

Principal Examiners' Report

February 2016

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Principal Examiner Report: Level 1 Writing February 2016 Series

Introduction

This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were:

1. Write a letter to the Editor of the local newspaper about Fast Feast restaurant
2. Write an email to the Manager of the local leisure centre suggesting how he can celebrate the Centre's 10th birthday party

This paper engaged candidates and the majority responded very successfully. Both tasks were accessible, with the source material offering support to weaker candidates, allowing them to work their way into a response. There were very few responses where no attempt had been made to answer the tasks.

Task 1

There is still the ongoing issue of incorrect salutation. The majority of learners believe that Dear 'First Name Last Name' is the correct way to start a letter. Very few responses with the correct salutation of Dear Mr Grimshaw were seen.

Despite the above, the question's content was answered quite well by all candidates. It was pleasing to see that the majority of learners had attempted letter conventions and that many addressed all three points. However, the development of all three points was limited with too much emphasis on the experience of an evening at Fast Feast and only a fleeting mention of how to solve the litter and noise problems. The solution of the problem for many focused on additional litter bins and suggestions that staff ask people to keep down the noise. Higher level responses referred to staff at the restaurant encouraging people to take responsibility for their own litter disposal and that the council could assist in tackling outside litter along with signage reminding people to bin their litter. Ideas to reduce noise such as, 'a quieter type of music' and 'closing outdoor eating areas after a certain time' were offered by some higher level learners while lower level learners were repetitive in their suggestions on limiting noise. The majority included 'putting up signs asking people to be quiet' or 'closing the restaurant earlier'.

SPG

On the whole this looks to have improved when compared with previous series'. The task allowed for a good range of adjectives and learners took advantage of this when describing the food in Fast Feast ie. Delicious, scrumptious, delightful and even colourful. Waitress service was 'quick', 'efficient' and the experience was 'pleasurable'. The lower level responses also included similar vocabulary although with a little less accuracy and misuse of capitalisation. The usual common errors, 'are/our', 'aswell', 'alot' even in higher level responses were frequent. Tutors can help to eliminate

these errors and also continue to encourage learners to proof read their response to avoid the too common problem of word omissions.

Strong Answers

Responses were well thought through. They had a good sense of audience and purpose and used the correct tone and language. Information was really well organised, learners correctly explained in their introduction that they were going to be writing about their own experience at Fast Feast restaurant whilst also addressing the litter and noise problems they had read about in the paper. The bulk of the letter was then written clearly, concisely and logically. The closing statement finished the letter off nicely by explaining why, despite the litter and noise problems, Fast Feast was still a good addition to the town.

Weak Answers

Although they could still relate to the question, learners misunderstood who they were writing to. Bill Grimshaw became the owner of the restaurant rather than the newspaper Editor. There was no clear introduction outlining what the letter was about and content was very brief, focusing on the experience at Fast Feast rather than the noise and litter problem. Learners either missed out the closing paragraph on why Fast Feast was good for the town or merely stated that it was good because you could get food late at night.

Task 2

A lot of the responses were well written and candidates seemed able to give realistic suggestions and detailed descriptions of the activities they would like to see at the party. The better responses were able to distinguish between the activity needed to kick things off and get people in the party mood and the other activities required for the main event. Sadly, far too many learners misread the question assuming this was a children's party. To help avoid misunderstanding, tutors should encourage learners to read the question several times and be sure they understand what is being asked before they start their response. The majority of learners offered a similar response to the third bullet point, ie, they would give their £100 to charity. Very few elaborated on this with just an odd response stating their preferred charity.

Strong Answers

Higher level responses adopted a balanced approach to the question and covered activities for all age groups. Assorted games for the young ones, competitions, sporting events, a chance to experience all the sports facilities, offers of reduced family memberships and a few learners included musical events for teens and adults.

Weak Answers

Ideas such as: pin the tail on the donkey, musical chairs and lots of soft drinks were too common. Additionally, some learners focused their response on how best to advertise the event rather than ideas to get the party started.

Recommendations for Centres

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose. When they come to the test they must read the question 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. letter and email) 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 candidates 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.

Tips to Centres for Improving Learner Performance

Although it was reassuring to see some really good responses and that centres have obviously been practicing writing articles and contributing to internet discussions, centres/learners may benefit from addressing the following points:

During the Test

1. Use a dictionary
2. Plan responses by using the bullets as sub headings; jot down ideas underneath each of these to avoid repetition of rubric and help structure the final response
3. When repeating words that are in the question, re-read the question to check spelling
4. Proof read afterwards to check spelling (especially the key words that are in the question paper) and that all bullets have been addressed

In Centre

1. Get candidates to improve time management by sitting mock tests using past papers
2. Get learners to read letters and emails to familiarise them with the different formats
3. Practice writing articles and internet contributions, focussing on audience and tone
4. Dedicate more time to assessing a candidate's control of English before entering them for the test

FCP

1. Identifying the purpose and audience
2. Making a statement: learners need to be encouraged to make a statement then develop and support the reasons for making the statement
3. Sequencing: how to use bullets in the question to aid development and sequencing of ideas
4. Organisation – an introduction, body text and conclusion for all letters

SPG

1. Homophones: focus needed on the spelling of common homophones such as "their" and there"
2. Capitals: correct use of capitalisation, especially names of people and 'I' not 'i'
3. Capitals: do not use in the middle of words or sentences
4. Punctuation: using full stops instead of commas to break up sentences and avoid 'run on' sentences
5. Punctuation: absolutely no comma splicing
6. Connectives: suggest alternatives to 'and'
7. Subject verb agreement: 'we were' not 'we was'
8. Are/our, as well/aswell, a lot/alot

Pass mark for E103 in February 2016

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

Ofqual
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