

Principal Examiner Report

July 2011

FS English Writing Level 2

E203

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General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 2 Writing Skills. The tasks set were writing a letter to raise concerns over dangerous traffic and contributing to an internet forum on whether the voting age should be lowered. Learners found these tasks accessible and there were very few examples of misinterpretation.

Task 1

The responses to this task showed that learners were familiar with the topic of road safety. They engaged with the topic and most were able to outline the problem coherently. The more successful responses built on this, by addressing the second bullet point and explaining the particular dangers that primary school children, health centre users and shoppers would face. In some other responses it was clear that learners had not read the prompt material sufficiently carefully as they wrote about traffic problems generally, rather than picking up on the specific groups required.

Learners were not required to offer ideas as to how the problem could be solved, but a number of learners did go on to make effective suggestions, such as the introduction of traffic calming measures or the hiring of a 'lollipop person'.

Successful responses remained focused on the task throughout and developed ideas logically. Less successful responses lacked structure and tended to jump from one idea to another, demonstrating a lack of planning. These responses also did not make accurate use of paragraphing to organise their ideas, with some written as a continuous block of text and others written in one-sentence paragraphs. Accurate use of paragraphing to organise ideas is a key component of successful responses at Level 2.

Most letters were written in an appropriate style and formal tone. Some learners were confused as to the purpose of the letter and wrote in an inappropriately aggressive or hectoring tone, eg telling Ria Lakhani that she should do something about the issue, or 'she'd be sorry'. Other learners wrote in a style more appropriate for an article, including quotes from invented locals or inflated road traffic accident statistics that did not add anything to the functionality of their response.

Successful responses also included an appropriate opening such as 'I am writing to draw your attention to road traffic problems in this area'. They went on to finish with an appropriate final sentence, such as 'Thank you for taking your time to read this letter and I hope that you can do something to improve this situation'. Less successful responses often started and ended very abruptly.

Letter layout remains an issue. Most learners were able to show some use of appropriate letter layout, but many only included the recipient address, often written on the right hand side of the page. On a more positive note most learners did manage to use the appropriate close, ie 'yours sincerely'.

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some responses were written to a very high degree of accuracy, whereas others contained so many errors that meaning became unclear. Common errors included confusion between *their/there* and *its/it's* and some words given in the prompt were also misspelt, eg 'trafic'. There were also issues with non capitalisation of proper nouns and sentence control was often weak, due to commas being used where full stops were needed.

Task 2

Learners responded with enthusiasm to this task, with the topic of whether the voting age should be lowered to the age of 16 provoking some strong views. These were evenly split on both sides of the argument. Many responses were well argued and engaged clearly with the ideas from the previous contributors, before giving their own conclusion. Less successful responses were often reliant on the source material and sometimes didn't move beyond commenting on Samir and Lucy's views.

Logical development of ideas was a key component of more successful responses. This task did not have any bullet points aiding the structure of the responses and so learners needed to organise their own ideas. Less successful responses tended to lose structure and were often repetitive. Stronger responses maintained a coherent structure using paragraphs to deal with each element of the response, eg one paragraph for and against and one final concluding paragraph.

Most learners heeded the instruction in the rubric asking them to give their detailed views. They did this by looking at both sides of the argument before giving their views. However, there were a number of very short responses seen and these were not able to get into the higher mark bands due to lack of development. The opposite problem was also seen where learners wrote too much and their responses became self-contradictory and unfocused.

Most learners wrote in an appropriate tone and heeded the requirement to write in standard English. Weak sentence structure reduced the clarity of a number of responses, with run-on sentences being a particular problem.

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar, with issues similar to those raised in Task 1. Again, it was the case that a number of words given in the prompt were misspelt, eg 'imature' and 'lowerd'.

Recommendations for Centres

Centres should continue to reinforce the fact that this is a test of functional writing skills. Learners need to produce responses that develop relevant information and remain focused on the task. In order to be able to do this they must read the task and stimulus material very carefully, before they start to write their response.

Prior to the test all learners should be given opportunities to practise writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. Developing the skill of writing in a clear and persuasive tone would be useful for learners. Work on effective ways of opening and closing different types of writing would also be of benefit.

Centres should continue to work on ensuring that learners are able to correctly format a formal letter, prior to taking the exam. It is clear that centres have been addressing this issue, but further reinforcement before the test is advisable.

Centres should also remember 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. This can have a significant impact on the mark awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Time should also be spent on helping learners to develop their paragraphing skills, as accurate paragraphing is a key component of a successful Level 2 response.

Finally it is also recommended that centres tell learners that they can plan their work on the exam paper. This will help them to structure their responses and to avoid just rewording the prompt material.

Pass mark for E203 in July 2011

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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