

DipTrans Study Guide

CIOL Qualifications Level 7 Diploma in Translation



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The Chartered Institute of Linguists

Founded in 1910 and subsequently granted its Royal Charter by HM Queen Elizabeth II, the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL) is the UK's Royal Chartered professional body for translators and those using high-level language skills in their professional and working lives.

CIOL Qualifications (CIOLQ) serves language professionals by providing the benchmark qualifications for translators and interpreters, which are recognised widely in the UK and around the world. These qualifications are also of lasting value to other linguists who may have different roles and who use languages regularly within their work in business, the professions and government.

Our Diploma in Translation (DipTrans) has been the 'gold standard' translation qualification for over 30 years, is taken in around 30 countries annually and represents the highest level of achievement in professional translation qualifications.

If you are successful, you will be entitled to use the designation 'DipTrans' and will be eligible to apply for full membership of the Chartered Institute of Linguists, the UK's Royal Charter body for language professionals.

We wish you every success with your studies and your DipTrans exam, and look forward to the prospect of welcoming you to the global community of language professionals as a member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists.



The CIOL Qualifications Level 7 Diploma in Translation (DipTrans)

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What is the qualification?

The DipTrans demonstrates the highest professional level of translation skills and knowledge.

Unlike the CIOL Qualifications Level 6 Certificate in Translation, which focuses on working-level practical translation skills, this qualification demands the ability to handle complex, specialised texts and to produce translations that meet the toughest market standards.

Success in the exam demonstrates the ability to work as a professional translator within both general and specialised fields.

The DipTrans is a regulated qualification in the UK and is underpinned by the expertise and standards of the Chartered Institute of Linguists. It is internationally recognised, which improves employability and career prospects for those who achieve the full award. It is recognised by employers, translation companies and international organisations as proof of a very high level of competence in translation.

It also meets the standards of the UK's National Occupational Standards in Translation for a professional translator.

Who is it for?

The DipTrans is for those who have native or native-level competence in their target language and possess excellent writing skills and cultural knowledge, as well as an in-depth understanding of their chosen specialist fields.

Candidates should have knowledge of translation theory and proven skills in the practical application of all of the above.

This qualification particularly suits those who work or aim to work as freelance translators or in-house translators for major organisations. It is also the qualification of choice for those seeking specialised translation roles requiring demonstrable expertise and knowledge in semi-specialised translation.

Professional Translation

Professional translation is a complex and nuanced process that demands not only exceptional language knowledge but also cultural sensitivity and creative skill, as well as near-scientific precision.

At Level 7 – the qualification level – you must demonstrate mastery of both the theoretical frameworks that underpin translation practice, and the practical skills required to produce professional-quality translations.



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Translation Theory

While the DipTrans is primarily a practical exam, a solid grounding in translation theory provides essential tools for addressing complex translation challenges.

Key theoretical concepts you should understand include:

- Translation equivalence and its various types, from formal equivalence to dynamic equivalence. This understanding helps you make informed decisions about when to translate literally and when to adapt content for your target audience.
- Text typology and its implications for translation strategies. Different text types - from technical manuals to literary prose - demand different approaches to translation.
- Cultural translation theories that assist you in navigating the intricate relationship between language and culture, ensuring that your translations are not only linguistically accurate but also culturally appropriate.



Translation Techniques

It is always important to carefully consider the 'Translation Spectrum' (please see p.9) and balance source and target language considerations.

Professional translators employ a range of techniques to produce high-quality translations. These techniques fall into the following main categories.

Direct Translation Techniques

Used when structural and conceptual elements of the source language can be transposed directly into the target language:

Borrowing is the practice of taking words directly from the source language into your translation. This technique is particularly useful when dealing with culturally specific terms that have gained international recognition. For instance, terms like 'sushi', 'yoga', or 'zeitgeist' are often borrowed directly in many languages.

Indirect (Oblique) Translation Techniques

These more complex techniques are essential when direct translation would result in awkward or incorrect translations.

Transposition involves changing the sequence of parts of speech while maintaining the same meaning.

Modulation requires reformulating the message from a different point of view, while preserving the essential meaning.

