

# Principal Examiner Report

July 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:

1. Writing a letter of application
2. Writing an email to complain about a faulty watch

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

## Task 1

Generally, the letters were relevant and written in an appropriate style and tone although there were a lot of weak responses in terms of content. Most people managed to include the address given and the correct greeting but very few included the sender's address, a date or got the ending quite right (usually in terms of spelling).

Stronger learners followed the bullet point framework given in the rubric which gave structure to the letters.

Weaker learners put irrelevant information in with regards to work experience and even suggested they wanted the job because they had been sacked from their last position. A few identified skills that they did not have rather than those they did have and some included skills that were not particularly relevant for the position being applied for, such as the would-be waiter who was 'good at football'. The result was that some letters contained rather long, disconnected lists of rather mundane factors which could be applied to everybody and every job. The overall quality of responses would suggest that teachers need to spend more time on this kind of letter, concentrating on linking experience/skills with the job they are applying for and emphasising the importance of including a reply address.

In terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar, the overall standard was variable. Many learners struggled with their tenses particularly with auxiliary verbs and there were the usual difficulties with upper case letters - particularly on 'I'. There were a lot of learners who wanted to apply to be 'a sales assistants'. The main punctuation problem was commas on this task; some used them in place of full stops, others seemed to scatter them randomly and with no apparent plan.

Strong answers contained the sender's address, the recipient's address and a date. They used the correct opening salutation of 'Dear Miss/Mrs Lakhani', then opened the letter by explaining who they were, why they were writing and what they were currently doing. They chose a job they were interested in and included relevant examples of previous experience, qualifications and skills. They explained why they were interested in the job and stated when they could start. They also asked for a response.

Strong answers used capitals for names and addresses correctly, had no comma splicing, used full stops and question marks (where appropriate) effectively and used the correct spellings of homophones. Sentences did not start with conjunctions and grammar and tenses were also used correctly.

## **Task 2**

Learners generally found it relatively easy to structure answers to this task because of the email format. Inevitably, in some responses the email became a rant but generally, the learners dealt with the task fairly well.

Stronger learners produced emails that were well thought out and written in a reasonable tone, describing clearly the reason for returning the watch adding some relevant and convincing detail to the bare bones of the rubric.

Weaker learners however did not understand the functions and quite often suggested the 'brushed steel casing didn't work'. Several were too vague and gave no specific reasons for the watch being unacceptable. Many lacked appropriate tone for a formal email and became abusive and threatening.

In terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar, some learners were incapable of changing the word 'resistant' to 'resistance' when required. Tense control and spelling were weaker than for the previous task, although this could be due to rushing. A number did not know the difference between employee and employer.

Strong answers adopted the correct tone from the outset, identifying that although there is no set format for an email, there was still a requirement for formality in tone and greeting/closing due to the nature of the task. They opened with 'Dear Sir/Madam' or 'Dear Customer Services Department' and ended with 'Yours faithfully'. They stated how long they had had the watch, what the faults were and the problems these faults had caused, how the store had responded to their complaint and ended with realistic suggestions for what they wanted doing. 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.

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 prompt.

## 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 task. 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, etc) 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.

Although it was reassuring to see some really good responses and that centres have obviously been addressing issues relating to letter layout and informal email layout, centres/learners may benefit from addressing the following points:

- Get learners to improve time management by sitting mock tests using past papers
- Practise email writing, stressing appropriate and inappropriate language forms

## Form, Communication, Purpose

- **Letter layout:** both addresses and date to be included in the correct position at the top of the letter; sender's address on the right, recipient's address on the left
- **Letters/emails of complaint:** don't be aggressive and rude
- **Letters of application:** obtain a sample template to coach learners on accepted and appropriate tone/content
- **Organised parties/events:** always include the main details that are in the question, e.g. time/date/place
- **Emails:** advise learners not to be too informal; work on using appropriate register and not using slang and texting abbreviations
- **Salutation:** when to use formal and informal greetings and choose the appropriate matching closing

- **Salutation:** in a formal letter, address it as “Dear Mr/Mrs...” (for example), don’t put “Dear Ria”, or include the whole of the recipient’s name, e.g. “Dear Ria Lakhani”
- **Identifying the audience:** when to use a formal/informal tone
- **Sequencing:** how to use pointers to aid development and sequencing of ideas
- **Closing paragraphs:** need to be rehearsed more; on the whole, they are a lot weaker than opening paragraphs which appear to have been much more rehearsed

### **Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar**

- **Homophones:** focus needed on the spelling of common homophones such as “their” and there”
- **Capitals:** correct use of capitalisation for names and addresses
- **Punctuation:** avoid comma splicing
- **Spelling:** most common errors; ‘brought’ instead of ‘bought’, ‘assistance’ instead of ‘assistant’
- **Salutation:** correct capitalisation, e.g. use “Yours faithfully”, not “yours faithfully” or “Yours Faithfully”
- **Salutation:** spell “sincerely” correctly, not, “sincerly”

## Pass mark for E103 in July 2011

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Maximum mark	<b>25</b>
Pass mark	<b>16</b>
UMS mark	<b>6</b>

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