

Examiner's Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

March 2012

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 1

E103

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General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were:

1. Writing a letter of complaint to Estrick Clothing Ltd.
2. Writing an email to a friend describing their day out at a Country Park

Both tasks were reasonably successfully interpreted; there were many prompts to draw on which enabled the candidates to understand the questions/contexts.

Task 1

This was realistic task and a large number of learners developed their ideas and demonstrated high levels of consumer awareness. Learners took the task seriously and most were able to maintain the correct tone, with few inappropriately angry or aggressive responses. Students used the detail from the question effectively and it allowed them to construct coherent responses. Learners attempted to produce more "substantial" responses, thus giving themselves a better chance to get the higher marks. This meant that more of them were achieving marks in the middle range. Some learners had difficulty with the "appropriate" temperature for washing clothes when responding to the task but even these weaker candidates were able to construct a logical sequence to the answer: they did not have marks deducted for misunderstanding any technical information relating to the task. There was a good range of responses, and considerable differentiation.

Generally, more of the learners were able to use correct letter layout than previously. Those who did not, tended mostly to include just the recipient's address and not their own. Where this was the case, they automatically stopped themselves from achieving top band marks even if the rest of the letter would otherwise have warranted it. Learners on the whole were also able to choose the correct form of address and closure. In terms of content, there were quite a few responses that started by outlining the washing issue and then focused a little too heavily on how poorly they had been treated by the shop assistant. This latter emphasis sometimes led to an unbalanced response and in some cases an unsuitable tone was adopted. In the main, the tone of the majority of responses was appropriate, with just a few learners struggling with the ending. Their expectations became a little confused about what they wanted from the recipient and their endings appeared to be incomplete.

Strong answers

Form, communication and purpose

The stronger learners did as we asked, following the bullet point framework given in the rubric which gave structure to the letters. They included the sender's address (on the right), the recipient's address (on the left) and a date. They used the correct opening salutation of 'Dear Mr Smith' (not, Dear Bill or Dear Bill Smith). The opening salutation was on one line, not split with 'Dear' on one line and 'Mr Smith' on the next. There was a good introduction to the letter explaining that they were writing a letter of complaint in relation to a faulty product that was bought and the details surrounding that, such as time and place

of purchase, product code number etc. They were then able to formally articulate the nature of the problem that occurred whilst washing the garment and included information about other clothes that were stained pink, e.g. £200 designer dresses ruined, spoiled work clothes and damage to children's clothing. Responses then clearly discussed what happened when they tried to return the item to the store, and how they had ended up writing to the Complaints Department. Learners then closed the letter appropriately by explaining clearly and **politely** what they expected to happen and what they wanted by way of compensation.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

Strong answers used capitals for names, addresses and the name of the company correctly, had no comma splicing, used full stops and question marks (where appropriate) effectively and used the correct spellings of homophones. Sentences did not start with conjunctions and grammar and tenses were also used correctly.

Less successful answers

Form, communication and purpose

Some responses left out the sender's address (or sometimes both) and date. They addressed the letter: 'To Bill Smith' or 'To/Dear Bill'. They also used the whole name, eg. Dear Bill Smith instead of Dear Mr Smith. Some even split the opening salutation and put 'Dear' on one line then 'Mr Smith' below on the next line. Responses leaned heavily on the bullet points without any further development and some were over long and an inappropriate tone was evident, especially when it came to describing the unhelpful staff in the store. Some learners did not state clearly what they wanted to happen and either left the matter in mid-air or ended with threats such as 'I'll take you to court'.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

A major issue was the confusion of the words, brought and bought which seriously affected meaning as did verb tenses which proved problematic for many - shrunked, shrank, shranked. Errors such as, 'could of', 'should of' were made and misuse of homophones, such as, their, there, were, where, wear, was evident. Poorly punctuated sentences, sentence demarcation and missing question marks were all apparent as was lack capitalisation for the start of sentences and proper nouns (their own name in some instances) addresses and the name of the company 'Estrick Clothing Ltd. Other common spelling errors were: lower case 'i' for first person singular, writting, sincerely, lable, alot, ran/run (colours).