Reformulation or equivalence is particularly important when dealing with idioms, proverbs and fixed expressions.

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Adaptation involves replacing cultural elements in the source text with equivalent elements more familiar to the target audience. This technique requires deep cultural knowledge and careful judgment to maintain the text's intended effect while making it accessible to the target readers.

Calque involves borrowing a phrase from the source language but translating its components literally. While this technique occasionally proves valuable, it demands rigorous judgment to ensure the resulting translation somehow achieves both comprehensibility and appropriateness in the target language—a challenge that frequently proves more difficult than anticipated.

Literal translation, or word-for-word translation, can occasionally deliver effective results when handling only the most simple, straightforward content where the source and target languages happen to share similar structures—a rare occurrence. However, at the DipTrans level, you must painstakingly demonstrate the critical judgment to distinguish precisely when literal translation is suitable and when more sophisticated techniques are absolutely essential—a distinction that proves notoriously difficult to master and where even experienced translators frequently stumble.

The Professional Translation Process

Pre-Translation Analysis

Before beginning any translation, professional translators take time to engage in a thorough analysis of the source text. This crucial step involves:

- Understanding the text's purpose and intended audience. A text written for specialists will require different treatment than one intended for the general public.
- Identifying potential translation challenges, including cultural references, specialised terminology, or structural issues that might require special attention.
- Researching the subject matter to ensure you have the necessary background knowledge to translate accurately.

In a timed exam, there is not the same scope for pre-translation analysis. However, one of the reasons we give a significant amount of time in which to complete each exam unit is because taking time to read the context information, analysing the text and preparing to translate it, is an important part of both good time management and assuring translation quality.



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The Translation Phase

During the actual translation, professional translators must:

- Maintain consistent attention to **accuracy** while working under time pressure. The DipTrans exam tests the ability to produce accurate and grammatically correct translations within strict time constraints.
- Make appropriate use of **reference materials**, including dictionaries, specialised glossaries, personal word banks and other resources. However, while such tools are important, they should support rather than drive your translation decisions.
- Apply appropriate **translation techniques** based on analysis of the text and its purpose.

Quality Assurance & Revision

Professional translation always includes careful checking and assurance of accuracy and translation quality, and commonly a thorough review and revision by someone else.

Of course, accuracy – and eliminating mistakes – is the most important area for a candidate to focus on, but success in the DipTrans also requires:

- The ability to critically evaluate your work, identifying and correcting any stylistic errors or weaknesses.
- Understanding and appropriate application under time pressure of the quality assurance skills, processes and procedures used in professional translation.
- The judgment to know when a translation meets professional standards – in essence, when to stop – and when it still requires further editing, improvement or changes.

Once again, using the time available in the DipTrans exam to review, revise and eliminate errors in a translation is part of demonstrating an appropriate awareness of and application of revision, quality assurance approaches and good professional judgment.



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Preparing for the DipTrans Exam

Familiarise yourself with the assessment marking criteria and the learning outcomes.

The DipTrans exam assesses your ability to:

- Produce translations that show the correct transfer of information and evidence of comprehension and accuracy, as well as translations which are grammatically sound, cohesive and coherent, and organised and accurate in punctuation, orthography and accentuation.
- Write in a style that is appropriate to the text type and target audience. Your translations should read naturally in the target language while maintaining the register and tone of the original.
- Handle semi-specialised terminology accurately and consistently. This requires both subject knowledge and research skills.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Experience shows that candidates often encounter specific challenges:

- Over-literal translation is a common issue. Remember that professional translation requires transferring meaning rather than just words.
- Poor time management can lead to rushed or incomplete translations. Practice working under timed conditions to develop appropriate pacing.
- Insufficient attention to target language conventions can result in translations that feel unnatural or foreign.



