

Examiner's Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

March 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 an article for the learner's school/college/workplace magazine about a person he/she thought was a good role model and writing a contribution to an internet discussion giving the learner's views on whether children should be driven to school. 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 describe the qualities of a person they felt constituted a good role model. They fully engaged with the task and wrote quite lengthy responses. The stronger responses developed their ideas and were able to write articles with detailed and compelling reasons for their choice of person. Amongst these stronger responses the choice of role model was evenly balanced between a public figure and someone known personally to the learner. They were able to go beyond a biography of the chosen person and give detailed reasons why that person was a good role model. Amongst the examples of these responses were those who chose David Beckham, not simply for his football skills, but for his stable family life and dedication to fathering his children, as well as his extensive charity work. Less strong responses conveyed some information about the chosen person, but were often simply biographical with no explained reason for the choice made. These could also be repetitive and often contained little detail about the character or personality of the role model. A significant proportion did not write about a person but were generic, writing, for example, about firemen or nurses. Responses that were marginally functional tended to be repetitive, lacked detail or were confused between biographical facts and reasons why someone might be a good role model.

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 aware of the audience and misunderstood the purpose of contributing to a series of public articles. Sometimes these had resorted to a letter format and approach, or a fusion of a letter and an article. This confusion affected the functionality of these responses. Amongst the weaker responses were those that spent a proportion of the article re-writing the task and describing what they were going to do.

Most learners were able to write a suitably organised article and attempted to have an introduction and a conclusion. Strong responses quickly attracted the reader's interest through the introduction and then rounded the article off with a cohesive summary of the chosen role model's main qualities. These responses were written to a clear and

logical structure with good use of paragraphs and an understanding of the sequence the development of the information. These were also able to write of sentence structures effectively helping the fluency of their response. Successful responses tended to have limited control of structure and the 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. These responses often lacked developed detail and were repetitive.

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' and 'centre/center' with 'your/you're' also frequently confused. There were also issues with non capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing in a number of responses. Answers written solely in capitals, compromising the correct use of capital letters, were less evident in this series. There were, however, issues with sentence definition, especially using commas instead of full stops and vice versa. Question marks were sometimes left out or replaced by exclamation marks.

Overall there were many humbling responses that displayed the great respect many learners have for parents, grandparents and their teachers. These articles were often emotive and gripping. These, along with responses that were very well informed about public figures, were fully functional and worked well as very interesting articles.

Task 2

Most learners were able to attempt an appropriate tone for a contribution to an internet discussion regarding the debate around children being driven to school and the resulting traffic congestion. There were a number of well written responses that were fully functional. These described in detail each contributor's views on the subject and then backed up these views with logical reasoning. These more successful responses developed ideas beyond the stimulus text taking it as a framework but adding considerable detail about the effects and potential consequences of the view or views being promoted. Weaker responses were often limited to the bare information taken from the stimulus text, sometimes simply repeating it word-for-word, or they were long and repetitive, often lacking coherence. Some responses argued both points of view. Weaker ones in this category became confused and the contributions lost functionality whilst the stronger ones were able to define each viewpoint clearly and then decide on a suitable compromise such as, driving children to school in bad weather and walking them there in good weather.

Stronger responses demonstrated functionality through clear organisation and structure, systematically dealing with the reasons for their views. As in the previous task, weaker responses tended to lose structure and were often repetitive or lacked any real development of the given information. They also lacked a systematic

approach and lacked logic with limited cohesion. Some adopted an aggressive tone and over-dramatised the situation on our streets with a great deal of unfounded speculation and conjecture.

In the majority of responses, spelling and grammar were sufficiently accurate not to impair meaning although punctuation was generally less secure. Common errors included missing possessive apostrophes and apostrophes used in plural nouns. Increasingly, in internet discussion 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. This was particularly noticeable in Task 1 where a significant proportion wrote about a generic role model, e.g. a fireman, rather than a person. Similarly a proportion wrote biographies rather than following the instruction to give detailed reasons why the learner believed the person to be a good role model.

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 an article or an internet discussion in a given context, in this instance presenting detailed reasons for the choice of a role model and presenting viewpoints in a public debate. 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 candidates 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. The prevalence of spelling errors resulting from homophones would suggest that this an area worth spending time on. 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 2013

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| Maximum mark | 25 |
| Pass mark | 16 |
| UMS mark | 6 |

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