

Examiner's Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2013

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 2

E203

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E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2

General Comments

This paper offered learners good opportunities to demonstrate Level 2 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were: writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper responding to another letter concerning the length of the school summer holiday and writing an email to a local celebrity persuading them to come and speak at a charity dinner. 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

Most learners were able to clearly give their views on the length of the summer break, using the prompts to help them construct their argument appropriately. They fully engaged with the task and wrote quite lengthy responses. The stronger learners developed their ideas and were able to write letters with detailed and balanced opinions, giving detailed reasons why the summer break should or should not be six weeks long, going beyond the material given in the prompts for the task. They also presented ideas which were sensible and realistic. Less strong responses conveyed some opinions, but these were sometimes confused, too assertive or lacked development. Responses that were marginally functional tended to be repetitive, lack detail or were unable clearly to support some of the ideas presented. Some learners confused who the letter should be written to and addressed it to the sender of letter in the local newspaper, Bill Sagar, when it should have been addressed to the newspaper's editor.

Many learners used the letter writing format appropriately and were able to use the prompts on the question paper to help shape their responses. The majority of letters included the address of the receiver, and many had the address of the sender, but this was less common, although it was noted by examiners that this aspect of letter writing has improved in recent series. The date was often omitted. The more successful learners began 'Dear Editor' but there were many occasions when the learner began too informally with 'Dear Bill'. The majority of learners were able to end the letter appropriately with 'Yours faithfully' or 'Yours sincerely', depending on the opening salutation.

Whilst many learners were able to write using an appropriate range of simple and complex sentences, there was evidence of several learners using too many very long sentences; sometimes sentences were demarcated by paragraphing. Less successful learners also 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.

Some responses either lacked detail or organisation, so that the issues discussed were often disjointed with some ideas appearing as afterthoughts. Some learners failed to indicate clearly what their view was, giving the results of an imaginary research project on the issue.

Most letters were written in an appropriate tone and made their points of view clear. There were very few examples of overly aggressive responses and most were constructed in such a way as to convince the reader of their views and to show full awareness of the intended audience. The vast majority of learners organised their ideas coherently and developed their responses in a logical manner. There were several examples of letters which were too informal and full of slang and colloquialisms.

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: 'sincerely', 'in response' and 'writting'. There were also issues with non-capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing in a number of responses. Question marks were sometimes left out or replaced by exclamation marks. There was some omission of apostrophes, the misuse of the semi-colon in a list and comma splicing. There were also several examples of the small case 'i' being incorrectly used.

There were a small number of responses which had been completely written using upper case letters. Although the information given was appropriate and well written, this would affect the mark for spelling, punctuation and grammar, and is to be discouraged.

Task 2

Learners were able to engage with the topic and there was a generally clear understanding of what was needed. There were a number of well written responses that were fully functional. More able learners were able to write a detailed email that was fit for purpose and persuaded the intended celebrity to attend the charity dinner, developing ideas from in the prompt provided and using their own, personal persuasive ideas. Less able learners tried to persuade Christina to attend, but were too obsequious, too assumptive that she would attend or too vague about what the charity dinner was for and when it was. Some less successful learners re-stated the stimulus material, sometimes word for word, with little development of their own persuasion, or they were long and repetitive, providing excessive information on the menu and the staff of the venue, often lacking coherence. There was also evidence of a lot of short answers for this task, in many cases probably due to time running out.

Stronger responses demonstrated functionality through clear organisation and structure, introducing the event, explaining what it was for, when it was and why the speaker should attend. There was evidence of good writer control in the vast majority of the responses, which ensured that the majority of the candidates were able to remain on topic, actively persuading the speaker to attend the dinner, whether this was developed or not. As in the previous task, weaker responses tended to lose structure and were often repetitive or lacked any real development of the persuasion. Some learners chose to write a letter, rather than an email and so did not have the right format for their material, often

ending too formally with 'Yours sincerely' when 'Kind regards' was more appropriate here.

The correct tone was adopted by many learners, who saw this as a politely informal piece of persuasive writing. Less successful learners tended to write too informally or much too formally and a small number of learners wrote quite aggressively, with some emotionally blackmailing the speaker to attend the dinner in case patients died as a result of her lack of support. There were a number of learners who wrote formally in one paragraph and informally in the next, thus confusing the register.

Most learners used clear and appropriate paragraphing, although there were several one paragraph emails. Errors in spelling were evident in many responses with several common homophonic spelling mistakes. The use of 'i' instead of the capital letter was, once again, evident in some responses.

As with the first task, there were a few responses which had been written totally in upper case.

Recommendations for Centres

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose, ie relevant to the task in hand. This means that they must read the task 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 letter or an email in a given context, in this instance expressing an opinion in response to a letter from a local newspaper and writing a persuasive email. This is also true for other functional writing tasks which 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, eg 'noun's' and the misuse of the small 'i', when a capital one is required.

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 E203 in June 2012

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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