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Exam feedback over the years has highlighted several key areas where DipTrans candidates face challenges:

- **Translation accuracy and content mastery** – these remain significant hurdles, even among candidates with strong target language skills. Examiners often note concerns with inadequate use of semi-specialised terminology and sometimes instances of serious errors that distort the source text.
- **Language interference poses problems** – this can manifest in poor lexical choices and inappropriate adherence to source language patterns. Additionally, candidates sometimes struggle to properly implement target language genre conventions or to make necessary grammatical adjustments. A professionally translated text needs to read naturally in the target language and not carry over inappropriate structural, vocabulary or other linguistic elements from the source text.
- **‘Over translation’** – another notable issue is the tendency of some candidates to over-interpret or explain the source text rather than focusing on accurate translation.

The Translation Spectrum

Professional translators must carefully balance source language and target language considerations.

The spectrum of translation ranges from source-language dominant translation to target-language dominant:

- Word-for-word translation (**strongest source language emphasis**)
- Literal translation
- Faithful translation (the DipTrans norm)
- Communicative translation
- Idiomatic translation
- Free translation
- Adaptation/transcreation/ localisation (**strongest target language emphasis**)

The DipTrans exam generally looks for **faithful translation** that is virtually error-free and publication-ready. This demanding standard typically requires the candidate to have developed a reliable sense of appropriate translation choices and considerable exposure to professional translation and exam practice.

Candidates will generally benefit from at least two years of professional translation experience and ‘fine-tuning’ from regular client feedback, and also collaboration and learning from and with other translators.



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Comparison with the CertTrans

The CIOLQ Level 7 DipTrans differs fundamentally from the CIOLQ Level 6 CertTrans in its complexity and requirements. The CertTrans focuses on the accurate rendering of comparatively straightforward source texts.

The DipTrans, by contrast, demands:

- Considerable mastery of translation conventions and norms
- Proficiency in both general and semi-specialised genres
- Ability to handle significantly more challenging texts
- Near-perfect accuracy in the final translation

This higher standard makes the DipTrans a particularly challenging, but also rewarding, qualification to achieve, reflecting its status as a professional-level certification.

Effective Preparation Strategies

To prepare effectively for the DipTrans:

- Develop a systematic study plan that includes regular translation practice, feedback from other translation professionals, and ongoing development of subject knowledge.

The DipTrans represents a significant achievement in professional translation. While the exam is challenging, thorough preparation and systematic practice will help you develop the skills and knowledge needed for success.

Remember that the qualification is not just about passing an exam – it is about developing and demonstrating the competencies needed for a successful career in professional translation.

DipTrans qualification structure

To achieve this qualification, candidates need to complete three units:

- **Unit 01 – Written Translation of a General Text**
- **Unit 02 & Unit 03 Written Translation of a Semi-Specialised Text**



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About the DipTrans Units

Unit 01 - General Translation

Unit assessment time: 3 hours

Candidates will be required to translate a text of about 600 words into their target language.

The text will be set at a demanding level of difficulty but non-specialised in nature. The translation must be completed to a professional standard of accuracy in the target language.

The learning outcomes are:

LO1: Be able to produce a translation of a general text that shows the correct transfer of information and evidence of comprehension and accuracy, transfer of names, dates and figures

LO2: Be able to produce a translation of a general text that is grammatically sound, cohesive and coherent, as well as well organised and accurate in punctuation, orthography and accentuation

Unit 02 and Unit 03 - Semi-specialised translations

Unit assessment time (per unit): 2 hours

Candidates will be required to translate a semi-specialised text of about 450 words into their target language. The text will be set at a demanding level of difficulty. The translation must be completed to a professional standard of accuracy.

The learning outcomes are:

LO1: Be able to produce a translation of a semi-specialised text that shows correct transfer of information and evidence of complete comprehension and accuracy, transfer of names, dates and figures.

LO2: Be able to produce a translation of a semi-specialised text that is grammatically sound, cohesive and coherent, as well as well organised and accurate in punctuation, orthography and accentuation.



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About the Assessment

The DipTrans equips candidates with the translation skills necessary to achieve high performance in the global business environment.

The pass mark for the assessment is 60%. Candidates who obtain between 60-69 out of 100 marks will be awarded a Pass, and candidates whose marks fall between 70-79 marks will be awarded a Merit. Those reaching the aspirational Distinction grade will have achieved 80-100 marks.

A translation can be awarded Distinction, Merit or Pass only if it is professionally usable. Any translation that is not professionally usable will be awarded a Fail.

