

Principal Examiner Report

May 2011

FS English Writing Level 2

E203

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General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 2 writing skills. The subjects of the tasks set proved accessible to learners and the large majority produced some appropriate ideas for each task. Full range of marks was awarded in this series on both questions.

Task 1

Most learners were able to understand the purpose of the letter and offered ideas as to why they should be chosen to do voluntary work.

The more successful learners developed their ideas beyond the brief, organising their responses logically and with appropriate detail. Some learners were very imaginative in their ideas and in their approach to the stimulus material.

Most learners also managed to write in an appropriately formal tone, with only a few lapses.

Letter format was greatly improved in this series and there was much evidence to suggest that learners had a better understanding of the correct layout. Some learners still confused recipient with sender's address. One common observation was that, although letter conventions were adhered to, learners did not always introduce their letters appropriately and simply launched into the main body of the text.

A smaller number of learners simply reiterated the bullet points or regurgitated the stimulus text. There was therefore a higher number of learners who were able to develop their ideas more fully, discussing experiences or skills that they felt were appropriate. Some weaker answers were inappropriately blunt about the motivation for applying, ie to improve their CVs.

Strong responses were written to a clear structure, with many learners using the bullet points provided to underpin their response. Paragraphing was mostly in place. A few wrote one sentence paragraphs or text in one continuous block, but this was not a common trend for this task. Sentence structure, however, was less controlled in the main.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar were variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate, whereas others contained many errors although meaning was generally still supported. Common issues were with non-capitalisation of proper nouns and the personal pronoun 'I' and also with incorrect demarcation of sentences, ie with splicing commas being used in many cases.

Task 2

Most learners were able to develop ideas on some of the points from the stimulus text with regards to the changes to gym membership. Few learners covered all of the points. They were either focused on expressing their disgust or offering suggestions for improvement. It was rare that both viewpoints were expressed. That said, texts were often lengthy and good attempts were made at developing full responses.

Tone was a problematic area on this task as many learners felt the need to express their dismay, often to hyperbolic extremes. This, therefore, affected the 'functionality' of the task and left responses seeming too informal or without relevant focus. More successful learners could express their displeasure appropriately.

The inappropriate use of tone, particularly in complaints, has been noted in previous series and it is reiterated in this paper that an awareness of audience is vital to maintaining functionality in writing.

Most of the responses demonstrated an understanding of layout and structure with some adopting a formal approach. Generally learners approached opening and closing their emails in a way that was fit for purpose.

Paragraphing was in place for most responses and it was observed that most answers were significantly longer than in previous series. Similarly to task 1, sentence structure was a weakness for many learners with overuse of commas and lack of sentence control.

In the majority of responses, spelling and grammar were sufficiently accurate that meaning was not impaired. Punctuation was generally less secure. Splicing commas were very common. Omission of apostrophes or using them to form plurals was also prevalent. Grammar was mostly sound in terms of tense and subject verb agreement.

Recommendations for Centres

Learners should be made aware that, as a Functional Skills assessment, they should read the brief and stimulus materials carefully to ensure they are fully cognisant of the task that is required. Their writing must be fit for purpose and developed to cover all of the necessary points. A well written response that does not clearly relate to the task will be limited in terms of marks awarded for form, communication and purpose.

Learners should be given plenty of opportunities to practise their writing in various formats, for different purposes and for different audiences/scenarios.

It is very important that learners recognise the different formats, in particular a formal letter layout.

Exam preparation should include time management, planning and proofreading practice, as these elements are often intrinsic in preventing otherwise strong responses from gaining higher marks.

Centres should emphasise 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. It is also vital that learners understand where and when different punctuation marks should be used, particularly for sentence demarcation. Learners should also be encouraged to proofread their work to check for 'sense' in sentences, use of basic punctuation, avoidance of common spelling errors and accurate use of grammar.

Pass mark for E203 in May 2011

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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