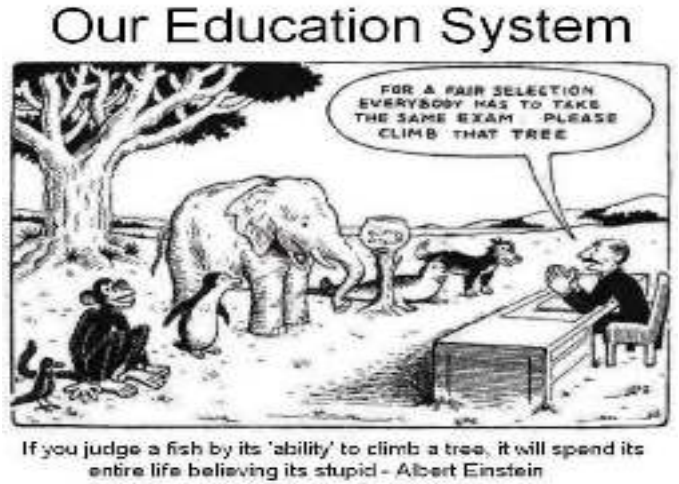


Sandy Secondary School

What are Functional Skills Qualifications?

2025

Nicky Aldridge

Functional Skills and Numeracy Provision Lead

GREENSAND FEDERATION

Functional Skills Qualifications are ….

- Practical alternatives to traditional GCSE Maths, English and Digital Communication They focus on real-life skills needed for everyday life, work, and further education.
- Functional Skills exams are valid and respected qualifications and are based on Department for Education (DfE) approved subject content and are regulated by Ofqual.
- Maths exams test your ability to solve real-world problems, rather than just memorising formulas.
- English exams assess practical English skills including reading, writing, speaking, listening and communication, with a focus on real-world applications.
- Digital exams will enable learners to initiate and participate in digital and online activities safely in the workplace and in other real-life contexts.

- *Where pupils struggle to access the full curriculum, the school makes sure the qualifications they work towards are well considered and suitable to their needs. This gives **all pupils** the opportunity to acquire the right knowledge and qualifications to equip them for their next steps*.
- Ofsted Report for Sandy Secondary School 2025

Who are they for?

- **Who Are They For?**

Functional Skills exams are ideal for:

- Students who may find aspects of GCSE subjects challenging.
- Students who need these qualifications for college or apprenticeships.
- Students who benefit from a more applied, personal, and flexible learning approach.

Functional skills Levels Available

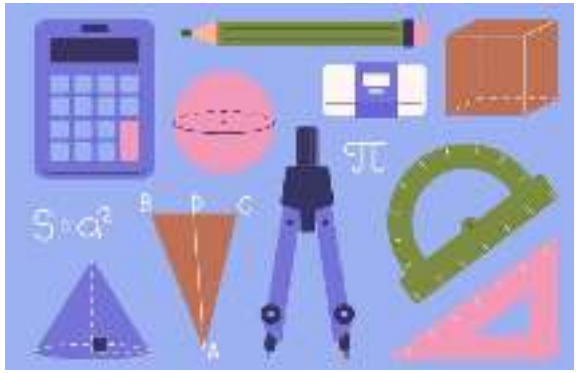
Students often start at Entry Level 1 and work their way up, depending on ability and progress.

Entry Level 3 - equivalent to GCSE grade 1
Level 1 – equivalent to GCSE grade 2–3
Level 2 – equivalent to GCSE grade 4

Digital Functional Skills are specifically available at Entry level 3 and Level 1 only

What's Covered in Maths? - Assessment Format

No coursework – Just written exams



- **Maths Functional Skills are divided into two papers, a non-calculator paper and a calculator paper – per level and completed on the same day.**
- Using Numbers – Working with whole numbers, fractions, decimals, percentages, and ratios.
- Understanding Measure, Shape & Space – Including time, money, area, perimeter, and interpreting maps or diagrams.
- Handling Information & Data – Reading charts and graphs, using averages, and interpreting statistics

