

# Examiner's Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

May 2012

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 2

E203

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## **E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2**

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### **General Comments**

This paper was effective in testing Level 2 Writing Skills. The tasks set were writing a letter to the council to complain about noisy neighbours and writing an email to friends to ask them to help at a fun day. These tasks were accessible to learners, the vast majority of whom were able to produce some appropriate content. The full range of marks was awarded, based on how successfully learners expressed and developed their ideas.

### **Task 1**

Learners were familiar with the issue of noise pollution and engaged well with this task. There were many well developed responses seen, with these able to clearly summarise the problems with the new neighbours and to describe the harmful effects of the loud music on themselves and their family. These responses also maintained a formal tone and came up with reasonable requests as to what should be done about the problem. Less successful responses often struggled to maintain a formal tone, with a few including threats as to what they would do to the new neighbours if the problems were not addressed. There was also some use of colloquial terms such as 'silly o'clock,' and 'driving me round the bend,' which are not appropriate for a formal letter and showed a limited grasp of the audience for the task.

Successful responses included a clear opening, giving a pithy introduction to the issue. They also ended crisply, with an appropriate closing comment such as 'Thanks for listening to my concerns and I look forward to hearing from you soon'. Many of these responses made good use of the bullet points provided and structured their response around these. Less successful responses generally lacked structure, often starting and ending very abruptly and frequently becoming hard to follow. This meant that they did not evidence the logical development of ideas.

The ability of learners to make accurate use of sentence structure and paragraphing was a key differentiating factor. Stronger responses used a range of sentence structures accurately to present ideas clearly. They were also successfully organised into paragraphs. Less successful 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 majority of learners made successful use of letter format, by including two addresses. It is clear that centres have been teaching this skill effectively, as there was a definite improvement on previous series where letters have featured. However, there were still a few issues seen, with the date often omitted and many learners not using the appropriate close ('yours sincerely,' in this case).

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some responses demonstrated an impressive level of accuracy, whereas others contained so many errors that meaning became unclear. Common spelling errors

included words given in the text such as 'neighbours,' and 'environmental'. There was also frequent confusion over the use of homophones, eg 'their/there,' and 'to/too'. It was pleasing to see that a number of learners had corrected errors, suggesting that more are now proof-reading their work.

With punctuation, many learners frequently used commas where full stops were needed. A number of learners also did not use capitals consistently for proper nouns, such as names and parts of addresses. Use of the apostrophe was also an issue, as was the use of the lower case 'i'.

The major issue with grammar remains subject verb agreement. Constructions such as 'we was' are still seen too frequently, as is the use of 'is', rather than 'are', with plural nouns.

## **Task 2**

This task was well received by learners, who were clearly familiar with the context of a fun day. The large majority were able to give some information about the fun day and what would be happening. The differentiating factor was clear development of ideas, eg in explaining the purpose of the day and why their friends should help.

Successful responses included key details such as dates and times and were often written in a lively, personal tone, which is appropriate for an informal writing task. They were able to use language for the purpose of persuading their friends and give some detail as to why the fun day would be a good day out and what people could help with. Less successful responses often missed out key details, or got these wrong, eg by missing the fact that the fun day was to raise money to buy trees and flowers for the park. They also sometimes took the informal style too far and used expressions, such as 'yous,' which are not acceptable in Standard English.

A few responses also struggled to develop ideas and often did not get far beyond copying out the information given in the prompt material. Other learners wrote too much and their responses became repetitive and rambling.

By contrast, successful responses used a range of sentence structures effectively and organised their ideas effectively, generally through paragraphs. These were usually based around the bullet points provided and this helped to maintain a fluency and flow to their email.

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, eg 'stools' for 'stalls'.

## **Recommendations for Centres**

Learners must read the task and stimulus material very carefully before they put pen to paper. This will help to ensure that their responses remain relevant to the task at hand, which is a requirement of a piece of functional writing.

For this paper, learners who were familiar with the conventions of letter writing had an advantage. Prior to the test all learners should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. Practice on use of formal and informal tone and effective ways of opening and closing different types of writing would also be of benefit to learners.

Learners should be reminded that any bullet points provided are there to help them structure their response. If the supporting bullets are prefaced with 'you may,' learners can use some or all as they wish, although it is recommended that learners use any bullets as scaffolding for their writing. Where the bullets are prefaced with 'you should,' learners must address all the bullets to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how they want to respond.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar are a key element of functionality. It was clear that many learners were well below Level 2 in these areas, as there were many errors in skills such as the use of the capital letter. Centres are recommended to allocate appropriate teaching time to developing learner skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

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.

To aid proof-reading it is important that learners are familiar with using a dictionary and they also need to be made 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.

## Pass mark for E203 in May 2011

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

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