



Department  
for Education

## Professional skills tests for prospective teachers

### Literacy test format and content

This document provides candidates with an overview of the structure of the literacy test, along with details of the content areas which the test assesses. This guidance will be helpful when you are preparing to take the test. You should use it alongside other guidance on the Department for Education's dedicated skills test webpages:

<http://sta.education.gov.uk/>

### Introduction

This document specifies the format and content of the literacy test. The test is a pass/fail minimum competence test, based on a range of practical skills deemed important for a teacher's general professional practice.

The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) maintains a bank of parallel test forms. Candidates are assigned a test form at random (excluding forms which they have previously taken) when entered for a test. Various modifications are available as special arrangements to ensure the assessment is accessible to candidates. The test bank is maintained with a proportion of questions being replaced each year.

All new questions are trialled prior to use to ensure that new and amended test forms are comparable in demand to the existing test forms. Candidates take the tests in a secure test centre, on computer, unless special arrangements have been granted for an alternative format.

A set of practice tests and support information is available on the Department for Education's website: <http://sta.education.gov.uk/>

### Format of the test

The test you will take will have between 45 and 49 marks. The range is caused by different questions in the grammar and comprehension sections. The pass mark also varies from test to test to ensure that the minimum competence threshold is equivalent across the different tests.

The test has 4 sections.

## Spelling

The spelling test has 10 sentences, each containing a word to be tested. You will hear the word when you click on the speaker symbol and can then type the correct spelling. For candidates with a hearing impairment who have booked to take a modified version of the test, 4 options are presented as text and you have to choose the correct spelling. The 3 incorrect spellings will contain realistic, common errors. Each spelling carries 1 mark.

## Punctuation

Punctuation is assessed using a text between 150 and 200 words long containing 15 punctuation errors. You have to insert the correct punctuation and won't be asked to remove incorrect punctuation. Each correct insertion carries 1 mark. Marks are not taken away for incorrect answers. Most of the errors will be omissions of essential punctuation. However some errors will require very limited changing of text, such as changing lower case letters to upper case at the beginning of a sentence.

You can add punctuation by clicking on the word. This will open a dialogue box where you can select the punctuation you want to add and where you want to add it by clicking in the word. If you make a mistake, the word can be reset. Once you are happy, you will need to click OK to save your change. Each correct answer carries 1 mark.

## Grammar

Grammar is assessed using a text in which you have to make a block of text complete by adding a whole or part sentence from 4 options given. You will construct a short continuous prose passage in this way.

Your knowledge of syntax won't be tested. You will be assessed on whether you choose the 'best answer', where 'best' provides the greatest clarity of meaning; for example, a commonly accepted use of language in speech is not necessarily acceptable in a formal written document where 'legal' clarity and professional tone and register may be required.

Each correct insertion carries 1 mark.

## Comprehension

Comprehension is assessed using a single piece of complex text (between 400 and 700 words). The text will be at an appropriate level of complexity, style and vocabulary sufficient to allow you to demonstrate a level of skill necessary for the demands of the professional role of teaching. Texts are authentic and might be taken from publications of interest to teachers, for example, documents written for a professional audience by government departments, agencies, universities and the educational press.

There will be a range of question types requiring you to read and understand the text in order to answer correctly. You will be required to identify the correct answers by dragging and dropping ticks and letters to the side of the response you have chosen.

## Test content

### Spelling

The spellings chosen for the tests will include words which you would be reasonably expected to use in your professional role as a teacher. These are words which colleagues, governors and parents would expect any teacher to know how to spell, whatever their subject or specialism. They include:

- words which are commonly misspelled. These are words which would show that you have a good grasp of phonetically irregular words, that is spellings you need to memorise;
- words which conform to common spelling patterns, including prefixes and suffixes;
- homophones;
- words in general use in written English, although they may be particular to the vocabulary of education or frequently used when writing for professional purposes;
- standard British English usage, although the adoption of American English usage for words which have an –ise or –ize suffix will not be penalised;
- words representing a sufficient level of challenge to demonstrate competency in spelling equivalent to GCSE Grade C.