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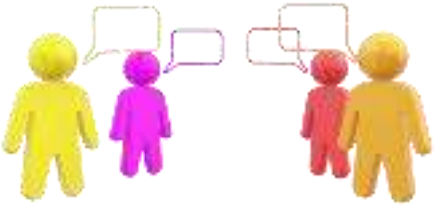
What's Covered in English? - Assessment Format

No coursework – Just written and speaking exams



- **English Functional Skills reading and writing exams are divided into two papers, Reading and Writing – per level and completed on the same day.**
- The Reading part of the Functional Skills Entry Level exam analyses student ability to extract information from various types and styles of texts.
- The Writing exam will require students to select appropriate statements, as well as producing their own texts to demonstrate their spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- Students will also take part in **Speaking, Listening and Communication exams**. This component typically involves a presentation and a discussion, where students are assessed on their ability to present information, respond to questions, and engage in group discussions. These skills are crucial for everyday communication.

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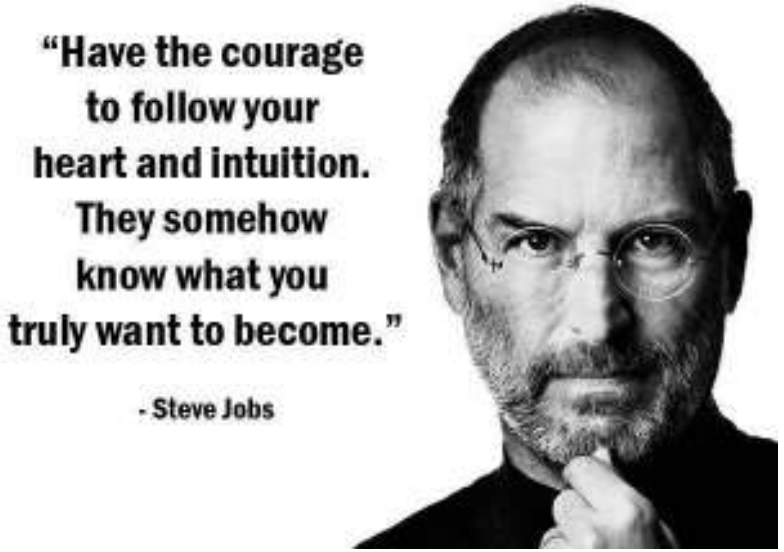
What's Covered in Digital Functional Skills ? - Assessment Format

No coursework – On-line assessments

- **Digital Functional skills exams are divided into two on-line assessments. One test section and a section to assess students' skills in the following areas:**
- Using devices and handling information – carrying out internet searches accurately and reliably.
- Creating and editing – using suitable applications for a range of purposes and audiences.
- Communicating – using email and online messages for a range of contexts and audiences.
- Transacting – managing settings for an online service and carry out checks to reduce the risks involved when making online transactions.
- Being safe and responsible online – understanding the importance of protecting information and privacy online.

Why Take Functional Skills?

- Builds confidence and fluency and a positive attitude towards Maths, English and Digital applications.
- Provides reliable evidence of students' achievements against demanding content relevant to the workplace.
- Recognised by employers, colleges, and apprenticeship providers.
- A steppingstone to GCSE or other qualifications
- Can be tailored to students' individual learning needs



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Support and Preparation

In school, students will:

- Be assessed by their class teacher and offered these exams.
- Have their timetabled GCSE curriculum lessons which will include skills needed for the Functional Skills curriculum.
- Take practice papers and mock exams.
- Receive extra support where needed (e.g., small groups, one-to-one help).

When do students sit the exams?

Functional Skills will have 4 exam points per year:

November, January, March and June.

Unlike GCSEs which are only taken in the summer. This flexibility means students can take the exam when they are ready.

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