

Principal Examiner's Report

March 2011

FS

Functional Skills English Writing Level 1

E103

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E103 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 1

General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. Both tasks were successfully interpreted although there was inevitable variation in the email response. Some learners did not grasp the first task's true audience and purpose but most were well prepared for the letter format and used the bullet points well.

Task 1

Most learners were able to focus on their favoured option although some provided rather too much discussion of the pros/cons of the other options too. The better answers were able to establish a reasonably coherent, clearly defined argument about the most suitable option which should be undertaken by the council.

Strong answers explained clearly why the person was writing and opened with "I'm writing in reply to your request for views...". They also contained the sender's address, as well as the recipient's, used the correct opening and closing salutation (appropriately capitalised) and produced a well structured response with supporting reasons, following a clearly identified recommendation at the beginning of the letter. The responses ended with a good closing statement like "Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I hope you consider my views and look forward to seeing which project is built".

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 didn't start with conjunctions and grammar and tenses were also used correctly.

Weaker answers tended to reproduce verbatim some of the material available in the question rubric, and this approach led to some learners writing answers with little embellishment or development of the given information. One of the main weaknesses was the absence of a relevant introduction at the beginning of the letter.

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 and grammar were variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate, whereas others contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. The majority of responses were reasonably accurate with the clarity of meaning only occasionally impaired. There were also a number of issues with non-capitalisation of proper nouns, incorrect sentencing in a significant number of responses and words contained in the prompt being spelt incorrectly.

It was genuinely refreshing to see how much of a social conscience/community spirit was evident from the letters, particularly in relation to obesity, keeping young people off the streets, and getting maximum usage and benefit from the project being selected.

Task 2

Learners generally found it relatively easy to construct answers to this task because of the informal email format. Many emails were reasonably well thought out and written in an appropriate tone. The content was relevant and fulfilled the task, even if there could have been more development of the details of the surprise party plans such as catering etc. Some responses were very colloquial, but not inappropriate given the context of the task. The more successful learners were able to use an effective informal tone to encourage friends to join the party.

Strong answers adopted the correct tone from the outset, greeting the group of friends with "Hi guys" or "Hi everyone" and did not use too much slang/text language. There was good sequencing of the main points, eg location/date/time and the fact that it was a surprise party. Learners also actually attempted to persuade their friends to go to the party using a good combination of information and familiarity. They also concluded with a request for a reply about attendance in order to 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.

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.

Weak answers used an incorrect tone, with the greeting and opening paragraph being too formal. They repeated the bullets and did not develop their own ideas or try to persuade friends to go to the party. In addition to this, they repeated the fact that the party was a surprise and that Sam should not be told, over and over again.

Spelling and grammar, again, varied in quality, with a surprising amount of learners spelling simple words that were in the prompt incorrectly. An example of this was "surprise" which was spelt "suprise" on numerous occasions.

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 (e.g. formal letter, informal email). 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 should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes.

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. For words used in the content that are in the prompt, learners should be encouraged to re-read the prompt to check spelling.

Finally, it is also recommended that centres tell learners that they can plan their responses by jotting down ideas underneath each bullet to avoid repetition of rubric and help structure the final response.

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

Form, communication and purpose

- **Letter layout:** both addresses and date to be included
- **Salutation:** when to use formal and informal greetings and choose the appropriate matching ending
- **Salutation:** don't include the whole of the recipient's name, i.e. "Dear Mrs Mina Parmer"
- **Identifying the audience:** when to use a formal/informal tone
- **Closing paragraphs:** need to be rehearsed more; on the whole, these are a lot weaker than opening paragraphs which appear to have been much more rehearsed

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

- **Homophones:** focus needed on the spelling of common homophones such as "their" and "there"
- **Capitals:** correct use of capitalisation for names, addresses and salutation
- **Punctuation:** avoid comma splicing
- **Sequencing:** how to use pointers to aid development and sequencing of ideas.

Pass mark for E103 in March 2011

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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