

EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT CHIEF DIRECTORATE
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2025 NSC CHIEF MARKER'S REPORT

SUBJECT	<i>ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE</i>
QUESTION PAPER	<i>THREE</i>
DURATION OF QUESTION PAPER	2 ½ HOURS
PROVINCE	EASTERN CAPE
NAME OF THE INTERNAL MODERATOR	MR CF DU PREEZ-MILES
NAME OF THE CHIEF MARKER	MRS CAS FERNDAL-MILLER
DATES OF MARKING	29 NOVEMBER – 13 DECEMBER 2025
HEAD OF EXAMINATION:	MR EM MABONA

SECTION 1: (General overview of Learner Performance in the question paper as a whole)

English First Additional Language Paper 3 is a "choice paper," meaning that the candidate chooses the text to create and answers based on their intellectual and cognitive abilities. The candidate's writing ability is evaluated by the marking criteria and rubric, guaranteeing a fair score. It is predicted that due to their numerous advantages, the 2025 cohort will perform better than the 2024 cohort. In addition to the time spent writing this paper at the beginning of the exams when they were "fresh," a lot of programmes and resources were deployed and money was spent to enhance instruction in the classroom, which will significantly boost their performance.

SECTION 2: Comment on candidates' performance in individual questions.

(It is expected that a comment will be provided for each question on a separate sheet).

SECTION A

QUESTION ONE

MARKS 50

1.1 The story behind my smile

The average mark for this question was 31/50 (63%)

This was by far the most popular choice of candidates in Section A. The responses varied from exceptional to inadequate. It was fascinating to learn the tale behind the smile. Behind their grins, many candidates shared ordinary experiences—some for love, a sizable portion due to traumatic events to keep the peace, and others for reasons of mental stability and sanity. Some people interpreted the smile metaphorically as a symbol of healing from rape, smile therapy suggested by psychologists, while others saw it as a means of exacting revenge for the wrongdoings of others. One candidate related a rather heartbreaking story about how, even though her mother knew her father was abusing her, she had to pretend to smile with her every day. Years later, when her mother was dying, her smile was a sign of revenge and retribution when her mother asked for forgiveness she smiled and flatly refused, for what she had allowed her husband to do to her daughter. Candidates performed well overall in this topic.

1.2 It gets easier

The average mark for this question was 27/50 (55%)

This was the third most popular topic selected by candidates from Section A. The responses varied from excellent to inadequate. Many candidates understood the basic idea of the topic, which was to move from difficulty to increasing ease. Unfortunately, several candidates misconstrued this topic and misunderstood its meaning. "It gets easier" is a clear viewpoint provided by the topic itself. In agreement or, more intriguingly, in disagreement, learners typically have no issue developing a compelling, straightforward premise. Here the biggest flaw was that candidates frequently don't know what "it" is or how "easier" is determined. They make broad generalisations without

supporting the idea with hard data. "Life gets easier as you grow up because you just know more things."

Candidates performed moderately well in this topic

1.3 A promise that I could not keep

The average mark for this question was 30/50 (60%)

This was the second most preferred option for candidates. Candidates found it easy to relate to this topic, which led to genuine and poignant narratives. The promise being made (setup), the conflict or obstacle preventing it from being kept (climax), and the realisation and aftermath (resolution) are the three distinct story arcs that the topic readily suited itself to. Most essays read like a simple story more than a thoughtful, meaningful essay. Some candidates used a relatively insignificant promise (e.g., "I promised my friend a chocolate bar and forgot") in order to make things easy. Although the prompt is technically met, the minimal emotional stakes prevent the reader from becoming engaged or from exploring remorse or the consequences of breaking the "vow" promise in a meaningful way. Candidates scored moderately well in this essay.

1.4 When the mask falls off

The average mark for this question was 45/50 (91%)

This topic was not a popular choice of candidates. Those who chose this topic scored exceptionally well as is evident from the average recorded. This was more suited to candidates with relatively good writing ability. Candidates who chose this topic clearly explored its figurative meaning referring to the personas, defences, and roles people adopt in different social situations. They were able to explore the central meaning of the topic as the moment when a person is suddenly, unexpectedly, or deliberately stripped of their protective social façade and revealed as their true, unvarnished self. Some also explained why they had to wear masks and had to allow it to fall off to find healing from pain and trauma they had experienced.

1.5 'We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.' Anais Nin

The average mark for this question was 27/50 (54%)

This was again not a popular choice for candidates. Candidates who selected it were those who had a good grasp/command of their writing ability, however the topic has two parts. Candidates either only

addressed one part and not the other or failed to address the topic at all. The topic calls for a concise way of expressing the idea that our perception of the world is not objective but is filtered and shaped by our internal state, experiences, beliefs, and emotional framework. Candidates who chose this topic performed moderately well.

PICTORIAL STIMULUS

1.6 OLD MAN

The average mark for this question was 32/50 (65%)

This pictorial stimulus was the more popular choice of candidates in this section of the essay topics. Candidates who chose this pictorial stimulus were able to write easily about this image because they could relate to it. The grandfather's image, their upbringing, their time spent with him, and the valuable lessons they learnt might all be positively relatable to many. Some told touching stories about how their grandfathers adopted them after they were shunned by their families and took on the role of father figures when they lost their parents. Because it was simple for them to write on this subject, those who selected this essay scored moderately good marks as is evident in the average score recorded for this essay topic.

