

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 2

E203

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General comments

This paper provided a successful test of Level 2 Writing Skills. The tasks set were writing an article about the facilities needed in the local area and recommending a hotel to a friend. Learners found these tasks accessible and the large majority wrote enough text to do justice to their ideas.

There were also very few examples of learners misinterpreting the tasks set. The full range of marks was awarded, based on how successfully learners expressed and developed their ideas.

Task 1

A large number of well developed responses were seen. These were often written in a lively and engaging tone and demonstrated a good awareness of the audience for the article, using techniques like direct address of the reader. The need to write an article seemed to take other learners by surprise, with some closing with a 'yours sincerely.' A number of learners wrote in columns, which is not required.

All learners were able to offer at least a basic opinion on facilities required and there were some strong views expressed about the attractions, or otherwise, of a wide range of places. The stronger responses went on to explain and justify their ideas, often by outlining how the community would benefit from them.

This task did not have any bullet points to guide the structure of the responses and so learners needed to organise their own ideas. Stronger responses remained focused on the task throughout and developed ideas logically. Less successful responses generally lacked depth, often just writing 1-2 sentences on each of the headline prompts given in the task brief and also tended to jump from one idea to another, demonstrating a lack of planning.

Successful responses included an appropriate introduction, which outlined the topic and grabbed the attention of the audience. They also concluded their articles successfully, eg by summing up their ideas and asking their readers to write in and say what they think. Less successful responses often started and ended very abruptly and did not make their purpose clear.

Use of sentence structure and paragraphing is always an important differentiating factor on this paper. Stronger responses used a range of sentence structures accurately to produce a coherently argued response. They were also successfully organised into well-balanced paragraphs. Weaker responses often showed limited sentence control and also did not make accurate use of paragraphs, with some written as a continuous block of text and others written in one sentence paragraphs.

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some responses were written to a very high degree of accuracy and used a wide range of punctuation accurately, whereas others contained so many errors that meaning became unclear. Common errors included confusion between 'their/there' and 'its/it's' and there were also a large number of careless errors,

showing that many learners are still not proof-reading their work for errors. Incorrect use of capital letters, commas and apostrophes was also seen frequently.

Task 2

Learners engaged well with this task and seemed to enjoy recommending a hotel to a friend. All learners were able to present appropriate information and there were very few excessively brief responses.

Some responses were highly persuasive in tone and used direct address very effectively, eg 'I know you love your coffee and this hotel is great for you, because you get your very own machine!' These responses also showed good use of language for the specific purpose of explaining why the hotel was a good place to stay.

Logical development of ideas was a key component of more successful responses. Weaker responses tended just to list or paraphrase the information in the prompt material, adding little to it. To access the higher mark bands learners needed to show that they had developed ideas, eg by explaining why the hotel facilities were so good, rather than just listing them.

Weak sentence structure and paragraphing reduced the clarity of a number of responses, with commas often being used incorrectly where full stops were needed. This led to responses losing functionality as it was hard to make sense of them. More successful responses used a range of sentence structures effectively and organised their ideas into paragraphs.

As in Task 1, the full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. There were similar patterns of errors seen.

Recommendations for Centres

Centres should continue to promote the fact that learners are being tested on the functionality of their written English. Learners need to produce responses that clearly present and develop 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 practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. Work on effective ways of opening and closing different types of writing would also be of benefit.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar are a key element of functionality. It is important that learners are familiar with using a dictionary and also that they are aware that they should spend a few minutes checking through their work, after they have finished writing. This can have a significant impact on the mark awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is also important that learners understand where and when different punctuation marks should be used. It is recommended that centres devote appropriate teaching time for this.

Accurate use of a range of sentence structures and paragraphing is also a key component of a successful response, as this enables learners to organise and present their ideas clearly. Many responses lose functionality through use of overlong and inaccurately punctuated sentences. Centres are strongly recommended to ensure that learners are secure in this area before entering them for the test.

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 January 2012

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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