

# Examiner's Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

February 2012

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 2

E203

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## **General comments**

This paper was effective in testing writing skills at Level 2. The tasks set were writing an article about a person the learner admired and taking part in an internet discussion on whether parents should have the right to smack their children. Learners found these tasks accessible and engaging and very few found it difficult to come up with ideas. The full range of marks was awarded, based on how successfully learners expressed and developed their ideas.

### **Task 1**

Learners responded with real enthusiasm to the task of writing about someone they admired. A huge range of people were chosen, but the most popular choice by far was for learners to write about their mothers. There were many well-developed responses seen and these often demonstrated a lively and engaging tone, as well as a successful awareness of the audience for an article.

All learners were able to identify a person they admired and give some explanation as to why they had chosen this person. The only commonly seen example of misinterpretation was that a number of learners wrote about a group of people, such as soldiers or doctors, even though the question clearly stated that they should write about one person. These responses were not able to go beyond the middle band for form, communication and purpose.

The stronger responses picked up on the instruction to give detailed reasons and showed the ability to develop ideas logically. They also made appropriate use of descriptive language to bring the subject of their admiration to life. The weaker responses often lacked development and struggled to make the reason for their admiration clear.

Successful responses included a clear opening, which identified who they were writing about and made you want to read more. They also rounded their articles off successfully, with a brief summary of what they had written about. Less successful responses generally lacked structure, often starting and ending very abruptly and frequently becoming hard to follow.

The ability of learners to make accurate use of sentence structure and paragraphing was a key differentiating factor as on previous papers. Stronger responses used a range of sentence structures accurately to present ideas clearly. They were also successfully organised into 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 very accurate responses were seen, whereas others contained so many errors that meaning became unclear. Common spelling errors included contractions such as 'alot' and 'aswell' and the usual suspects such as confusion between 'their/there' and 'its/it's'. There were also many careless errors seen, such as missing words, showing that many learners are still not proof-reading their work for errors.

With punctuation, the most commonly seen error was the use of commas where full stops were needed. A number of learners also did not understand the rules for using capital letters, a skill that needs to be mastered well before learners attempt an L2 test. Use of the apostrophe was also an issue for many learners, as was the use of the lower case 'i.'

## **Task 2**

Learners responded positively to this task and all had an opinion on whether parents had the right to smack their children. The large majority also seemed to be comfortable with the informal style of writing typical of an internet forum. The differentiating factor was how clearly learners were able to develop their opinions.

Many responses were well argued and considered both viewpoints before reaching a conclusion. Opinion was fairly evenly split on whether or not smacking was acceptable, with many learners making persuasive use of personal experience.

Successful responses could be reasonably brief and it is important to note that length of response is not a good indicator of success on this task. Some learners wrote too much and their responses became repetitive and contradictory. These learners would have benefited from spending more time planning, rather than plunging straight into their response.

Logical development of ideas was a key component of more successful responses. These responses tended to follow a structure of introduction, development and conclusion and also employed a range of vocabulary to back up their points. Weaker responses tended just to rely too much on the messages posted by the other respondents, often copying or paraphrasing what they had written. This meant that they were unable to evidence the logical development of ideas.

Successful responses used a range of sentence structures effectively and organised their ideas effectively, generally through paragraphs. This helped to maintain a fluency and flow to their argument. Less successful responses often lost control of sentence structure and did not use any organisational features. These responses lost functionality by becoming unclear.

As in Task 1, the full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. There were similar patterns of errors seen, with learners often misspelling words that were given in the stimulus text, e.g. 'naughty' and 'violence'.

To aid proof-reading 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 SPG.

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 February 2012

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Maximum mark	<b>25</b>
Pass mark	<b>16</b>
UMS mark	<b>6</b>

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