

Examiner's Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

May 2012

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. The two tasks set were: writing a letter of complaint to the local council and an email persuading a local Scoutmaster to lend you some tents for a sponsored walk. These subjects proved accessible to the majority of learners and 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 letters of complaint using an appropriate tone. The majority had understood the scenario and used the stimulus text and image to describe the state of the pavement and the potential danger it posed to pedestrians. The more successful learners were able to develop this initial input and describe, in detail, how the broken slab may affect, in different ways, the elderly, primary school children and those visiting the doctor's surgery. 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 descriptive, formal letter of complaint and produced fully functional responses. They maintained an appropriate tone throughout, whereas weaker responses often exaggerated the danger and potential consequences, including fatalities. Less successful learners had limited control of structure which resulted in lack of cohesion and repetition.

Successful learners were also able to make realistic suggestions as to the remedial action needed, but less successful responses often adopted an inappropriate tone using various threats to the Environmental Officer losing functionality in the process.

Letter format remains 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 and closing for a formal letter. 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 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 email requesting help from the Scoutmaster. The more successful added to this by using effective persuasive language, whilst the less successful were not convincing in their request to borrow three tents. Some responses were inappropriate, carrying threats to the Scoutmaster if he did not oblige by lending the tents. These lost functionality having used the wrong kind of 'persuasion'.

Successful responses used the fact that the walk was to raise money for the local hospital, to very good effect in their persuasive writing. Some of the less successful were repetitive in their attempts to persuade or were over persuasive and unrealistic in describing the consequences if they were not able to borrow the tents.

Successful learners were able to present their request in a logical way, developing it beyond the information contained in the stimulus text. Secure answers understood that they were seeking the goodwill of the Scoutmaster and used the scenario to good effect. They developed their responses to include inducements, such as good publicity for the Scouts as well as encouraging them to join the walk. Less successful learners were unable to develop any detail to their email and simply quoted the information from the text repeating the first two paragraphs in their entirety. These learners were amongst those who lacked any attempt at persuasion.

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 omission apostrophes and confusion of words like 'there' and 'their'. A very common error was to confuse the meanings of 'lend' and 'borrow'.

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 L1 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 do not want it to be marked.

Pass mark for E103 in May 2011

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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