1.7 CUB SNARLING

The average mark for this question was 22/50 (45%)

Very few candidates chose this pictorial stimulus although it was topical and related to the milieu of most learners. Again, this topic was for the candidate who has a good grasp of his/her writing ability and command of his/her additional language. Those who chose this topic wrote mundanely about lions, while anything could be written on lions the responses produced were incoherent and at most just references to lions in general. There were some beautiful responses, one was about a lion cub who recognised its owner many years after it had been released into the wild and retrogressive memories were shared, another response was about the film "Lion King", the tale retold from a modern perspective. Learners scored average for this essay.

1.8 EGGS ON A CLOTH

The average mark for this question was 30/50 (60%)

Although a very logical and accessible picture many did not choose to write on it. One got the impression that they saw this pictorial stimulus as abstract. Those that attempted this essay wrote moderately well and were able to earn moderate scores for it. One candidate wrote about the chicken industry, another wrote on “don’t count your chickens before they are hatched,” another wrote on the eggs as possibilities for new beginnings, while yet another reflected on the idiom “being chicken” i.e. being a coward which made for interesting reading. Overall, those that attempted this topic, scored moderately well as is reflected by the average mark for this essay,

SECTION B

QUESTION 2

MARKS 30

2.1 EMAIL

The average mark for this question was 19/30 (64%)

In this section, the email was the third most common option. Those that selected this text type were able to write well about the subject, thank the previous instructor, discuss the influence the teacher had on their lives, and tell him or her about their future goals. One candidate thanked the teacher for giving him a loaf of bread every day while he was in high school so that he and his siblings could eat every day so that he could study and perform well. He is currently pursuing a legal degree and wants to become a prosecutor in order to imprison anyone who encourages others to commit crimes in their communities. Some candidates merely discussed the thankfulness portion of the topic or told the teacher about their aspirations for the future. Overall, learners were able to relate well to the topic and produced what was required of them in this text. Sadly, despite knowing what they were writing about, candidates frequently neglected to include the email address, subject, and message because they were unfamiliar with email format. They jumped right into the topic.

2.2 REVIEW

The average mark for this question was 11/30 (37%)

Due to the various ways in which this text type can be examined, very few candidates attempted the review. Those who did were unsure on how to attempt a restaurant review. Those who tried it received a mediocre score, but they were unable to provide the necessary response. In certain cases, they neglected to include a recommendation, the restaurant's name, or the type of meal they were served. It is evident that applicants were unfamiliar with this type of text, and it was directed towards learners who were comfortable with dining out and had a strong command of the language.

2.3 DIALOGUE

The average mark for this question was 19/30 (64 %)

The dialogue was the most preferred text type in this section. Candidates could write quality texts since they were familiar with the scenario. They could identify with the librarian and the damaged book for which they had to pay. In most cases, the book was damaged by a younger sibling, sister, or niece and nephew while they were studying or watching TV. In one case, a candidate wrote that while he was sitting with his girlfriend, his three-year-old sister stole his library book and started drawing in it. He received absolutely no kindness from the librarian. Overall, candidates were able to score reasonably well and wrote quality texts. It is encouraging to see that candidates are paying attention to word count and remembering to include the context. Unfortunately, some applicants had lengthy introductions that obscured the main points of the conversation.

2.4 SPEECH

The average mark for this question was 17/30 (59%)

This was the second most popular choice of candidates in this section because they could relate to the scenario, which was extremely clear: the candidate had to give a speech for the final assembly as the RCL's outgoing chairperson. Many candidates were able to write reasonably effectively on this topic, although many confused the assembly with the "matric farewell" and commented on the function rather than motivating and advising their fellow students. Most candidates who attempted this text type were able to achieve a reasonable score.

SECTION C
QUESTION 3
MARKS 20

3.1 FLYER

The average mark for this question was 9/20 (48%)

This was the least popular text type chosen by candidates. This was the choice of candidates with a good command of their additional language who were able to relate to the topic and who were business minded. They were able to produce reasonable texts which were clearly understandable and scored reasonably well. The only downside to their flyer was not adding the name of the institution and contact details in case someone required more information. The scenario and question also lent itself to the format(s) of an invitation and a note.

3.2 WHATSAPP MESSAGE

The average mark for this question was 11/20 (59%)

This was the surprise question of the question paper and was the second most popular choice of candidates in this section of the paper. Candidates could relate to the scenario and text type as it is a familiar and popular social media application to which they are addicted. They were able to answer this question with relative ease and could relate well to the movie evening and the planning of it: snacks, popcorn, slush puppy drinks, pillows, blankets, permission from parents, etc. They were careful not to leave the permission of the school out lest they antagonise the principal. Surprisingly enough, they did not use "WhatsAppese" and used standard English to get their message across. The warning not to use slang kept them in check. Candidates scored moderately well in this question.