## **Punctuation**

The punctuation section of the test determines whether the candidate knows where and when to use the following:

a) The main ways of marking ‘units of meaning’

- Paragraphs (eg when used to separate main ideas or signal a change in time or place)
- Full stops
- Comma(s)

b) Additional ways of marking ‘units of meaning’

- Colon
- Semi-colon
- Question mark
- Brackets/parentheses

c) Punctuation which indicates the status of the language being used

- Speech marks
- Quotation marks

#### d) Punctuation within words

- Hyphen
- Apostrophes
- Use of capital letters

### Grammar

The grammar section of the test will determine whether you know and understand the following:

#### a) Consistency with standard written English

- Failure to observe sentence boundaries
- Abandoned or faulty constructions and sentence fragments
- Lack of cohesion
- Lack of agreement between subject and verb
- Should have/of, might have/of; (would/could/must/need not have/of)
- Inappropriate or incomplete verb forms
- Wrong or missing preposition, eg different from/than/to
- Noun/pronoun agreement error
- Determiner/noun agreement error
- Inappropriate or missing determiner
- Problems with comparatives and superlatives
- Problems with relative pronouns in subordinate clauses
- Inappropriate or missing adverbial forms

#### b) Sense, clarity and freedom from ambiguity

- Wrong tense/tense inconsistency
- Unrelated participles
- Attachment ambiguities
- Vague or ambiguous pronoun reference
- Confusion of words, eg imply/infer

#### c) Professional suitability and style

- Non-parallelism in lists
- Inconsistent register and tone eg, you/one; active/passive; level of formality; colloquialisms; appropriateness for audience
- Shift in person within sentence, or across sentences
- Redundancy/tautology
- Inappropriate conjunctions (also known as connectives), eg 'The reason is because...'

## Comprehension

The comprehension assessment covers the following aspects of literacy:

- Identifying the main points in a text
- Making inferences and deductions
- Distinguishing between fact and opinion
- Showing a grasp of the relative importance of the points being made
- Presenting parts of the information conveyed in a different way from the original
- Retrieval of facts and specific points
- Re-presenting information from several parts of the text
- Gathering information from several parts of the text
- Seeking evidence relating to statements from or about the text and making judgements, eg whether certain points are explicitly stated or implied.

Questions will be selected from the following types.

### a) Attributing statements to categories

You will be offered a number of short, written statements and must decide which of a given list of categories matches each statement. You will then drag and drop the category by the statement.

### b) Completing a bulleted list

You will be offered a number of short statements or phrases (usually double the number of correct statements) from which to select the most appropriate to create a bulleted list against a specified stem, for example 'according to the article, mobile technology...'. You must select and place the statements to complete a bulleted list. The final bullet point will be completed for you.

The phrases or statements do not need to be in any particular order.

### c) Sequencing information

You will be offered a number of statements and asked to select the order in which the statements should come. You must select and place markers saying first, second, third and fourth alongside the appropriate statement.

The number of statements may be the same or greater than the number of sequence markers.

### d) Presenting main points

You will be offered a number of short statements written as sentences and correctly punctuated. You will be asked to choose, for example, 5 statements out of 10 to most accurately describe the main points within the text. The number of statements will be approximately double the number of correct answers.

e) Matching texts to summaries; multiple-choice tick box

You will be offered a number of statements, typically 4, and asked to select which statement most effectively summarises a section of the text.

f) Identifying the meanings of words and phrases; multiple-choice tick box

You are required to identify an alternative to replace a specified word or phrase within the comprehension text. You will be offered a number of words or phrases, typically 4, and asked to select the most appropriate alternative phrase within the context of the text. You must drag a tick button to indicate your chosen phrase. The correct option should fit into the meaning and the syntax of the sentence in question.

g) Evaluating statements about the text; multiple response letter in box

You will be offered 4 or 5 statements related to the subject of the comprehension text. You must select and place a marker to indicate whether:

- the statement is supported by the text (S);
- the statement is implied to be the case or is implicitly supported by the text (I);
- the text provides no evidence or information concerning the statement (NE);
- the statement is implicitly contradicted or implicitly refuted by the text (IC); or
- the statement is explicitly contradicted or refuted by the text (EC).

Each marker may be used once, more than one, or not at all.

h) Selecting headings and sub-headings; multiple-choice tick box

You will be offered a number of headings and/or sub-headings (usually double the number of correct statements) and asked to select the most appropriate for the beginning of paragraphs within the text. Options for sub-headings should begin with a capital letter, but do not require a full stop. You must click on buttons marked, for example, P1, P3 and P7, denoting paragraphs 1, 3 and 7, and drag them to the appropriate heading or sub-heading.

i) Identifying possible readership or audience for a text; multiple-choice letter in box

You will be offered a number of possible readership options. You will be asked to select the person or audience that would find the text most relevant or helpful and 1 that would find the text least relevant or helpful. Candidates select and place the appropriate markers for most and least relevant next to their choice.