

Principal Examiner's Report

February 2018

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Principal Examiner Report: L1 Writing February 2018 Series

Introduction

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

- Write a letter of complaint to the council about rubbish problems at a local market.
- Write an email of thanks after a visit to a theme park.

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

In general candidates were able to engage with the task and found it accessible although the majority of responses were in the middle band.. Better answers added their own ideas on the state of the market area and how the council might implement improvements. Despite this, the stimulus material appeared to help the majority of candidates, so long as they used it as a starting point from which to add a coherent structure, tone and layout. Tone was generally good in the majority of responses and most responses contained at least one address. Many of the letters did not contain a correct close and in a few cases no close at all.

Stronger responses engaged the reader with effective use of language and structure. Information was presented in a logical sequence with good levels of appropriate detail. These responses used the prompts as a starting point moving on to a well-developed letter to the Council about the problems at the market and how these problems could be overcome and often contained interesting additional ideas. There was often good use of descriptive language such as.

“a haven for rats”
“flimsy bags”
“potent smell”
“rat infestation”
“escalating”
“lurking”

Weaker responses often contained one or two incoherent sentences offering no detail and with very weak spelling impacting clarity of meaning. There was sometimes an over-reliance on the stimulus material, which led to under-developed responses that consisted of the information reworked into a continuous prose

SPG

The majority of responses contained numerous errors, with punctuation often used incorrectly. Sentence demarcation was often weak and there were many instances of capitalisation mid-sentence. Articles were missing and there was confusion for many with you/your/you're and the use of they/there/they're and their. Common spelling errors included hygienic, appalling, complain, writing, environment, alot and sincerely. The majority of learners showed command of simpler grammatical structures but longer sentences frequently displayed a loss of control.

Task 2

This was a good task that received a high level of engagement from learners, many of whom approached it with enthusiasm, drawing on their own experiences and thrills at a Theme Park. Again, a large amount of stimulus material was provided but the majority of learners were able to use this effectively, adding details of their own where appropriate and often organising the response effectively.

Stronger responses were able to sustain an enthusiastic tone throughout the response, engaging with the task and adding a sometimes impressive level of detail that took a number of marks into the top band for FCP. Many were able to give extended responses with developed detail about how they had spent their day using descriptive language such as:

"...actually lives up to its slogan of the scariest ride in Europe"
"friendly and welcoming atmosphere"
"best burgers I have ever eaten"
"watched the sunset from the boating lake"
"...so scary my soul almost left its body"

Weaker responses tended to use the source text and add only a small amount, sometimes explaining in restricted detail and not generating an appropriate tone. However, many of these responses produced enough to take them into the middle band.

SPG

Largely the same issues as Task One were seen, though often errors were fewer in number. However, there was a frequent tendency to use incorrect present simple and present continuous tenses. Common spelling errors included 'thoroughly', 'queue', 'which' and 'friend'.

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 email) 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 inform learners 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. Present and past tenses
9. Practice is needed with you/your/you're and they/there/they're and their

Pass mark for E103 in February 2018

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

Ofqual
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