3.3 INSTRUCTIONS

The average mark for this question was 13/20 (66 %)

This was by far the most popular choice in this section. The scenario and question were well within the experience and milieu of candidates. Many were able to describe how to wash sneakers and to get them white. It was interesting to note that tissue/toilet-paper and mealie meal were used to get the whitening effect on the sneakers. Candidates went

“to town” in terms of describing how they would go about washing and whitening their sneakers and in cases exceeded the word limit of 100 words. Overall candidates who opted to do this question did well as indicated by the average for this question.

QUESTION 3

Provide suggestions for improvement in relation to Teaching and Learning.

SECTION A

Candidates need to be encouraged to attempt essays on a variety of topics including pictures and quotes. Teachers must teach learners how to write good introductions, and powerful conclusions. Narrative techniques need to be revised. Teachers need to guide candidates during the year on which types of writing best suit their writing ability. For example, we find that weaker candidates attempt the more challenging topics and then score a low mark for content.

SECTION B AND C

ALL prescribed transactional texts (both longer and shorter) must be covered thoroughly from Grade 10 to 12. The 2025 question paper deviated from the papers set over the past four years (regarding the transactional texts tested) and this caught teachers and candidates off guard.

Teachers must teach the correct formats of ALL the transactional texts as prescribed by the CAPS document. Many candidates omitted the setting/scenario in the dialogue. Teachers need to emphasise the setting because this informs the context of the conversation.

Candidates need to be taught that the setting/scenario should be concise. Too many candidates waste excessive words on greetings and introductions. This results in the prescribed length of 150 words being exceeded. Lower marks are scored as the crux of the question is not addressed within the prescribed word count.

Some candidates confused instructions with directions and thus lost marks for content.

The question on the review was not a popular choice amongst candidates, and this could imply that they are not exposed to review writing from grade 10 to 12.

QUESTION 4

Describe any other specific observations relating to responses of learners and comments that are useful to teachers, subject advisors, teacher development, etc.

Observations and Recommendations for teaching and learning

The following observations were noted during the 2025 marking session:

SECTION A

Many candidates struggle to express themselves due to their limited vocabulary and poor sentence structure.

Candidates made numerous language and spelling errors which impacted negatively on the mark awarded for language, editing and style. There is no paragraph development, and this leads to an essay that is poorly constructed and not a cohesive unit.

The following errors in language were observed, among others:

- Incorrect prepositions used, e.g. "Pour water on bucket".
- Incorrect use of articles, e.g. "Use an soap". "Get a money".
- Incorrect homonyms and homophones used.
- Confusing words such as "soup" for "soap".
- The inability to use punctuation marks correctly, especially the use of capital letters.
- The number of candidates who used different tenses within the same written piece was alarming.

Some candidates lack creativity and choose the picture topics but then are unable to link the content of their essay to the chosen picture.

Illegible handwriting is the bane of an educator's existence and even more so at the marking centre where we are pushed towards deadlines. Educators must impress the need for neat, legible writing upon their learners.

Candidates need to be mindful of only using contractions when writing pieces with an informal tone and register. The use of contractions in pieces with a formal tone and register is not acceptable.

Candidates should be taught to cancel their planning and drafts.

One learner wrote the entire paper in isiXhosa and ended up scoring 8/100.

One candidate did not attempt to answer any of the topics under any of the sections and scored 0/100.

Some candidates either rewrote the question paper or used phrases from all

the topics in the paper to formulate an essay. This resulted in them achieving a very low score.

Some candidates STILL far exceed the prescribed word count in all three sections. They end up penalising themselves through repetition and writing unnecessary or irrelevant details.

Two centres had groups of candidates who had virtually verbatim introductory and second paragraphs in their essays. At the one centre all six candidates responded in the same way to question 1.6 which is a picture of an old man. The six essays were all titled: **“I lost all hope”**.

The following similarities were observed in the responses:

Five out of the six essays had verbatim introductory sentences:

Paragraph 1

Sentence 1: *“I did not believe it when it finally happened”*.

Sixth essay started with: *“I lost hope when it finally happened”*.

Sentence 2: Two of the essays *“That day caused me so much sadness and anger with me/ within me.”*

Four essays: *“As much as it happens to everyone but I was not ready.”*

Sentence 3: Five of the essays had the same third sentence, including the use of the ellipsis. *“Do you know what really happened? I ... I... I... lost hope.”*

Paragraph 2

Sentence 1: All six essays start with: *“It was at midnight when I called him and he did not respond.”*

Sentence 2: Five of the essays: *“I panicked not knowing why he was not responding”*.

Teachers should discourage learners from learning pre-written essays en masse. This practice could lead to investigations of suspected irregularities at the marking centre.

The overall performance in English FAL Paper 3 demonstrates that many candidates are developing stronger writing skills, particularly in structuring texts and responding appropriately to given topics. However, sustained attention should be given to critical editing, coherence, and accurate language usage. It is recommended that teachers continue to prioritise explicit instruction in the writing process, supported by regular practise and constructive feedback. By reinforcing these foundational skills and encouraging candidates to read widely, the quality of candidates' writing can continue to improve.