

1. Phonics

Is the learner experiencing problems with the sound system of the language of learning? If Yes, to what extent? Note: The prosody of African languages differs markedly from that of English. African languages are basically syllable-timed whereas English is stress-timed. English has 21 vowel sounds whereas African languages have no more than seven. English has a set of consonants whose number, types and clustering are different from those of African languages, etc..

2. Dictation

How well does the learner “hear” English? Are the conventions of writing part and parcel of his/her literacy skills? We also look at spelling.

3. Numeracy

This particular component is non-verbal. Is the learner numerate? Numeracy is an integral part of Literacy. A person who is literate but NOT numerate would not be able to look up a telephone number, a date on a calendar or read a weather report, etc. or understand/write down messages involving numeracy.

4. Spatial grammar

Most SAALs (South African African-language Users whose preferred language of learning is English) have major problems with the Language and Grammar of Spatial Relations. We have identified 55 concepts that often create confusion in the workplace. Inability to master Technical Drawing, Machine Drawing, etc. can be related to this problem.

5. Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension at ABET 1 (Grade 3) level – only in ELSA Elementary.

This reading comprehension (a simple narrative) is pitched at a Grade 3/Std 1 level and has been standardised at that level (the norms are English mother tongue). Any grading below “on par” would be equivalent to a minimal survival proficiency level.

Reading Comprehension at ABET 3 (Grade 7) level – more time allowance in Elementary than Intermediate.

There are basically two types of writing that a learner encounters: narrative and expository.

Here we deal with narrative writing at a relatively simple level (readability index: ± Grade 7).

Four sets of questions need to be answered: Sequencing (cloze), True/False, Yes/No and Multiple Choice.

The “pass-mark” is 80%. A respondent who has problems with a user-friendly narrative text at this level couldn’t possibly cope with the expository writings (often at a Matric+ reading level) contained in training manuals, regular business correspondence, standing orders, etc.

6. Feel for English

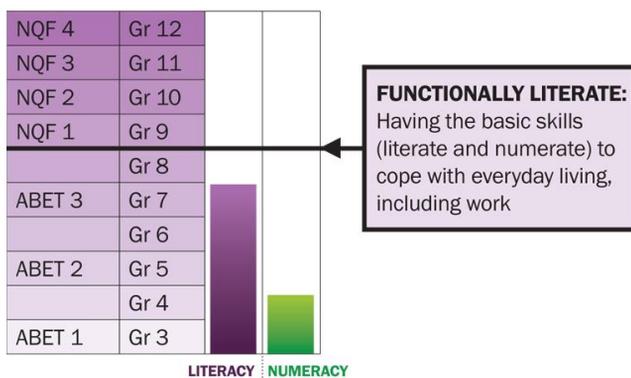
This is expository writing – 30 items, 1 000 words that need to be processed in 10 minutes. The readability index is Grade 12. Mother tongue matriculants can process 250 words a minute with 70 – 80% comprehension at this Grade 12 level. It follows that a matriculant (SAAL or not) who processes 100 words per minute with great difficulty and poor comprehension has major problems re. reading processing, a restricted reading vocabulary and a limited understanding of the grammar (syntax) of the English language.

Poor reading processing is also indicative of poorly developed writing skills, e.g. developing sequences of sentences into paragraphs and arranging these paragraphs into a unified whole. Not all mother-tongue users of English master this stage of writing, let alone SAAL-matriculants who are not functionally literate in English (i.e. functioning at a grade 7-level or below).

7. Vocab in context

This is an excellent type of “test” to see whether a learner has developed a “feel” for the language of learning, and the extent of his/her exposure. Is he/she a compound bilingual who has learnt the symbols of English as mother tongue equivalents? Does he apply his/her mother tongue as a mediator? If Yes, he/she is a rote learner who would find it extremely difficult to cope with the demands of a formal training situation involving English as the language of learning. Extensive research has shown that such functionally illiterate employees cannot be trained successfully to do high-performance jobs.

Moreover, the readability levels of the two cloze procedures are Grade 8 (ABET III/IV) and Grade 9 (ABET IV) respectively. The passages are expository (“abstract”) as opposed to narrative. A respondent who battles with an expository text at this very simple level, would have major problems to interact with run-of-the-mill work-related writings such as memos, reports, standing orders, training manuals, etc. written at a Matric or Matric+ level.



Overall Numeracy Level

Quantitative Numeracy: Unlike Basic Numeracy, this second Numeracy component is verbal. The items are graded. An ‘adequate’ or even ‘below par’ grading tells us that the respondent would be able to cope with most run-of-the-mill situations involving figures or numbers (e.g. talking about, understanding and relaying related verbal instructions, measuring, estimating distances or quantities, etc.) in the workplace. Gradings ‘poor’ and ‘inadequate’ show that division, common fractions, decimal fractions and percentages are beyond the grasp of the respondent, and the manipulation of figures and/or dealing with two or more concepts at a time either mumbo-jumbo or a mystery.