

Principal Examiner Report

June 2011

FS English Writing Level 1

E103

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General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were:

- Writing a letter of complaint to the manager of a theme park, detailing the reason for their complaint and what they wanted doing about it.
- Writing an email to a group of friends/colleagues inviting them to a colleagues leaving party.

Both tasks were successfully interpreted; there were lots of prompts to draw on which enabled the learners to fully understand the tasks/contexts.

Task 1

Most learners were able to produce a functionally effective letter. Many answers showed that learners had been well prepared for writing a formal letter, although some learners still positioned the addresses incorrectly and/or omitted the senders address.

Learners reaching the higher bands were able to develop their ideas convincingly and express the failings of the theme park, suggesting areas for improvement. Often these responses contained an introduction, middle and an end and focussed on fewer issues that were well developed.

Weaker answers opted for describing that everything in the theme park was wrong but with little focus or detail and rarely giving a conclusion. Also, they appeared not to have read the task properly and got tied up in the 'style' of the leaflet. Some learners were more aggressive in their language and occasionally used inappropriate and/or threatening phrases or manner, eg. 'I want you, Chris, to give me my money back or you will know about it'.

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.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar were variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate, whereas others contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. An all too frequent example of tense confusion was, 'I were looking' and the misspelling of words that were in the task, i.e. 'queue' spelled as 'que' or other variations and 'writing' is still an issue as is 'there/their'. There were also a number of issues with non-capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing in a significant number of responses.

Strong Answers

Form, Communication and Purpose

Strong answers contained the sender's address, as well as the recipient's, used the correct opening salutation of "Dear Mr Carter" and closed with "Yours sincerely". They opened with a brief explanation of when they had visited and who with. They then developed a well-structured, convincing argument. They understood the implications of misleading advertising and skilfully drew detailed comparisons between their experience and the details in the leaflet. The response ended with realistic suggestions for what they wanted doing about the problems and put forward some good recommendations for improvements at the park. The key, especially in this last paragraph, was tone. Strong answers used a gentle tone and appealed to a sense of fairness rather than becoming abusive and rude.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

Strong answers used capitals for names and addresses correctly, had no comma splicing, used full stops and task marks effectively and used the correct spellings of homophones. Sentences did not start with conjunctions and grammar and tenses were also used correctly. Finally, words from the task were spelt correctly, eg 'queue'.

Task 2

There was tighter content and learners generally found it relatively easy to construct answers to this task because of the direction in the task and the informal email format. Many emails were reasonably well thought out, well-structured and written in an appropriate tone. Some responses were very colloquial, but not inappropriate given the context of the task.

The more successful learners gave basic details and were able to use an effective tone to encourage friends/colleagues to not only join the party, but also bring some stories to tell. They comprehensively and persuasively developed different aspects of the proposed party and included their own ideas such as details about catering and music.

Weaker answers were factual, but not particularly enthusiastic or encouraging. They repeated the bullets and did not develop their own ideas or try to persuade friends/colleagues to come to the party. Some completely ignored the date/time/venue, providing their own invented details. Others completely omitted one or two of the vital details.

Issues were similar to those mentioned in Task 1, again demonstrating some awful past/present tense issues.

Strong Answers

Form, Communication and Purpose

Strong answers adopted the correct tone from the outset, greeting the groups of friends/colleagues with 'Hi all' or 'Hi everyone' and did not have too much use of slang/text language. There was good sequencing of the main points, eg location/date/time and the fact that it was a leaving party. Learners were also very enthusiastic and actually attempted to encourage their friends/colleagues to come to the party and provide some funny stories, using a good combination of information and familiarity. They also concluded with a request for a reply about attendance in order facilitate preparations and used an appropriate closing salutation like 'bye for now', 'look forward to hearing from you', 'see you at the party', and then their name.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

Strong answers showed consistent use of capital letters, complete sentences, good subject-verb agreement, good use of tenses and no comma splicing. They also got basic spellings correct, especially those that were in the task.

Recommendations for Centres

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. When they come to the test they must read the task 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.

In preparation for this test, learners need to understand the purpose of different types of functional task, eg formal letter, informal email, and 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 tackling a future Level 1 Writing paper.

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 do not want it to be marked.

Pass mark for E103 in June 2011

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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