

Principal Examiners' Report

March 2016

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 2

E203

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E203: Level 2 Writing March 2016 Principal Examiner Report

This paper worked well as a test of Level 2 writing skills. The first task required candidates to write an email to a local councillor, giving their view on whether a Premier League football team should be allowed to use their local stadium, whilst their own ground was being redeveloped. The second task asked learners to write a review of 'Pytstop,' a new community leisure facility.

Both tasks were accessible and there were relatively few examples of misinterpretation. One example of misinterpretation that was seen was on Task 1, where learners who did not read the prompt material carefully sometimes assumed that the local councillor was the owner of the stadium or the Premier League football team.

The full range of marks was awarded on both tasks, based on how successfully candidates expressed and developed their ideas.

Task 1

All learners were able to present appropriate information and to advance an opinion about the stadium. Most were able to adopt an appropriate tone for a formal email and to develop their ideas with some clarity, building on the prompt material. There were a number of well-balanced pieces seen, where learners weighed up the evidence before making their decision.

Less functional responses often lacked clear structure and organisation. These responses often frequently switched from one idea to another and sometimes became repetitious and unclear. A few responses also became too angry and abusive and so failed to demonstrate an appropriate tone.

Learners needed to demonstrate accurate use of sentence structure and paragraphing in order to get their points across clearly. Less successful responses were those where candidates only had limited sentence control and also did not make accurate use of paragraphs, with some written as a continuous block of text and others written in one sentence paragraphs.

Whilst there is no set format for an email, learners should use an appropriate opening and close (e.g. 'Dear Mr Nedham', 'Regards') to start and finish their responses. A few responses were too informal for this task, e.g. 'Hi Bob.' Some learners also included addresses and wrote their response as a formal letter.

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some responses demonstrated an impressive level of accuracy and most used spelling, grammar and punctuation with some accuracy. There were also responses that contained so many errors that meaning became unclear. Common grammatical errors included use of the wrong verb tense or the omission of articles. There were also responses that included several basic punctuation errors such as missing full stops and capital letters.

Common spelling errors on this task included 'buisness,' 'belive' and 'writting,' as well as the usual issues with homophones.

Task 2

Most learners clearly understood the concept of a review and included an appropriate heading and went on to write in a suitable style. The better reviews adopted a lively tone and reported on what was available at Pytstop as well as making suggestions about improvements which could add to the experience.

Stronger learners were able to develop their ideas logically and produce a clearly structured piece of writing. These responses were also characterised by apt choices of vocabulary and the ability to build on the prompt material. Another feature of a successful response was a clear opening stating what the review was about and a closing comment summing up the learner's experience.

Weaker responses were those where learners struggled to develop their ideas clearly. On occasion it was hard to work out what learners were writing about. These responses often demonstrated limited control of sentence structure and made little use of organisational features.

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. There were similar patterns of errors seen as in Task 1, with large numbers of grammatical errors in some responses. One issue with this task was the large number of learners who spelt names from the prompt material wrong. There were several different spellings of 'Pytstop' seen, with 'Pystop' probably being the most common.

Recommendations for Centres

Both tasks in this paper are now equally weighted at 15 marks. The time for the paper has also been extended to one hour. It is important that learners plan their time carefully to ensure that they have sufficient time to fully answer both tasks. In order to demonstrate functionality learners need to present appropriate information and develop relevant ideas clearly. Centres are recommended to reinforce the importance of reading the task and stimulus material very carefully and also to encourage candidates to plan their responses.

Prior to the test all candidates should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats and for different audiences and purposes. Practice on use of formal and informal tone and effective ways of opening and closing different types of writing would also be of benefit to learners. A strong opening and close are important components of an effective response.

Candidates should be reminded that any bullet points in the task prompt can be used to help them structure their response. If the supporting bullets are prefaced with 'you may,' candidates can use some or all as they wish, although it is recommended that candidates use any bullets as scaffolding for their writing. Where the bullets are prefaced with 'you should,' candidates must address all the bullets to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how they want to respond.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar contribute 40% of the marks for this paper. It was clear that many candidates were well below Level 2 in these areas, as there were errors in skills such as the use of the capital letter, verb tenses and also in the spelling of common words. Centres are recommended to allocate appropriate teaching time to developing candidates' skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar and to consider entering candidates at lower levels if they are not ready for Level 2.

To aid proof-reading it is important that candidates are familiar with using a dictionary and they also need to be made aware that they should spend a few minutes checking through their work, after they have finished writing. This can have a significant impact on the mark awarded for SPG.

Pass mark for E203 in February 2016

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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