

Introduction to a set of five Learningguild documents

1. This Introduction is written to assist three groups of readers, some of whom will, I hope, belong to more than one. There are (A) those who intend to take the examination for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression, or are thinking of doing so; (B) teachers and other helpers who want to assist one or more people in that first group, and may regard becoming well able to do so as part of their professional or intellectual development; and (C) teachers and administrators in schools, colleges, universities, companies and other associations who wish to decide whether and to whom to recommend the exam. **The five documents identified in the next paragraph, along with the green exam leaflet whose text is accessible also at ‘Certificate’ on our website learningguild.org.au, are jointly sufficient to explain the nature of the exam and guide preparation for it.** They have a wider value for anyone wanting to develop his or her powers of reasoning and expression.

2. These documents, now available as a printed set, are the exam paper and the report named May 2014, the booklets *QPS (Questions and Principles for Sentence-Construction)* and *Reasoning*, and my lecture of June 2017 called “What kinds of help do tertiary and post-tertiary students need in reasoning and English expression?”. The first two are chosen partly because together they show the suitability of the exam at all of senior secondary, tertiary and post-tertiary levels: see especially the first two paragraphs of the report. Its fourth paragraph is now out of date, because the welcome appearance in 2015 of the Penguin book I strongly recommend by Rebecca Gowers, *Plain Words* (a revised and updated version of her great-grandfather’s famous book *The Complete Plain Words*) necessitated a revised *QPS*, published in *Learningguild Letter* 2.2015 and since made into a booklet. The booklet *Reasoning* is not on our website. To have these five stapled documents in a folder or case with this Introduction **and mark and write on them** can be a valuable part of anyone’s study in any field that requires reasoning and writing. The set is offered at the Learningguild members’ discount price of \$12 (plus \$3 if postage is requested). Anyone not suited by paying in cash or by cheque should email to me at learningguild@gmail.com.

3. Two fundamental features of the exam are, first, that it is tied to no course, and does not require acquaintance with any particular material, however helpful, that is available in print or on the web, but is **a test of skill and sensitivity in reasoning and English expression**, for which test previous papers and reports provide examples and constructive guidance, and, second, that it is a **repeatable** test. Two papers are set each year, and there is no limit to the number of new papers one may take, aiming for a higher result and/or out of interest. Readers may at this point or later wish to turn to the text of our leaflet about the exam and the three testimonies to its value (also at ‘Certificate’), and to the lecture of June 2017 just mentioned.

4. The first of those fundamental features has to be balanced against the fact that **direct, persistent, and cumulative** study of the English language and of principles concerning sound and unsound reasoning is very helpful in preparing for the exam. Two examples: it would

certainly be enriching for any senior secondary, tertiary or post-tertiary student to have and get to know his or her own copy of Gowers, and to have ready access to *A Wealth of Words* (1960), by H.G.Fowler and Norma Russell, of which I write in the third paragraph of the May 2014 report. (If the latter book is found unobtainable, I can supply photocopies.) One aspect of good learning widely neglected since about 1980 has been to become well acquainted, perhaps over several years and even from as early as the age of eleven, with books that are still worth close attention five and more years later. Of course, teachers should be on the lookout for books old or new that they can regard as of particular value and appeal.

5. The thoughtful preparation and asking of many **questions** is essential in education, and for intellectual and professional development (and a good life?). So, in reading these five documents, in whichever of the three groups of readers one is (paragraph 1 above), it is helpful to put in the margins a question mark, preferably in a circle, by anything one doesn't understand or agree with, along with underlining or highlighting and whatever comments seem relevant, and ask a competent person about it or include it in discussion.

6. There is an essential mental activity that may be called **uptake**, as in descriptions of someone, perhaps after an interview, as quick or slow on the uptake, though there are times when lengthy attention has to be given to something (or someone) to achieve thorough understanding or an approximation to it. A good examination in a limited time is a test of uptake, and no exam should be such that memory, even when added to a sense of relevance, is all that the candidate needs. Sections 1 and 2 of our exam are especially tests of uptake: the ability to see what a person actual or imagined is "trying to say", albeit defectively, and to make sense of sets of words in which there is no punctuation or capital letters. Here and elsewhere in our exam, the combination of care and alacrity of which I write at the end of the exam leaflet is tested and can be developed.

7. In learning to engage well in any complex activity, it helps to have a balance of *Dos* and *Don'ts*, with a range of examples of each. Each of the report, *QPS*, and *Reasoning* provides both. Corrections or improvements to the defective sets of words that end each of the thirteen sections of *QPS* would best be done by students in writing, with discussion to precede and follow, but those sets would also supply material for oral treatment and discussion by groups of teachers.

8. In any meetings with administrators or teachers or students in which I participate, I shall be glad if much of our time is spent in discussion of the kinds of questions and comments I have mentioned in paragraph 5. As a chief examiner, I cannot act as an employed teacher for any institution where students may take the exam, but, with payment for expenses, I should happily come occasionally to such institutions so far as I am able, encourage discussion, and invite and answer questions. My hope is that people already in teaching posts, and senior students, would be keen to make opportunities for such discussion and questions without any need for me to be there. As I imply on p.6 of the June lecture, in any institution where students wished to take the exam some person or persons would need to accept responsibility for the arrangements for the holding of the exam there.

John Howes

July 2017

learningguild@gmail.com