

Principal Examiners' Report

May 2017

Functional Skills English
Writing Level 2 (E203)

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E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2

General Comments

The paper proved to be an effective test of Level 2 writing skills. The first task required candidates to write an article, giving their view on whether there was too much advertising. The second task required candidates to write an email, giving their opinion on which of three funding proposals the council should support. Both tasks were accessible and the candidates engaged well with them.

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

Task 1

Candidates responded well to this task and most included article conventions, such as a heading. Everyone had an opinion on advertising and whether there is too much of it. Most candidates wrote in an appropriate tone that was designed to capture the interest of the reader.

Strong responses were those in which opinions were clearly developed and explained. Candidates used their personal experience to build on the prompt material and develop ideas. These responses also had a clear structure and were easy to follow.

Weaker responses lacked the clear development needed to be functional. These responses often lacked logical sequencing of ideas and sometimes became repetitious and unclear. Other responses did little more than repeat the prompt material and did not add a personal point of view.

Candidates needed to demonstrate accurate use of sentence structure and paragraphing in order to develop their ideas 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.

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.

Common spelling errors on this task included 'advertising', 'alot' and 'buisness' as well as confusion with words such as 'to' and 'too'.

Task 2

This task required learners to consider three different funding proposals and there were a large number of detailed and thoughtful responses. A range of different approaches were taken, with some candidates strongly supporting one idea and other suggesting splitting the money between different proposals. All relevant approaches could achieve the top band of the mark scheme, as long as ideas were presented clearly.

Stronger candidates were able to develop their ideas logically and produce a clearly structured piece of writing. These candidates also developed their opinion in some detail, providing examples to back up their points. Another feature of a successful response was a clear opening stating what the email was about and a summary at the end.

Weaker responses were those where candidates struggled to express or develop their opinions clearly. These responses sometimes became repetitious and contradictory. Other candidates just repeated ideas from the source material and added very little material of their own. Some candidates wrote very long responses for this task and this often led to a loss of control over content and accuracy.

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. Some candidates made mistakes with words that were in the prompt material, including 'library' and 'concil'.

Recommendations for Centres

In order to demonstrate functionality candidates 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 candidates. 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. 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 articles, verb subject agreement 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.

Centres are also advised to encourage candidates to check their work as they are writing to ensure that their language is accurate. On this paper candidates generally wrote with great enthusiasm, but the quality of expression often did not match the quality of the ideas.

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 May 2017

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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