

Principal Examiners' Report

October 2015

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 council giving a point of view on the closure of Kindon Park and writing an article for the Dintone Echo about a 'Wow Wednesday' they had experienced. These subjects proved accessible to learners and a good number produced appropriate ideas for each task. However, there was, as ever, a large variation in how clearly these ideas were expressed and the full range of marks was awarded.

Task 1

Learners were required to read information from a council noticeboard about the proposed closure of the park so that houses can be built. The information gave reasons why the park was to be closed and brief information on what would be done with the land. Learners were asked to write to the council giving their views and explaining, in detail, the reasons for these views and also invited comment on what they would like the council to do.

A large number of learners engaged with the task and were able to present information and point of view clearly and adopted an appropriate tone for this task, using a good range of comments to support the overall point of view expressed. There were a good number of well-developed responses and many were structured appropriately with a reasonable number of paragraphs utilised.

A small number of learners were uncertain of the audience/ purpose of their writing. It is important that learners are fully prepared for a range of possible audiences and purposes.

There were a good number of more successful learners who were able to use the bullets and information provided as starting points to help structure their letter, developing it using their own ideas. Some learners did not go much beyond the information provided in the prompts or had little to say, resulting in some very brief responses which showed little of the qualities required of a level 2 writer.

The vast majority of learners gave a number of valid reasons why the park should remain open and why building houses elsewhere would be a better course of action. It was pleasing to see some who balanced their argument, seeing both sides but suggesting one had a greater value than the other. Better letters clearly stated their views, explaining why they felt this way and suggesting, in some detail a way forward. Less functional letters tended to be repetitive, lack detail or were unable to clearly explain some of the ideas presented.

The use of a clear opening, a conclusion and paragraphs were features of successful letters. There were, however, a number of less functional letters which did not use any paragraphs at all.

There was a large range in quality of Standard English with some very accurate responses and some filled with basic errors. Errors in the grammatical use of English was an issue e.g. subject verb agreement, incorrect use of prepositions, incorrect syntax etc. This sometimes had an impact on letters which had good content, but this content was not communicated successfully. Spelling was also variable in quality. Common errors included the misspelling of 'sincerely' the wrong use of 'their' and 'too' and 'receive' was often incorrectly spelt by learners not at level 2. Occasionally, learners used sentences which were often overlong, with commas used as replacement full stops. There were also some letters which were constructed only by using lots of simple sentences. There was also evidence of the use of the small 'I' as a Pronoun.

Task 2

Learners were given some clear information on what they needed to write in their article for the 'Wow Wednesday' section of the Dintone Echo.

Learners were able to engage with the topic and there were a good number of well written articles that were detailed and fully functional. Learners often wrote with a clear sense of purpose and using their own experiences. There were only a small number of very short responses and most articles were well developed in terms of content and showed a sufficient range of devices to be functional.

There were a small number of learners who did not understand clearly what the purpose of the article was but the vast majority were able to write an appropriate article. Less successful learners wrote too briefly, with insufficient material offered to demonstrate their ability to write appropriately for the task.

The vast majority of learners wrote in some detail about their 'Wow Wednesday' experience, describing the moment, explaining what made it a 'wow' moment and saying why it made them smile – the three suggested bullets in the task. Less functional articles tended to be repetitive or missed one or more of the bullets.

The use of a heading and other structural devices such as subheadings and paragraphs were features of successful articles. There were, however, a number of less functional articles which did not use a heading or any paragraphs at all. When paragraphing was successful, learners used an introductory paragraph stating the purpose of the article, a paragraph for each bullet in the task and then a concluding paragraph summarising the 'Wow' moment. Whilst many learners were able to write using an appropriate range of simple and complex sentences, there was some evidence of the over-use of short sentences. More successful learners are able to vary sentence types and paragraphing structures to positively impact on the meaning of their writing. Less functional articles 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.

There was a large range in quality of Standard English with some very accurate responses and others full of errors. Many of the issues were the same as in the first task such as errors in the grammatical use of English e.g. subject verb agreement, incorrect use of prepositions, incorrect syntax etc. This sometimes had an impact on articles which had good content, but this content was not communicated successfully.

Common errors included the use of incomplete sentences, not using a capital I when referring to themselves or the use of the wrong 'there/ their/ they're' or the wrong 'too/ to/ two' being used.

Many learners wrote more for this task than for task 1, which showed they had engaged well with it. Others may not have spent enough time on this response, writing very briefly; learners should allow enough time to complete both tasks.

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 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. A number of responses are written using only one paragraph and it is difficult to access the full range of marks if only one paragraph has been used, so learners should be encouraged to use a variety of paragraphs in their writing.

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 discussion forum entry in a given context. 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. The frequent of the small 'i', when a larger one is required, is still a common error, as is the misspelling of 'receive', 'too' and 'there'.

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 October 2015

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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