the correct choice 'afraid', completing the expression 'afraid to (do) something).

Part 2: Reading comprehension

8. Candidates generally attempted most questions in both passages. However, some candidates did not attempt Passage B and a few candidates attempted neither passage. As noted above, questions requiring global understanding or interpretation of the implications of information were generally less well-answered. For example, in response to the question 'What changed the writer's view of the news as "dry, serious political discourse"?', many candidates wrote 'the satire and the subtle humor' rather than responding correctly that it was the writer's growing *appreciation* of the satire and subtle humor that changed his view. Similarly, some candidates responded to the question 'Complete the following sentence: The writer's main message in this passage is that reading for pleasure is...' by writing 'the best way of reading', rather than by writing 'the best way of *developing competency in a language/learning a language*', which was the writer's theme throughout the passage. Many candidates appeared not to understand the use of metaphor in Passage A, responding to the question 'In the last paragraph, what is reading compared to?' with a range of answers including 'listening', 'reading for pleasure', and 'playing a musical instrument'.
9. Most candidates responded well to the questions in Passage B requiring completion of a table showing the problems and results of textbook compilation and use. However, some candidates appeared not to read the question carefully; it asked them to 'complete the following diagram *to reflect the opinions of Zhang Xuebing and Chen Weihe*', instead of using other information from the passage which was not relevant to the question asked.
10. Candidates with strong results showed evidence of reading the questions carefully to uncover the meaning. They also seemed aware that the assignment of two marks to a question indicates that two pieces of relevant information are required. Stronger candidates also referred to the text rather than to their own general ideas when formulating responses. For example, the question in Passage A 'If the writer were to discourage grammar drilling, which of his *principles* would he be applying' should direct the reader back to lines 51 and 52 in the passage, where the writer refers to his *principles*. Candidates who performed less well responded less directly, with general statements about love of reading, or intrinsic desire to learn, rather than selecting one of the explicit principles.
11. Advice to candidates
 - 11.1 Candidates should aim to manage their time so that they can attempt all question items in the paper. If candidates spend too much time on one part of the paper they are allowing themselves fewer

opportunities to record a reasonably good score. Spending too much time on one part of the paper may mean that they perform less well overall than they actually can, so that the score does not represent the actual ability.

- 11.2 Candidates should read the cloze passages aloud quietly to get a sense of the structure and flow of the passages. They should consider possible word choices for each blank, then tackle the items by looking at the options for each.
- 11.3 When they tackle the reading comprehension, candidates should first skim the passage to get the gist and a sense of the writer's viewpoint before beginning to address the questions. They should remember that some of the questions will ask for a global understanding of the passage, which is difficult to achieve by only addressing each question and that part of the passage that provides the answer to each specific question.
- 11.4 Candidates are advised to read each question carefully, scanning the relevant part of the passage, then reading it closely to ensure that all the necessary information has been given in the answer.
- 11.5 Where one question includes more than one mark for the response, candidates should ensure that they have an appropriate number of discrete pieces of information in the answer.
- 11.6 Candidates should use the words from the passage if the best response to a question is found in those words. If candidates choose to use their own words, they should aim to express themselves clearly. Marks cannot be awarded if the marker cannot understand the answer, or if the incorrect spelling of a word or structure of a phrase changes the meaning of that word or phrase so that it is no longer a correct response.
- 11.7 Candidates are advised to read English on a regular basis to improve their overall English skills. They should aim to understand the writer's point of view and familiarise themselves with expressions of opinion and feeling, not just with simple statements of fact. It would be beneficial to read a range of genres, including the literature of the profession, fiction, poetry, biography and commentary. A good strategy is to read a little and often rather than tackling an entire book at a time, and in so doing make reading a pleasure rather than a chore.

Paper 2 (Writing)

12. This paper consists of two parts, Part 1: Task1, Expository Writing, and Part 2: Tasks 2A & 2B, Correcting and Explaining Errors/Problems in a Student's Composition. Candidates are tested on five scales of performance, (a) Organisation and Coherence, (b) Grammatical Accuracy, (c) Task

Completion, (d) Correcting Errors/Problems and (e) Explaining Errors/Problems. Descriptors of each scale are set out in the Syllabus Specifications published in November 2000. The proficiency attainment rate of the 1,330 candidates who attempted this paper was 45.9%.

