

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 1

E103

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Publications Code FC030370

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General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were: writing a thank-you letter to the manager of a bowling alley and posting views on an internet forum, about the worth of a degree. These subjects proved accessible to the majority of learners and the many produced some appropriate responses and views 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 write their thank-you letters using an appropriate tone. The majority had understood the scenario and used the stimulus text to describe the surprise party. The more successful learners were able to develop this initial input and describe, in detail, various aspects of the party. These learners were more likely to be placed in the highest mark band. Less successful learners were not able to describe any detail beyond the stimulus text. This resulted in some very short responses that lacked the necessary development of ideas and placed them into the lower mark bands.

The more successful learners wrote to a clear structure, with many using the bullet points provided to underpin their response. They were able to develop these points with a logical sequencing of their ideas. These successful learners were comfortable with the task of writing a positive letter and produced fully functional responses. Less successful learners had limited control of structure which resulted in lack of cohesion and much repetition. They were also less comfortable with the task and not quite sure what they should describe or what language would be appropriate.

Letter format was an issue for many learners, as in several previous series. There were, however, more learners who were able to set out the letter correctly than in those previous series. There still appears to be a reluctance to put a sender's address or a date. Apart from a few inappropriate opening salutations, most learners adopted a suitable opening for a thank-you letter.

Spelling, punctuation 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 issues in a significant number of responses with non-capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing.

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.

Task 2

Most learners were able to sustain an appropriate tone for an internet forum. Some responses were colloquial, but not too inappropriate given the context of the task. The more successful learners were able to use an effective tone to argue for their point of view regarding the value of further study. Some learners did not understand what a degree was and confused it with staying on at school. The more successful learners had a strong point of view which they expressed forcefully whilst the less successful sat on the fence or agreed with both sides of the debate.

Successful learners were able to present their arguments in a logical way, developing them beyond those expressed in the stimulus text. Less successful learners were unable to develop any detail to their points of view and simply repeated views posted in the stimulus text. These less successful learners, also, were frequently confused about who posted what view and their responses tended to lose control as a result of this confusion. It is crucial that the stimulus text is read carefully before engaging in the writing task.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar were generally secure enough not to compromise the meaning and coherence of the majority of responses. Common errors were, as in the previous task, mostly in capitalisation, sentence definition, missing apostrophes and confusion of words like 'there' and 'their'.

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. 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 need to understand the purpose of different types of functional task (eg formal letter, information leaflet, internet forum) and should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. This experience will be of great help to them in tackling a future Level 1 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.

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 E103 in January 2012

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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Order Code FC030370 January 2012

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