

Principal Examiner's Report

February 2017

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Publications Code E103_01_1702_ER

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Functional Skills English Writing Level 1: E103

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Introduction

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

1. Write a letter of complaint to the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit about gangs of youths causing problems outside the Community Centre
2. Write a contribution to an internet forum about animal welfare

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

This was very accessible and successful overall showing a good range of marks between the middle and top bands and very few in the bottom band. Learners wrote the letter giving relevant information about the problems that young people caused around the community centre. The minimally competent learner tended to talk about the community as a whole rather than the problem being just outside the community centre and they simply repeated the bullets relating to the problems and solutions; sometimes just listing them as bullets themselves in their answers. Many of the stronger responses were well developed and sounded realistic. Candidates made good use of the information given as a starting point and expanded their points; describing the impact on the neighbours of the specific problems and explaining the benefits of the suggested solutions.

On the whole, candidates used two addresses; there seemed to be only a handful that didn't use an address at all. Some candidates, who seemed to have English as a second language, struggled with their grammar and sentence construction, although their letter's content was more accurate.

Strong Answers

There was a clear introduction. Learners explained that they were writing to bring the issues they were encountering with youths outside the community centre to the attention of Mr Choudery. They then described in detail what the issues were. For every issue mentioned, the learner explained the negative impact on local residents. Once all of the issues were covered, learners then put forward measures that could be taken to improve the situation. The benefits of each of these measures was also described in some detail providing a well thought out and rounded response. Learners closed the letter by thanking Mr Choudery for taking

the time to read the letter and stating that they hoped they would see an improvement in the situation soon.

Weak Answers

Learners wrote about the local area and failed to pinpoint the problems to just the area around the community centre. They simply repeated the bullets when explaining what the problems and solution were and didn't expand by describing the negative impacts of the problems for local residents or benefits of the measures to be taken. Those learners who didn't address all the bullets in full, but gave a response that was fit for purpose and used appropriate tone and language, were still able to gain minimal competency.

Task 2

This question was accessible and gave equal scope to those who agreed or disagreed with Sophie or Amir. More able learners picked up on the fact that Sophie was talking about non-domestic animal welfare and Amir was talking about domestic animal welfare which helped them produce a good argument and detailed views. Weaker learners just used the information at the top of the task to write an answer rather than forming their own opinions. They tended to struggle with the concept and simply repeated the reasons either Sophie or Amir had given for thinking we were a nation of animal lovers or abusers. A high percentage of learners used the correct tone/language for forum contributions

Strong Answers

The best answers introduced the names of organisations such as the RSPCA and Dogs Trust to show how much our country did to protect animals. They also talked about the food chain and how killing animals was necessary to provide food. For those who believed we were a nation of animal abusers, they talked about the money made by the make-up industry for example and explained that there were companies out there who produced make up that wasn't tested on animals so it wasn't compulsory.

Weak Answers

Responses were short with awkward expression and a lack of clarity affected overall success. They simply repeated either Sophie or Amir's contribution or talked about how well they looked after their own pets at home. There was little or no development of these answers which still scored reasonably well but lacked the detail needed for the top band on FCP.

SPG General

With SPG, common problems included subject/verb agreement. Candidates had particular problems with "was/were". Common words misspelt were, "there/their", "writing (writting)", "sincerely (sincerly)", and "because". The correct use of articles proved difficult for many learners. The use of lowercase 'i' instead of 'I' continues to be a common error. There was a considerable number of second language speakers who spelled words correctly and applied punctuation correctly but found the use of tense problematic.

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 internet forum contribution) 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 very good responses and that centres have obviously been practicing writing letters and emails, 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 themselves with the different formats
3. Practice writing articles and internet contributions, focusing 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. Writing a good introduction that sets the scene
3. Making a statement: learners need to be encouraged to make a statement then develop and support the reasons for making the statement
4. Sequencing: how to use bullets in the question to aid development and sequencing of ideas
5. 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 2017

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

Ofqual
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