

Apprenticeship Workforce Development: Collaborative Project Functional Skills – Changing the Paradigm

HINTS AND TIPS FOR FUNCTIONAL SKILLS EXAMS

DATE: OCTOBER 2024

Hints and Tips for Functional Skills Exams

Introduction

Tutors and learners can use these hints and tips to prepare for Functional Skills exams. It provides helpful ideas of things to look out for in the exam and how to prepare.

1. How to read and understand exam questions.

Read questions carefully.

Look out for command verbs and underline key words in the questions:

- 'State' or 'Give'- these usually require short answers, and have only 1 or 2 marks attached (if you are asked to 'Give' you will be told how many answers to give and this will be reflected in the marks awarded to the question)

'Identify', 'Explain' and 'Describe' – this means that you have to identify elements of the information you have been given and give reasons why you think the answer should be one thing or another. They usually have more marks than 'State' and 'Give' questions.
- 'Calculate' – this is not used as often as you might imagine in maths questions, but the mark scheme will indicate how many calculations you have to do – it is usually 1 or 2 per calculation.

So, look at the marks allocated to each question to indicate how much to write (or calculate).

In maths questions with several calculations to perform the information is usually provided in the order in which you need to use it.

Questions are often 'contextualised' which some learners find distracting (especially in maths but it can happen in English too). Awarding Organisations have a duty (by law) to give a range of questions that reflect the demographics and diversity of the UK and so you may see (in English exams) subjects and situations you are unfamiliar with and (in both English and maths exams) names of people that maybe unfamiliar to you.

Practicing past paper questions will make you more familiar with this

2. Understanding marking schemes and how to tackle an exam paper.

It is important to read the rubric. The 'rubric' are the exam instructions on the front page of the paper. These tell you the amount of time you have and any special instructions (for examples making sure that your answers are in boxes and not to write anything in the margins).

If you have practiced past papers these rules will be familiar to you and it is unlikely that they will have changed but it is important to check them before you start answering questions.

The number of marks is directly related to the amount of time you should be spending on a question. Your tutor will help you work this out as it varies depending on which awarding organisation you are using.

For example, if the exam is 60 minutes long and there are 60 marks this means that every mark is worth a minute of time. If there were only 30 marks, then this means that every mark is worth two minutes of time.

Remember that functional skills exams are Pass/Fail qualifications, so you only need to achieve the Pass mark in order to get the qualification. Your overall mark is not shown on your certificate. Your tutor can tell you what the pass mark is the qualification.

For English you need to pass all three separate components, but for maths the non-calculator and calculator marks are added together to give an overall score.

The amount of space you are given to answer a question does not always reflect the amount of writing or calculations you need to do. The space provided is determined by the formatting of the exam paper layout, and exam papers often include lots of blank spaces and sometimes blank pages (usually with BLANK PAGE written on them).

The best way is to practice as many exam papers as you can. First just work through them at your own pace and then work on doing them under exam 'timed' conditions to get used to the speed at which you need to work on the day.

3. Time management in exams.

This relates back to the mark scheme. It is important to pace yourself in the exam and use the entire time you have allocated. This can mean working through the questions quickly and then going back to check your answers or going at a slowly pace which might not give you enough time to go back over your answers. Either way try not to leave the exam early.

In maths exams the non-calculator paper is much shorter, and you will need to work quicker than you do for the calculator paper to gain the same number of marks per minute.

The English papers will be dependent on your reading speed. Try not to skim through the documents you are asked to read, take your time and hopefully you will only have to read them through once. Make sure you understand the questions fully before reading documents, so you have an idea of what you are looking out for.

Sometimes questions are asked *after* you have been asked to read some documents so it is a good idea to do it in reverse order if you can and read the questions first.

If you can, just before the exam, write down key formula you need to remember (for maths) and any words that you have trouble spelling for English.

Being prepared is key – writing useful vocabulary out on paper or key formula and putting them around the house in places that you often go to (on the fridge door for example or by the kettle) will help you remember them.

4. Exam Nerves

Few people enjoy taking exams so don't think you are the only one.

Make sure you are hydrated (with water or soft drinks) before hand and have had something to eat. Empty stomachs generally don't help people to concentrate.

Take some deep breathes, before you start, to compose yourself and if you can feel yourself getting anxious during the exam, just pause and take a few moments to settle yourself.

If a question is proving difficult, then it is best to move onto the next one rather than stress over it. Remember there will be other questions where you can pick up the marks you need. No single question in itself will carry so many marks that you would fail by not answering it.

However, if in doubt, just write or calculate something. All mark schemes are positive ones which means that you don't get marks taken away for getting something wrong, and who knows you may hit lucky.

It is easy to see exams as being these monsters we have to face, but we suggest you think about it slightly differently. Yes, we have to do them but try and put them into perspective and plan to do something fun (e.g. with friends, family or pets etc) afterwards as an enjoyable activity to look forward to later in the day or week after you have taken the exam.

After all, you won't know yet if you passed but you can celebrate the fact that you took the exam. Even planning to watch a film or favourite TV show, or cooking a great meal can be a good reward

FUNDED BY



Department
for Education

Apprenticeship workforce development is delivered by:



SDN

