

Examiner's Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

March 2012

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 2

E203

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General comments

This paper offered learners good opportunities to demonstrate Level 2 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were, writing a review for an internet site designed to help people considering a move to a new area and an email to encourage friends to join a clean-up campaign. These subjects proved accessible to learners and a majority produced some appropriate ideas 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

Many learners were able to understand the purpose of the review and write informatively about their home area. They fully engaged with the task and wrote quite lengthy responses. The stronger learners developed their ideas and were able to write a balanced review about their area, often being honest about the negatives, as well as enthusiastic and persuasive about the positives. These were realistic and well thought out pieces that would have been useful to prospective residents.

Less strong responses conveyed some information about the places where the learners lived, but this lacked sufficient relevant detail to be fully functional. These responses were often quite repetitive, or contained irrelevant detail, such as, describing the learner's own house. Some learners compromised the functionality of the response through misunderstanding the purpose of the task and wrote reviews more akin to tourist reviews. Responses that were marginally functional tended to be repetitive, lack detail or include some irrelevant information. Some learners missed the point entirely, writing a description to sell their house or a review about the website. Others lost functionality through failing to name the place they were writing about.

Many learners managed to write in an appropriate tone and were functional, with only a few lapses. In these responses, the tone showed an awareness of audience and the purpose of the task. There were, however, some responses that were not fully confident about the intended audience, urging the reader to come and visit the tourist attractions. Sometimes these were reasonably well written and contained just enough relevant detail to be minimally competent. A few adopted an inappropriate tone using aggressive vocabulary about the unsuitability of their locality. These lost functionality whilst others maintained it, when being negative, through writing in an appropriate tone.

Most learners were able to write a suitably organised review, but some were not and used a formal letter layout. Stronger learners wrote to a clear and logical structure with good use of paragraphs and addressing the bullet points from the task. These were also able to write a range of sentence structures effectively helping the fluency of their review. Less successful learners tended to have limited control of structure and their paragraphing was erratic, with a number writing in one sentence paragraphs and others writing the text in one continuous block. This has been noted in previous series and reflects learners who are not yet at Level 2.

Spelling and grammar were variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate, whereas others contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. Words commonly spelt incorrectly were: their/there, weather/whether, you/use, centre/center, leisure/liesure, buses/busses. There were also issues with non capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing in a number of responses. Some answers were written solely in capitals compromising the correct use of capital letters. There were issues with sentence definition, especially using commas instead of full stops and vice versa. Question marks were frequently left out or replaced by exclamation marks.

Task 2

Most learners were able to attempt an appropriate tone for an email to friends extolling the virtues of joining the Estrick Clean-up Campaign. There were a number of well written responses that were fully functional giving both information and encouragement. These more successful learners developed ideas beyond the stimulus text, drawing on thoughts of social responsibility, helping improve the environment and gaining personal satisfaction. They adopted a suitably persuasive and informal tone, recognising the intended audience. Often they saw this as a good opportunity to get together with friends and have fun. This led to some interesting and lively responses. Weaker responses were often limited to the bare information taken from the stimulus text or they were long and repetitive, often lacking coherence.

Stronger responses demonstrated functionality through clear organisation and structure, systematically dealing with the details of the event as well as writing persuasively as to why it was a good idea to get involved. Many saw it as a worthwhile use of time, on a day they usually did very little, as well as an opportunity to gain credit in their search for a job.

As in the previous task, weaker responses tended to lose structure and were often repetitive or lacked any real development of the given information. This meant they lacked the persuasion, which was integral to the task and were not fit for purpose.

In the majority of responses, spelling and grammar were sufficiently accurate not to impair meaning although there were occasional lapses in the use of appropriate punctuation. Common errors included missing possessive apostrophes and apostrophes used in plural nouns. Increasingly in email responses learners are using 'i' instead of 'I'. These comments have been made in other series.

Recommendations for Centres

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose, i.e. relevant to the task in hand. This means that they must read the question and stimulus material with great care, 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.

Prior to the test, all learners should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. They should be clear about the particular purpose of a review in a given context, in this case giving information to prospective residents of a place or area. This is also true for other functional writing tasks which do require a good understanding of the nature of different audiences. This experience will be of great help to them in tackling a future L2 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. It is also important that learners understand where and when different punctuation marks should be used. Recent series have seen frequent misuse of possessive apostrophes in simple plural nouns e.g. noun's.

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 March 2012

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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