

Principal Examiners' Report February 2011

FS

Functional Skills English Writing Level 2

E203

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E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2

General comments

This question paper worked well in testing Level 2 writing skills. The two tasks set were writing a letter to invite a guest speaker to an Energy Saving Day and an email complaining about the quality of an internet service. These subjects proved accessible to learners and the large majority produced some appropriate ideas for each task. However, there was a large variation in how clearly these ideas were expressed and the full range of marks was awarded.

Task 1

Most learners were able to understand the purpose of the letter to persuade a busy man to speak at an energy saving event. The more successful learners developed their ideas beyond the stimulus text and organised their responses logically. Again, the more successful learners wrote persuasively, realising the need to entice the potential speaker. Most learners also managed to write in an appropriately formal tone, with only a few lapses.

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. Common errors were to only include the recipient's address and to leave out the date. The lack of a sender's address may reflect security of privacy, in which case, learners need to be reassured that they can use a mock address.

The more successful learners wrote to a clear structure, with many using the bullet points provided to underpin their response. These learners were able to develop these points beyond simply repeating the stimulus text. A significant number, however, limited their response to a simple re-iteration. Less successful learners tended to have limited control of structure and their paragraphing was erratic, with a number writing in one sentence paragraphs and others writing the text in one continuous block.

Spelling and grammar were variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate, whereas others contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. Words commonly spelt incorrectly were: speech/grateful/appalling/connection/disappointed. There were also issues with non capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing in a number of responses.

Task 2

Most learners were able to attempt an appropriate tone for an email of complaint and there were a number of well written responses that were fully functional. These more successful learners developed ideas beyond the stimulus text giving precise details of the problems encountered and the recompense they sought. The majority adopted an appropriately formal tone in complaining, showing an awareness of audience, but a few saw it as an opportunity for invective and unrealistic threats, thereby losing functionality.

There were considerable variations in the opening and closing conventions of the email with some adopting a formal letter format and others inappropriately informal salutations. Successful learners recognised the function of the email, opening and closing it in a way that was fit for purpose.

Again, many of the stronger learners used the bullet points in the task to add a logical structure to their response. Having described the problems they then explained exactly what they were asking the company to do.

In the majority of responses, spelling and grammar were sufficiently accurate not to impair meaning although punctuation was generally less secure. There was a tendency to use semi-colons and exclamation marks at random.

Principal Examiner tips

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose, i.e. relevant to the task in hand. This means that they must read the question and stimulus material with great care, before they start to write their response. Responses that are well written but of limited relevance to the task set will not receive a high mark for form, communication and purpose. There were a few examples of this in task one where learners wrote advertisements for the "Energy Saving Day".

Prior to the test all learners should be given opportunities to practise writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. This experience will be of great help to them in tackling a future Level 2 Writing paper. This should include the differences in writing an email to friends or to a more formal contact.

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

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. It is also important that learners understand where and when different punctuation marks should be used.

Pass mark for E203

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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