Task 2

This was readily accessible with most able to identify with the task, presumably having experienced such an outing. This enabled learners not only to adopt a persuasive, chatty tone but to also convincingly and enthusiastically develop ideas about the Country Park and attractions. Unfortunately the experience and maturity of some learners was insufficient to deal with the task and some merely repeated or reworked the given material. There were a number of very brief, almost truncated responses with learners either saying it was nice or lovely. Not all were positive about Cornfield Country Park and these were believable and added an alternative and interesting perspective to the Park.

Strong answers

Form, communication and purpose

In the well-developed responses learners addressed their friend correctly, eg. Hi Louise, and provided a good introduction mentioning the fact that they had recently visited Cornfield Country Park with friends/family etc. Some included details of date, travel time and weather. Learners then discussed what there was to do at the Park adding to the information in the stimulus material by explaining why they liked/disliked these attractions/facilities/services. They discussed things such as the peace and quiet, cleanliness, health and safety, cost of the park and quality of the food choices. They produced very convincing and well structured messages that included their views and opinions. These learners could understand the difference between describing what they liked/disliked and then explaining why it would be a good/bad for the friend to visit.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

Strong answers showed consistent use of capital letters, complete sentences, good subject verb agreement, good use of tenses and no comma splicing. They also got basic spellings correct.

Less successful answers

Form, communication and purpose

The style and register were unsuitable for the task and there was no development of the rubric. The formality level of the opening/closing salutation could be mixed, with most knowing that 'Hi' or similar was appropriate, but some then ending with 'Yours faithfully' followed by a full name. A few were extremely colloquial and there was often no real attempt to persuade their friend to go with them, just a list of the things to do at the park. Some responses just appeared to stop or were off task in that they told their friends what a good time they had together when they went. Sequencing was a problem as some learners worked through the information and just listed features. A few lapsed into 'story telling' mode.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

Generally any issues were similar to Task 1. In addition to this, some answers used slang expressions such as 'very fun', 'well good', 'blud', 'init' and 'safe'. Lots of responses included 'of' instead of 'have'. For example "you would of loved it".

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 tasks. When they come to the test they must read the question and stimulus text with great care in order 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 (e.g. formal letter, informal internet blog) and should be given opportunities to practise 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 candidates 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.

Tips to Centres for Improving Learner Performance

Although it was reassuring to see some really good responses and that centres have obviously been addressing issues relating to letter layout and internet discussion forums, centres/learners may benefit from addressing the following points:

During the Test

1. Use a dictionary
2. Plan responses by using the bullets as sub headings; jot down ideas underneath each of these to avoid repetition of rubric and help structure the final response
3. When repeating words that are in the question, re-read the question to check spelling

IN CENTRE

General

1. Get candidates to improve time management by sitting mock tests using past papers
2. Use a letter layout template to coach learners
3. Practice writing informal emails, concentrating on the opening and closing salutations and tone

FCP

1. **Letter layout:** *both addresses* and date to be included in the correct position at the top of the letter; sender's address on the right, recipient's address on the left
2. **Opening salutation:** should all be on the same line, **don't** split it, eg. 'Dear' on one line and 'Mr Smith' on the next
3. **Salutation:** when to use formal and informal greetings and choose the appropriate *matching* closing salutation
4. **Salutation:** in a formal letter, even if the question states that the name of the person they need to write to is Bill Smith, advise learners that it should be addressed as "Dear Mr Smith. **Don't** put "Dear Bill", or include the whole of the recipient's name, e.g. "Dear Bill Smith"
5. **Identifying the audience:** when to use a formal/informal tone
6. **Sequencing:** how to use pointers to aid development and sequencing of ideas
7. **Closing paragraphs/summarising:** need to be rehearsed more
8. **Internet discussion forum:** it's a nice touch to address the audience

SPG

1. **Homophones:** focus needed on the spelling of common homophones such as "their" and there"
2. **Capitals:** correct use of capitalisation for names and addresses
3. **Capitals:** always use a capital after a full stop
4. **Punctuation:** concentrate on teaching when full stops should be used to avoid 'run on' sentences
5. **Punctuation:** avoid comma splicing
6. **Punctuation:** avoid using commas where there should be full stops
7. **Spelling:** correct capitalisation, e.g. use "Yours sincerely", not "yours sincerely" or "Yours Sincerely"
8. **Spelling:** sincerely, faithfully, writing, a lot, bought (not brought)

Pass mark for E103 in March 2012

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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