Part 1: Expository Writing

13. The topic (healthy eating) was felt by markers to be clear, stimulating and relevant, providing candidates with ample opportunity to perform well.
14. Most candidates structured their answers well and seemed to be aware of the required text type and how to tailor this for the intended audience. However, there seemed to be a lack of creativity, with many candidates copying ideas and sometimes whole phrases from the input text.
15. As in previous administrations, grammatical problems were common and detracted from otherwise acceptable writing. Common problem areas included the following:
 - Inappropriate use of assertive language; e.g. instead of using modals to make suggestions to their Principal, candidates used assertive language that shows that some things will certainly be done, like ‘I think is applicable to our school and will be used a framework for the campaign’; ‘how I and my colleagues will spend this money’
 - Misuse of tenses; e.g. ‘As there is \$2000 for us to do the campaign, we suggested two ways ...’
 - Subject-verb disagreement; e.g. ‘when it come to making your decision’
 - Confusion caused by pronoun reference; e.g. ‘most of our students take junk food, fast food and sugary drinks as their breakfast and lunch. It makes me worried’
 - Confusion of active and passive voice; e.g. ‘Students will be prepared the ingredient’; ‘what problems will be happened’
 - Wrong singular or plural forms; e.g. ‘In views of this’; ‘little exercise are making our student weaker’
 - Misuse of discourse markers; e.g. the misuse and overuse of ‘Besides’ and ‘Moreover’ to introduce an additional point or argument
 - Inaccurate word classes; e.g. ‘harmful to their healthy’; ‘due to convenient’
 - Faulty sentence constructions; e.g. ‘If no junk food is sold in the canteen, Our students will have less sugary drinks’.

Part 2: Correcting and explaining errors/problems

16. Markers felt that the task was straightforward, clear and relevant to the job of a teacher of English in a Hong Kong school. They also felt that the error types were those commonly seen in real student writing.

17. Many candidates did well in Task A but less well in Task B, suggesting that their ability to correct simple errors in English usage is acceptable but that they do not have the necessary metalanguage to be able to classify errors, nor explain their causes and solutions. In some cases, candidates wasted time correcting phrases which were already correct. In others, the explanations were themselves ungrammatical, making it difficult for markers to judge whether candidates understood the grammatical point at issue.
18. The following are some of the major problems found in candidates' performance in Task B.

- Failure to detect the problem, for example:

(2) My brother much worser than I am

Some candidates thought that 'I am' should be 'me', but failed to realise that 'worser' was a wrong comparative form. A suitable correction for this error was:

'My brother is worse than I am'

- Description of the correction made without explanation, for example:

(7) I think this is good idea

Some answers simply stated that an article is needed, without showing *understanding of the underlying rules or generalisations* by referring to the existence of a singular countable noun '(good) idea', and so scored no marks.

- Incorrect explanation of error, for example:

(11) ... we can lost a lot of weight.

Many candidates explained that 'lost' should be changed to 'lose' because the present tense should be used. This is incorrect. The correct answer was that there should be a bare infinitive 'lose' after the modal 'can'.

- Correct identification but incorrect or incomplete explanation of the error, for example:

(6) If we will eat junk food, our teacher will be anger with us

Many candidates successfully identified the incorrect use of the tense of the verb 'will eat' in the first clause, but gave explanations like not having two future tenses in one sentence, which is incorrect. The

correct explanation should demonstrate an awareness of the tense used in the ‘if’ clause of a (first) conditional sentence.

(11) If we make sports every day...

Despite clear instructions to use metalanguage in explaining errors, a number of candidates still wrote explanations like ‘the word ‘make’, instead of the verb ‘make’, and so were not awarded full marks.

- Ambiguous answers, for example:

(7) ... and my father only brought fish and vegetables at the market

There are two ways of correcting this sentence: either the verb ‘brought’ should be changed to ‘bought’ to match the preposition ‘at’; or ‘the preposition ‘at’ should be changed to ‘from’ to collocate with the verb ‘bought’. A number of candidates did not explain why a change of verb or preposition was necessary. Some vaguely mentioned that the change was needed to suit the text or to agree with the general idea. Such an answer would only warrant 1 mark.

(6) ... our teacher will be anger with us

Ambiguous answers such as ‘The problem is the wrong use of word form. The adjective “anger” should be used here... instead of the noun’ did not receive full marks because the adjective form of ‘anger’ is ‘angry’.

(11) If we make sports every day during 30 minutes

Some candidates correctly changed the preposition ‘during’ to ‘for’, but failed to explain the difference in the use of the two. In fact, ‘for’ indicates the duration of the activity whereas ‘during’ refers to a point within a period of time.

- Wrong spelling, for example:

‘The first problem is a collocation mistable.’

‘we do not use a past participal after any model auxiliary verb’

‘should have put bare infinite’

‘pluaral verb’

When spelling errors become intrusive and affect comprehension of the explanation, full marks are not awarded.

19. Candidates should be aware that they need to display their professional knowledge during this part of the writing assessment. They need to present information systematically and clearly, using appropriate grammatical terminology, in the manner suggested in the example given in the question

paper. Candidates are advised to go through past papers and to familiarise themselves with the format suggested for acceptable answers.

