

Principal Examiner Report

June 2011

FS English Writing Level 2

E203

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Publications Code FC027836

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General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 2 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were: writing a section in a guide about what overseas visitors could do in the learner's locality and an email to friends seeking sponsorship and support for a fundraising walk for the local hospital. 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 information guide and wrote with pride about the available facilities in their local area. They fully engaged with the task and wrote informed and quite lengthy responses. The stronger learners developed their ideas and were able to guide the visitors to a range of activities to meet different tastes. Less strong responses lacked this variety and tended to dwell on one or two aspects of the locality, generally shops and restaurants. Some learners missed the point and wrote generalised answers based on the whole of the United Kingdom or even holiday destinations abroad. It appeared as if some learners had been encouraged not to be specific in order to preserve their centre's anonymity. These responses lacked the informative detail and sense of pride that others conveyed. Although it could be felt that learners from tourist destinations had an advantage in this task there were plenty of strong answers from learners living in areas with, on the face of it, more limited facilities. They were able to develop the less obvious attractions such as hiking and picnicking.

Many learners managed to write in an appropriate tone and were fully functional, with only a few lapses. Occasionally the tone adopted was more suited to an advertising brochure with the resulting loss in functionality placing the response in one of the lower bands. This also happened when learners tried to produce a leaflet style guide relying too much on lists of attractions with very few sentences.

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 with detailed descriptions of a range of differing facilities found in their locality. These were confidently structured with paragraphs and sub-headings. 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. This has been noted in previous series and reflects learners who are not yet at Level 2.

Spelling, punctuation 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: their/there, weather/whether, you/use, centre/centre, leisure/leisure. 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 asking for sponsorship from friends and family 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 walk and the kind of support they were seeking. They adopted a suitably informal tone recognising the intended audience and the potential embarrassment of asking for money or other kinds of help. The strongest responses had a gently persuasive tone that avoided over pressuring the recipients. They also built strong cases as to why the fund raising for the hospital was necessary. Some lost functionality in this area through indulging in dramatic scenarios often on the theme of many people not surviving their hospital visit due to lack of funds!

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

This task did not have any guiding bullet points aiding the structure of responses. Weaker responses tended to lose structure and were often repetitive. Stronger answers, however, maintained coherent and systematic structure using paragraphs to deal with each element of the response. They conveyed all the important information including issues such as timing and clothing which were not in the stimulus text.

In the majority of responses, spelling and grammar were sufficiently accurate not to impair meaning although punctuation was generally less secure. Common errors included missing possessive apostrophes and apostrophes used in plural nouns. Increasingly in email responses learners are using "i" instead of "I".

Recommendations for Centres

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose, ie relevant to the task in hand. This means that they must read the task 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.

Prior to the test all learners should be given opportunities to practise writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. They should be clear about what is appropriate to include in an email asking people to give for a cause. This is also true for other functional writing tasks which do require a good understanding of the nature of different audiences. This experience will be of great help to them in tackling a future Level 2 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. It is also important that learners understand where and when different punctuation marks should be used. Recent series have seen frequent misuse of possessive apostrophes in simple plural nouns e.g. noun's.

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 don't want it to be marked.

Pass mark for E203 in May 2011

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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Order Code FC027836 June 2011

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