

Principal Examiners' Report January 2011

FS

Functional Skills English Writing Level 2

E203

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E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2

General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 2 Writing Skills. The tasks set were writing a letter to a local business asking for sponsorship and writing a message to an internet discussion forum on whether people should constantly be told how to live their lives. Learners found these tasks accessible and there were only a few examples of misinterpretation. The full range of marks was awarded.

Task 1

The large majority of learners were able to say why the youth centre was in need of repair and what they would like to do. This information was provided in the prompt material and the more successful learners went on to develop these ideas, e.g. by explaining how the community would benefit from a revamped centre. Learners also had the opportunity to develop their own ideas as to how the company would benefit from providing sponsorship. Many did this well, e.g. by referring to the publicity the company would gain and sometimes even offering a share of the profits.

The majority of learners also managed to write in an appropriately formal tone, but a number wrote letters that were inappropriately informal, e.g. starting with "Hi Kate." The ability to use persuasive language successfully was a key factor in accessing the higher mark bands.

Letter format was an issue for the large majority of learners, with very few managing a completely correct layout and an appropriate open and close. A number of learners did not provide a sender address.

The more successful learners wrote to a clear structure, with many using the bullet points provided to underpin their response. Less successful learners tended to have limited control of structure and their paragraphing was erratic, with a number of learners writing in one sentence paragraphs and others writing the text in one continuous block.

The full range of spelling, punctuation and grammar marks was awarded. Some responses were written to a very high degree of accuracy, whereas others contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. Common errors included confusion between their/there and its/it's and a number of the words given in the prompt were also misspelt, e.g. "sponsorsip." There were also issues with non capitalisation of proper nouns and confusion with the use of the apostrophe.

Only a small number of learners showed evidence of having planned their responses, before they started writing them. It was clear that writing a plan had helped these learners to write clearly and logically.

Task 2

Learners found this task accessible and were able to express their views on the topic. It appeared that many were experienced in this type of writing.

Despite the online format the large majority heeded the instruction to write in standard English and a number of well developed responses were seen. These could be as short as one page, but there were a number of learners who did not spot the instruction to give their "detailed views" and wrote only a few lines.

Conversely there were other learners who wrote rambling responses, with limited structure and self-contradictory arguments. The ability to present views clearly was a key factor in deciding the success or otherwise of a response.

Weaker learners often wrote about one aspect of the task only, e.g. writing about the importance of healthy eating rather than on whether people should be told how to live their lives more generally. Some learners also got rather worked up by the topic and lost control of what they were writing and a few were rude to the other respondents.

There are no format conventions for an online review and so this was not an issue. However, a few did make obvious format errors, e.g. by writing a letter, and a large number of learners did not use paragraphs to give structure to their response. Again, the full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Principal Examiners Tips for Centres

Prior to the test all learners should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. This experience will be of great help to them in confidently tackling a future L2 Writing paper.

It is vital that learners are able to correctly format a formal letter, prior to taking this exam. Being able to write in a formal tone is also important.

It is also recommended that time is spent on teaching the use of persuasive language and on giving learners the opportunity to practice using this.

Learners need to be reminded of the importance of writing their responses in paragraphs. Where bullet points are included in a question then these can often be used as the basis for each paragraph.

Centres should also reinforce the fact that 40% of the marks are for spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is important to remind learners that they are allowed to use a dictionary and also that they should spend a few minutes checking through their work, after they have finished.

Finally it is also recommended that centres tell learners that they can plan their work on the exam paper. They will just need to rule through this if they don't want it to be marked.

Pass mark for E103

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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