Paper 3 (Listening)

20. Of the 946 candidates, 74.3% attained Level 3 or above.
21. Candidates listened to a radio interview with senior managerial personnel from a tertiary institution and a student attending an associate degree programme administered by the institution.
22. The speakers in the paper assumed four different roles: (1) the radio programme presenter (John, a male non-native speaker of English), (2) the Principal of a community college of a tertiary institution in Hong Kong (Jane, a female non-native speaker of English), (3) a Senior Lecturer of a department in the community college (David, a male native speaker of English), and (4) a student attending an associate degree programme at the community college (Connie, a female non-native speaker of English).
23. The discussion begins with background information about the three interviewees. It then moves on to the origin and nature of associate degree programmes, the providers and provision, and the teaching and learning of these programmes in comparison with other tertiary courses. Towards the end, the speakers share their views on the value of completing such a programme and the prospects for developing the provision of these programmes in China.
24. The paper went through a rigorous pre-testing and moderation process. The moderation committee and markers considered that the topic of the paper was appropriate and liked the fact that it drew upon issues from the wider educational context.
25. The moderation committee also ensured that the items were constructed in such a way that candidates were asked to comprehend individual speakers' views, personal observations and specific pieces of information, rather than general knowledge.
26. The speed of the recording was in line with real speech of the type simulated. There were four speakers, and their voices were all distinct, yielding a balanced mixture of male and female, English native-speaking and non-native speaking voices.
27. A wide variety of task types were included in this paper. These included blank-filling, table-completion, cloze passages, multiple choice, flow-chart, and open-ended questions, which allowed for the testing of a variety of micro-listening skills.

28. Lexical errors or careless slips?
- 28.1 In general, grammar and spelling mistakes in candidates' answers were not penalised. However, if there were grave errors which resulted in a change of meaning, marks were deducted. Grammaticality was a requirement for responses to Question No. 11, however, since this was a gap-fill activity.
- 28.2 It is a general practice that a LPATE listening paper usually begins with some local retrieval items. These items are often related in terms of content to some background information about the speakers on the tape. Item No. 2 drew attention to a misspelled key word as an answer. The item asked a candidate to identify the job position of Jane Wong, the Principal of the Community College at Kowloon University. Unfortunately, many candidates misspelled 'Principal' as 'Principle'. The same mistake was also made by several candidates with Item No. 6, where the answer should be 'Principal Lecturer', but many wrote 'Principle Lecturer' instead.
- 28.3 In Item No. 23, many candidates put down 'board-based' education instead of 'broad-based', resulting in their being given no mark for this item.
- 28.4 It is difficult to tell whether these were instances of genuine lexical error or misspelling due to carelessness, although with stronger candidates one is more inclined to believe that these were slips. In any case, many of these lexical mistakes could have been avoided through more careful proofreading.
- 28.5 Weaker candidates also had problems with the correct spelling of many words which should not have been too unfamiliar to language teachers, for example 'community', 'translation', 'interpretation' and 'tourism management'. Candidates should note that when the answer to an item is a proper name, such as a name of a field of study (e.g. 'translation', 'interpretation'), the correct word form is required for the mark.
29. Listening to numbers
- 29.1 Listening to numbers and jotting them down accurately is an important listening skill, as this is something many people, including teachers, have to do at work. Each year the LPATE paper includes items to test this skill. There is evidence that some of the listening-to-number items in this paper caused comprehension problems for many relatively weaker candidates. These items include Item No. 3, Item No. 38 and Item No. 57. It is suggested that future candidates should consider spending time on strengthening this particular skill.

30. Making inferences
- 30.1 Advanced listening requires that a listener have the ability to draw inferences from a text. One item in this paper that tested this high-order skill was Item No. 59, which asked candidates to give an explanation for a comment made by John: ‘There seems to be a bottle-neck here’. To answer this item, a candidate had to get at the meaning behind these numbers. In other words, the item tested a candidate’s ability to infer from what he or she had heard. The item discriminated the stronger candidates from the weaker ones, but it also ranked as the third most difficult item.
31. Suggestions to candidates
- 31.1 As teachers and learners of English, candidates may wish to enhance their awareness of some commonly confused words in English, such as ‘principal vs. principle’, ‘flew vs. flu’, ‘pane vs. pain’ and ‘fare vs. fair’. Many of the commonly confused words are in fact homophones which can cause listening and communication problems for ESL learners.
- 31.2 Future candidates need to recognize the importance of allocating appropriate time to proofreading and checking spelling. They should also practice listening to numbers and drawing inferences.