It is important to note that a Pass for each paper is 60% as long as the minimum pass mark has been scored in each Learning Outcome.

Candidates will obtain the full DipTrans qualification only if they pass the core mandatory unit and both mandatory option units.

Advice to Candidates

Candidates are advised to study the Qualification Specification carefully and make sure that they are fully aware of the demands of the assessment.

In particular, they should ensure that they have sufficient training and/or experience to attempt an assessment at this level.

Three factors generally determine how much preparation may be needed in the run-up to this assessment:

- Is there sufficient knowledge of both languages and cultures for the translation tasks?
- What knowledge of relevant subject areas and experience of translating to a professional standard of accuracy that candidates may have had beforehand.
- The amount of translating practice, with feedback, that they have had or can receive before the assessment.



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Courses

Additionally, in preparation for the DipTrans assessment, candidates may want to consider attending university or short professional courses, including modules in translation, applied linguistics or other semi-specialised areas of language study.

The choice, of course, will depend on the requirements of each candidate and the level that they are at. Courses will vary and focus on different aspects, may provide some of the theory and an introduction to concepts and terminology for some of the topics offered within the DipTrans. It is not possible to lay down any hard or fast rules regarding the extent and duration of preparation.

What can be said, however, is that an excellent level of language competence in the source and target languages is essential.

Practice

Candidates should be aware that professional translation can sometimes be a 'race against the clock'. In accordance, the assessment does introduce some time pressure, which means that candidates need to select texts carefully and translate them within the time allocated for each part of the assessment.



Candidates will want to practice translating at the right speed so that they are prepared when they sit the assessment. This is very important, since many candidates in translation assessments say they ended up feeling there was not enough time.

Candidates are advised to revise specific topics covering their semi-specialised areas and the units they are planning to choose. This revision should include both 'passive' and 'active' practice.

It may not be enough to just read and analyse texts in both languages, preparation should also include actually translating texts on those topics and identifying areas or terminology which should be reviewed, learned or researched further. Candidates also need to practice writing clearly in the target language. It may be helpful to engage peers as target language readers.

If some sentences are difficult to read or understand, it means that candidates may need to review the structure of those sentences or paraphrase to make for a more 'natural' read; but at the same time, candidates need to make sure that the translation accurately represents the information contained in the source text.

Finally, when preparing for the assessment, it may be helpful to consider both the quantity and the quality of translation practice. The volume of practice is vital, but so is planned recovery time, otherwise there may be a feeling of 'burn out' and performance in the assessment may drop. Practice should be tailored to what will be needed in the assessment. When translating texts, candidates need to identify their weaknesses and work on them to achieve a successful overall performance.

Back to basics - preparing for the exam

Candidates should start preparing well in advance of the exam. This is particularly important for those candidates with limited professional translation experience.

Candidates are advised to go through a process of identifying any skills which need further development and improvement.

Advanced language skills are crucial as each translation task involves understanding the source text correctly (decoding) and rendering or transferring the information into a target language (encoding) in a way that the text reads as if it had originally been written in the target language.

Writing skills in the target language need to be both accurate and professional, demonstrating the ability to write in a variety of different styles.

The text produced should be technically sound in terms of grammar, spelling, punctuation, accentuation and so on. Some candidates will benefit by performing regular writing exercises with a native speaker, to seek feedback and suggestions for improvement.



Research skills and pre-translation analysis

Research skills are vital for the professional development of translators, and specifically when candidates work on and refine specific texts. In preparation for the DipTrans, candidates need to practice conducting searches for lexical items and focus on any issues they encounter when translating practice texts. They can also learn from the experience of others and may consider joining translation forums. This work will not only expand candidates' knowledge but will also enable them to analyse relevant lexical and grammatical issues and find appropriate solutions.

Many translation problems are resolved by revising and reviewing a wide range of information ahead of the assessment

In the exam, all candidates should carefully read the introductory assessment rubric in English, which contextualises the topic of the text and offers some information about the target readership. This is important for understanding the content and context of the source text and the required decoding and encoding of the information presented in it.

