

# Principal Examiner's Report

March 2017

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills  
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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## **Principal Examiner Report: L1 Writing Mar 2017 Series**

### **Introduction**

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

1. Write a letter of application for a job on a cruise ship
2. Write a contribution to an internet forum about circus 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. The question was appropriate for a wide range of students, they engaged with the task and chose the career they were suited to best. Top band responses generally paid attention to letter layout, although not all of these correctly placed the sender/receiver addresses but were able to identify a specific job role and structure a functional letter of application setting out their skills and relevant experience. It was a shame that some very strong responses did not include a sender address and particularly these tended to be applications for engineering positions which read really well.

A large percentage of the weaker learners tried to cover all jobs in one application which resulted in a disjointed letter. A particular common response applied for 'cooks and waiters' assuming this was one job. Generally, the lower band responses lacked any development of ideas and clearly letters of application had not been practiced, in fact the concept proved unfamiliar to many. Also, there were many learners with English as an additional language who were not operating at level one. Sadly, these letters did not resemble any kind of job application letter and lacked coherence and structure.

### **Strong Answers**

There was a clear introduction. Learners explained that they had seen an advert for a range of jobs on the cruise ship. They stated which job they were interested in applying for and gave detailed reasons as to why, for example, because they had a love for travelling along with a passion for working with children. They went on to explain in some detail why they thought they were right for the job, for example, previous experience, qualifications etc. An appropriate closing was included, thanking the HR Manager for reading their letter of application and saying they hoped to hear from them soon/hoped their application was successful.

## **Weak Answers**

The minimally competent learner said that they were writing about a job on the ship then briefly said why they were interested. Their reasons for why they thought they were right for the job weren't detailed and more often than not, there was no distinction between the second and third bullets. There was no closing statement of any kind. 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.

## **SPG**

There were many missing full stops, lower case nouns and incorrect subject/verb agreement. Sincerely was often misspelt and so too, experience and interested.

## **Task 2**

This question allowed most learners to offer an opinion and many were functional. Top mark responses sometimes included specific examples of circus stories either from their own experience or from well-formed opinions. These were sequenced and read well and interestingly often went against the opinion stated on the question paper. The majority agreed that a circus mistreated animals but some tended to regurgitate the rubric. Some were able to argue a case for closing down all animal entertainment offered by a circus.

## **SPG**

Again, incorrect subject verb agreement and in particular the addition of 's' in the first person, 'I likes the animals' and also 'I am also agree'. 'Are' instead of 'our' and the usual 'there' instead of 'they're'. (It never fails to surprise that these errors continue unchecked in classrooms).

## **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/a lot

Pass mark for E103 in March 2017

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Maximum mark	<b>25</b>
Pass mark	<b>16</b>
UMS mark	<b>6</b>



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