

Principal Examiners' Report

June 2017

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 speech to be delivered to the council, representing local peoples' views on the closure of a leisure centre and writing an e-mail to the Editor of the Chasfield News, giving suggestions about what to do on a rainy day. These subjects proved accessible to learners and a good number produced appropriate ideas for each task.

There was clear evidence that the learners had been fully prepared to write personal responses. The use of paragraphing was strong in both tasks and there was clear evidence of good preparation for candidates writing an e-mail and appropriate writing techniques were in evidence for the writing of the speech. However, there was, as ever, a large variation in how clearly ideas were expressed and the full range of marks was awarded.

There is continuing evidence of learners who are not yet at level 2 being entered for this examination. This is often indicated by the inability of learners to construct sentences in a grammatically correct manner. There were a high number of candidates who were unable to write in a manner that conveyed meaning in a clear, concise manner.

Learners are encouraged to keep their responses within the pages of the answer booklet as over-long responses are often just as un-functional as ones that are too short. A number of candidates wrote long responses to both tasks, in the hope that this would make the response functional and, although many appropriate ideas were expressed, meaning often was very unclear due to a large amount grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors.

Task 1

Learners were required to write a speech to be delivered at a meeting with the local council, giving views on the closure of the local leisure centre. A number of notes were given to help learners' framework their ideas.

Most learners read the whole material and clearly constructed their speeches using the notes and the bullets as guidance. A good number of learners developed a clear speech, with a range of valid ideas presented. In general, speeches were better when they were more personal than generalised about the given topic.

The most successful letters adopted a generally formal tone and were able to follow the bullet points clearly, but not in a mechanical manner. Less successful responses had a paragraph for each bullet in the prompt, using the words of the prompt as the first sentence. These responses were too formulaic and did not read fluently. Some learners wrote using either just one paragraph or used a succession of single sentence paragraphs. There were also some very short, list-like or repetitive pieces which were written in a very simple style and did not develop much beyond the material presented in the source material. Learners need to demonstrate that they can use a range of paragraphing structures successfully to pass at level 2.

Sentence structure was varied and accurate, however, in a number of responses and was mainly supported by effective use of punctuation. There were quite a large number of responses where meaning was obscured because of a lack of control of sentence construction – including missing key words in sentences such as ‘Here some suggestions’. There were also some problems with sentence demarcation and missing commas from around clauses within sentences in less functional responses.

The language of many speeches was often full of errors with missing ‘articles’ – both direct and indirect – weak spelling of basic monosyllabic words, poor subject/verb agreement, comma splicing and poor punctuation. Some learners need to have more control and check their language accuracy. Common grammatical errors included: ‘have discuss’, instead of ‘have discussed’ and ‘these centre’ instead of ‘this centre’. These are examples of grammar which clearly is not of a level 2 standard.

The better responses demonstrated the ability to write using the format of a speech, including appropriate tone, addressing material to an audience and structuring the ideas logically in a manner that enabled the reader/ listener to follow the lines of argument. Some were too aggressively worded, or did not coherently express views, moving rapidly from one line of argument to the next.

Many learners wrote a large amount, but this often resulted in over-long, error-filled writing that was not of the appropriate standard to pass at this level. It is advisable for learners to write succinctly and accurately.

Another common issue is learners who write very little. This gives the examiner little to reward as a variety of sentence types and structural devices are unlikely to be evident in a very brief, undeveloped piece of writing.

Task 2

Learners were required to write an email to the editor of the Chasfield News giving their ideas for activities which could be done on a rainy day. Learners engaged fully with the topic and there were a number of detailed emails that were fully functional. Learners often wrote with a clear sense of purpose and followed the bullets clearly.

Some learners chose to write about a range of ideas including various activities from indoor sport, to playing Twister or painting, creating Papier Mache items and watching a good movie. Sometimes these responses were more of a list than detailed comments. Other emails focused on one or two activities in greater detail and explored the reasons why these were good things to do on rainy days.

There were some very imaginative ideas on offer, including mud sliding and simply playing in the rain or other activities which involved getting very wet.

What was made clear by a range of ideas is that learners had a lot to say and were able to come up with some valid and convincing ideas.

Learners, on the whole, wrote more for this, more successfully and the content was generally more engaging to read; this appeared to be a task which learners enjoyed doing.

Less developed emails often were very vague, too short and did not really convince the reader that their ideas were worth doing on a rainy day.

As with Task 1, learners with English as a second language, wrote some interesting responses, but generally omitted both the indirect and direct article throughout and mixed up prepositions. Common grammatical errors tended to be regarding tense or omission of words such as definite articles. In more severe cases the errors related to weak syntax. A lot of errors could have been corrected with proof reading. Examples of errors included 'many indoor game' instead of 'many indoor games' and 'these activity' rather than 'these activities'.

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. 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 a speech or an email 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'.

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 June 2017

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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