

Principal Examiners' Report January 2011

FS

Functional Skills English Writing Level 1

E103

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E103 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 1

General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. The tasks set were writing a letter to a council officer about the intention to end free travel for under sixteens on public transport and writing an email to friends who had volunteered to help at a charity event. 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.

Task 1

Most learners were able to offer their views regarding the ending of free travel. Many adopted a balanced approach making both sides of the argument before coming to a conclusion for or against the proposal. The more successful learners linked realistic reasons to the views they expressed which included issues of poverty, financial restraint on large families, inhibiting social lives and being a disincentive to attend school or college. Those successful learners who wrote in support of the scheme also developed their ideas about the way in which the money saved could be used to benefit the wider community. Successful learners taking the opposite viewpoint were very dismissive of any such potential benefits.

Most learners were able to establish a relevant viewpoint on the subject of free travel and showed it was widely accessible across the range. A number went astray trying to understand the economics of how money would be saved which led them away from the main point of the letter. Less successful learners held a view but were unable to substantiate it by reasoned argument.

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 significant proportion only attempted to include a recipient's address. There appeared to be a real reluctance to put a sender's address or a date. Apart from a few inappropriate opening salutations most learners adopted a suitable formal tone with very few lapses.

The more successful learners wrote to a clear structure, with many using the bullet points provided to underpin their response. Less successful learners had limited control of structure which resulted in lack of cohesion and much repetition.

Spelling and grammar were variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate, whereas others contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. The majority of responses were reasonably accurate with the clarity of meaning only occasionally impaired. There were also issues with non capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing in a significant number of responses.

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

Most learners were able to sustain an appropriate tone for an email to friends. There were, however, a noticeable proportion that used more formal letter conventions in opening and closing the email. Some responses were colloquial, but not inappropriate given the context of the task. The more successful candidates were able to use an effective informal tone to allocate jobs to their volunteering friends thus ensuring a fully functional email. A large number of learners wrote asking for volunteers, not having understood that the recipients had already volunteered. This underlined the importance of learners reading the stimulus text carefully to ensure their response is fit for purpose

Again, many of the stronger learners used the bullet points in the task to add a logical structure to their response. Successful learners also used an introduction and conclusion and developed detail explaining exactly what was required of the volunteers. Less successful learners were unable to develop any detail about the tasks and resorted to simple lists. A few completely misunderstood the task and wrote an email to advertise the event. As commented above, it is crucial that the stimulus text is read carefully before engaging in the writing task.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar were generally secure enough not to compromise the meaning and coherence of the majority of responses. Common errors were, as in the previous task, mostly in capitalisation, sentence definition, missing omission apostrophes and confusion of words like "there and their".

Examiner Tips for both tasks

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose. In preparation for this test learners need to understand the purpose of different types of functional tasks (e.g. formal letter, information leaflet, internet forum). When they come to the test they must read the question and stimulus text with great care to understand the purpose, 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.

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.

Pass mark for E103

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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