

Examiner's Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2013

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 to the Road Safety Department to give views about the Council's plans to restrict parking
- Writing an email to the Head of the Sports Department at Estrick Council to ask for a grant to refurbish the changing rooms at the sports club.

Both tasks were successfully interpreted; there were lots of prompts to draw on, which enabled the learners to understand the tasks/contexts.

Task 1

This task was clear and accessible. Learners took the task seriously and most were able to maintain the correct tone, mostly using the correct vocabulary and avoiding slang. Most learners understood the issues involved and tackled both bullet points with varying degrees of success. There were, however, a number of responses that omitted the second point altogether. Successful responses made their opinions and views personal to them, giving some good alternatives for workable solutions when they did not agree fully with what the council was proposing. Weaker responses put forward the 9-5 parking restriction as their own idea or merely added that it was a good idea/bad idea without any development.

Most responses included an attempt at a formal letter layout. However, a significant number of learners failed to meet the full conventions, in particular, missing out their own address.

Stronger responses followed 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 Ms Sagar (not Dear Eileen Sagar). The opening salutation was on one line, not split with 'Dear' on one line and 'Ms Sagar' on the next. There was a clear opening to the letter, explaining that they were writing in response to the information they had received about the Council's proposals for parking restrictions. Both bullets were addressed and developed further than the information in the stimulus material and there was an appropriate closing, indicating that they would like to hear back from the Council about their views and suggestions.

Strong answers used capitals appropriately, 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.

Task 2

Learners in general found the lack of formality and layout of an email much easier, although they did not always provide openings or closures. There were many very detailed and coherent responses to this task. However, most learners did little but copy the wording from the task when addressing the second bullet.

Responses varied in length and the amount of detail, and most used an appropriate tone for the audience and purpose.

Strong responses provided an opening and closure in order to give structure to their answer, clearly stating in the opening that they were writing in order to ask for a grant. Better answers described the effects of the problems in the changing rooms on the people that used them, eg the leaking ceiling was making the floor wet, which was a health and safety hazard. They also conveyed how important it was to the community that the club should be maintained properly in order to stay open, referring to family days supporting their local teams and getting youngsters off the street on an evening.

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.

In weaker responses, spelling was still an issue. Many learners spelt writing with two 't's, ie writing, and used 'are' instead of 'our'. There were a number of long sentences with little use of connectives other than 'and'. There was little or no punctuation. They often struggled using the correct verb form, especially with irregular past tenses. There were problems with suffixes, such as -ed and -s. Subject-verb agreement could be a problem with some. Learners seemed to struggle with homophones and were unable to use commas with confidence, except in lists. Capital letters were also an issue, especially being used within words, or not being used for proper nouns and sentence starts. Also, using 'i' rather than 'I' was a common issue. There was also often a struggle with word order.

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 (e.g. formal letter, informal internet blog) 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 don't want it to be marked.

Pass mark for E103 in January 2013

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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