Candidates are advised to identify key terms and decide how they should be encoded within the given context. They may also need to use dictionaries to research further any particular vocabulary, wording, proper names, cultural references or other information.

Back to basics - preparing for the exam

Before starting to translate, it is advisable to read the entire source text a couple of times. Initial scrutiny of the source text is crucial at the beginning as it may not only reveal certain obvious features, some lexis and terminology and the basic argument or logic of the text, but also point to some cultural references, style and register, semi-specialist terminology, abbreviations, acronyms and extra contextual references which may need further reflection or research.

Generally speaking, it is at the reading stage that potential challenges start to emerge and where candidates will shape their general strategy or framework for the translation assessment. In other words, reading is aimed at overall comprehension and positioning the content and context.

Although there are time constraints, the importance of a thorough pre-translation reading of the source text should not be underestimated. The final translation will benefit from a better understanding of essential text markers, which may help build a picture of the text's overall logic. Thorough pre-reading will create a solid framework for the entire translation.

Overall, pre-translation analysis helps identify the major 'landmarks' of the source text to ensure the adequacy and accuracy of translation. Candidates need to consider the following questions:

- What is the text type?
- What is the text's purpose?
- Which discipline and text-specific conventions are used?
- Are these different in the target language?

During pre-translation analysis, it is worth considering whether any linguistic features are not available in the target language or may appear the same but have different associations, connotations, areas of usage or purposes.

Comprehension and related skills (decoding)

Comprehension of the source text is paramount and will have an impact on how the information understood from the source text is encoded into the target text.

The main indicator that a candidate has understood the source text is the accuracy of the translation: information presented in the source text should be accurately transferred into the target text without any additions, omissions or misinterpretations.

Some common causes of lapses in accuracy are often a result of the following:

- An inability to grasp the overall meaning of the entire sentence or paragraph, and therefore resorting to literal (word-for-word) translation.
- Guessing the exact meaning of specific words or phrases instead of consulting a dictionary.
- Issues with comprehension which lead to mistranslation of words, phrases, concepts or technical terms.
- Omission of sections of translation either because they were not understood, there was a lack of attention to details or words or phrases were missed and, as a result, the information was not presented sufficiently accurately in the target language.

A source text could have references to particular international issues. In this and other cases, understanding the cultural context will help candidates navigate such references. It is also important to understand differences between source and target language cultures and culture-specific aspects of life: pastimes, customs, socialising and suchlike.

Back to basics - preparing for the exam

Candidates are advised to regularly follow current affairs in both languages and pay particular attention to the language being used when describing particular events. New lexical items appear in languages all the time to describe new events and phenomena. Candidates need to be aware of them and how to describe them in both languages.

Candidates can extend their cultural knowledge by:

- Living, studying and/or working in both source and target languages and cultures
- Regular reading, watching, listening to media in both languages, and paying attention to linguistic issues associated with specific events
- Attending a variety of cultural events
- Researching culture-specific events or topics which they may not be familiar with
- Having a native speaking mentor to guide and advise

Transfer the information into the target language (encoding)

In the assessment the presentation of information in the target language (encoding) must respect the norms of the target language, e.g., grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, text cohesion, the use of terminology etc. The accuracy with which the information is presented in the target text is central in translation.

When presenting decoded information in the target text, candidates need to pay special attention to the choice of register, appropriate vocabulary, terminology and idioms. They must all reflect the intention of the source text. In other words, if the original source text was written 'for the educated layperson' or 'for the readership

interested in the topic' or 'for businesspeople working in a particular region', then the translation and the target text produced should also reflect the same readership.

Candidates need to remember that translation is not just about translating words, phrases or sentences; it is about understanding ideas presented in the source text and transferring them effectively into the target language and culture. Candidates need to establish the overall purpose of the text; identify the key messages the author wants to convey and then proceed to finding appropriate means of conveying those ideas into the target language.

Word-for-word or literal translation may lead to the production of stilted or inappropriate style in the target language and may also result in some misinterpretations which could confuse the target readership.