Paper 4 (Speaking)

32. As in previous administrations, candidates performed better on the scales of Organisation & Cohesion (Task 1C) and Interacting with Peers (Task 2), and less well on Pronunciation, Stress & Intonation (Task 1A/B) and Explaining Language Matters to Peers (Task 2). The overall attainment rate for the 1,234 candidates who sat the paper was 37%.
33. Typical problems exhibited by candidates while reading aloud a poem and a prose passage were:
1. mispronouncing uncommon words (such as ‘sanctuary’ or ‘composure’)
 2. pronouncing / ð / as / d /
 3. mispronouncing final consonants (such as in ‘hissed’ or ‘replaced’)
 4. pausing slightly after individual words rather than after groups of words (‘thought groups’), leading to inappropriate stress and intonation patterns.
34. It would be helpful if candidates could listen to different kinds of poems being read aloud, and practice reading aloud to themselves or to an audience, in preparation for the assessment.
35. Task 1C was generally done quite well. Successful candidates demonstrated

a full range of accurate and appropriate structures and did not overuse clichéd formulations or rely on platitudes. They spoke about their personal experience, employing a personal, anecdotal and informal style.

36. With regard to Explaining Language Matters, candidates were generally able to identify errors in the composition. However, it sometimes happened that the discussion moved on too quickly to strategies before the errors in the passage had been fully described and corrected. This meant that some discussions dried up before the allotted time, as candidates seemed to feel that they had covered all the ground and were reluctant to return to error correction.
37. Some candidates seemed unsure of how to behave in a formal, assessed interaction and were either too quiet or too dominant, or were content merely to ask questions. Some candidates did not really engage in interaction at all; they simply said what they had prepared and then stopped. This suggests a lack of familiarity with discursive practices in English, a deficiency which can only be rectified through greater exposure to, and participation in, discussions on professional issues.
38. As in previous years, some candidates gave very general suggestions, such as ‘read a newspaper’ or ‘play a game’, instead of describing specific tasks designed to address the errors identified in the student’s work.

Paper 5 (Classroom Language Assessment)

39. A total of 437 candidates were assessed between early February and the start of April 2006. The pass rate was consistent with those of previous administrations with 92.7% attaining at least Level 3 or above in all the four scales of Grammatical Accuracy; Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; Language of Interaction and Language of Instruction.
40. The majority of the candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the descriptors and most lessons observed were appropriately prepared, displaying a variety of structures and expressions. Some in fact achieved a very high standard in both accuracy and fluency and showed a good level of confidence and competence. Comments on the individual areas of assessment are given below.
41. Grammatical Accuracy
 - 41.1 In general, a wide range of vocabulary and structures were used by candidates. Most candidates proved mindful of their grammar. In general, most of the grammatical mistakes that occurred did not impede communication. Many candidates managed to self-correct almost instantly.
 - 41.2 Errors related to tenses, subject-verb agreement and prepositions were noted on occasion, as in ‘He is (was) born in 1991.’; ‘She like

(likes) ice-cream.’; ‘What are you talking (What are you talking about)?’, etc.

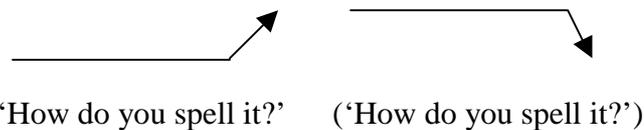
42. Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation

42.1 Most candidates demonstrated an acceptable level of accuracy in pronunciation, stress and intonation. Overall, proper attention was given to articulation and enunciation.

42.2 Confusions sometimes arose when candidates failed to distinguish between sounds such as /v/, /w/ and /r/ (e.g. veal/weal/real); /n/, /l/ and /r/ (e.g. neighbour/labour; blanket/bracket); and /i:/ and /I/ (e.g. seat/sit).

42.3 Consonant clusters and the ‘-ed’ (past participle verb form) proved difficult for some candidates. In the latter case, the /id/ was either inappropriately left out as in ‘wanted’, or unnecessarily added as in ‘allowed’.

42.4 Intonation generally was appropriate. Some candidates used it well to register emotions like surprise and excitement, a fact best exemplified by teachers in their story telling/reading. However, some candidates tended to use the rising tone for all question types, as in



43. Language of Interaction

43.1 In general, candidates demonstrated a fair level of sensitivity to the needs of the students and were undeterred even when there was a lack of response from the class.

43.2 Most candidates proved effective in giving positive encouragement and in eliciting responses from the students. Some actually asked challenging and stimulating questions such as ‘Why did you do that?’ and ‘What would you do if...’ to engage the students in meaningful discussions.

43.3 While interaction with the students was largely natural and appropriate for most candidates, responses to students’ incomplete or wrong answers proved inadequate in some cases. For example, some candidates failed to recognize wrong answers and some did not use follow-on questions to guide students to the correct answers.

44. Language of Instruction

44.1 Most candidates achieved both clarity and coherence in the delivery

of their lessons. Instructions and explanations were usually clear and effective.

44.2 In explaining vocabulary items, most candidates were clear and accurate. Abstract ideas like 'proud', 'bitter' and 'salty', however, posed some difficulty.

44.3 A general sense of confidence and effectiveness was noted in the majority of candidates.