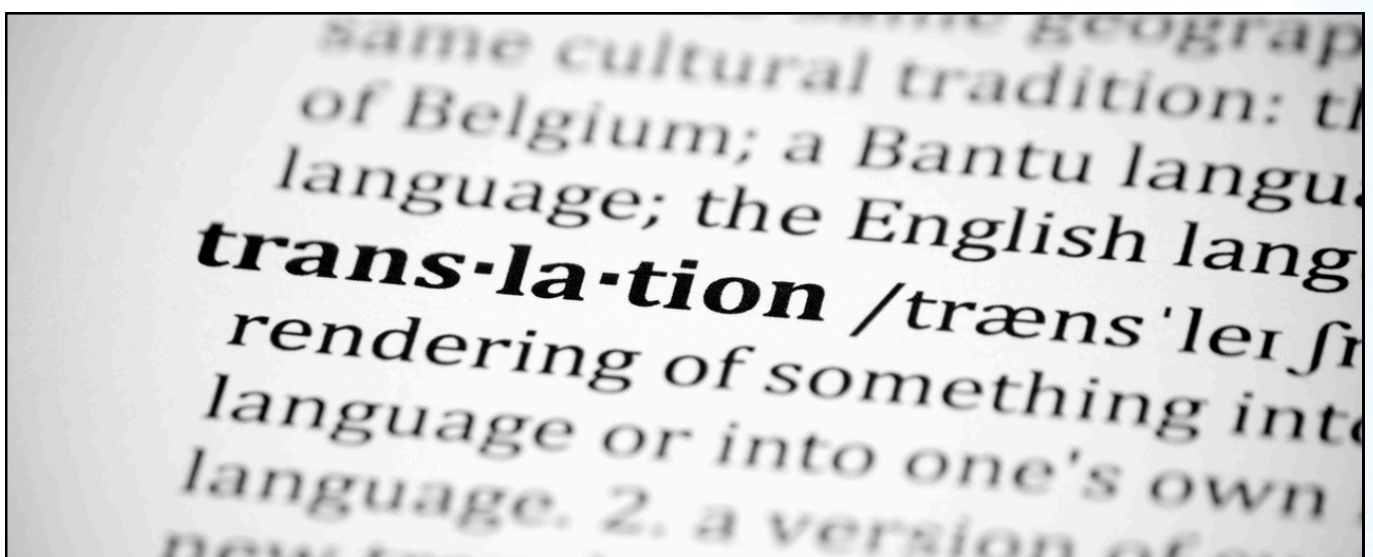
Coherence of sentences, text cohesion and organisation of work may suffer when candidates adhere too closely to source language sentence structures and patterns. The target text may read awkwardly for the target readership or even be difficult to understand. It is important to learn, while practicing translation exercises, how to present information in the target language so that it reads as if it has originally been written in that language, and at the same time accurately covers all ideas expressed in the source text. This is the central challenge of translation.

It is also important to note that candidates should avoid the use of informal language, for example: 'doesn't', 'can't', or 'won't' in English, unless this is the style of the source text. It is therefore important that candidates allocate time at the end of each unit for a review of their text, to ensure that it adheres to the norms of the target language and reads appropriately for the intended context and audience.

Back to basics - preparing for the exam

Tips for refining language and preparing for your exams

- Set learning goals – short and long term
- Challenge yourself daily
- Consolidate key vocabulary
- Consider flash cards for reference and self-checking
- Connect with native speakers
- Stay up to date with news and cultural aspects of the language
- Practice with actual texts regularly
- Talk to other translators
- Practice with word games (word of the day; crosswords etc.)
- Watch movies with subtitles in your target language
- Keep it enjoyable! Avoid making preparation a chore



Information on resources and references

There are many resources for reference and revision that may support your studies. As an Awarding Organisation, we do not recommend or endorse third-party resources.

Assessment resources

The assessment is 'open book', which means candidates may use the following:

- Hard copies of general bilingual, monolingual, and specialist dictionaries
- Published glossaries and/or personal word banks
- Various reference materials, including encyclopaedias

Assessment-related materials

Depending on the units chosen, candidates should familiarise themselves with as wide a range of source materials relevant to that context as possible.

Books

- Abbott, D. (1998) Culture and identity. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
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