

Principal Examiner's Report

June 2018

Pearson Edexcel 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:

- Write an article promoting an all day sponsored silence
- Write an email saying what can be done to make your college/school/workplace more fun

This paper engaged learners and the majority responded successfully. Both tasks were accessible, with the source material offering support to weaker learners, 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

There was a high number of mid-range answers for FCP with a number of responses not addressing all the points indicated on the task. Most responses gave a detailed description of the charity they wanted to support (Cancer Research was definitely the most popular charity!) - sometimes with less detail about the actual sponsored silence event. A number of responses didn't seem to understand what a sponsored silence was and it became a little confused at times. These tended to be students with English as their second language. They understood the charity aspect but clearly did not understand the concept of what the day was about. This meant that the responses from students with English as their first language were markedly better than the others. A few responses planned a totally different event - cake stall, sponsored swim, etc.

Articles for magazines/newspapers appears not to have much instruction in the classroom and the register and tone were often incorrect. There were many that copied down only the facts laid out in the question rather than writing an article. Stronger learners engaged with the task and showed successful development and added their own ideas to the responses. The best ones were able to talk about the event and why they were supporting it. They went into more detail about the charities who would benefit and why this was important. There were some that covered the last bullet (encouraging others to join them) but many didn't manage it. Weaker responses lacked detail and development

Strong responses:

Examples included plenty of detail about the sponsored silence and how it would help the chosen charity. They went on to detail why they had picked this charity, generally because of a personal experience or because a relative was affected or helped by that charity. There were responses that added in other activities that would be included on the day such as face painting. There were some thoughtful ones that told participants where they could collect a whiteboard to help the fund raisers on the day.

Weak Responses:

Weaker responses lacked detail and development.

SPG Performance

There were clearly many learners using English as a second language. Responses were missing articles and determiners, as well as tenses being inconsistent. There were quite a few that were really accurate as well as some that simply didn't use punctuation. Spelling was a problem with most learners when any attempt to use advanced vocabulary was shown. At a basic level spelling varied. Quite a few learners spelt 'raise' as 'rasie', which I found unusual that it was so prevalent.

Task 2

Generally, this task was answered better than task 1. It was easily relatable to learners who seemed able to draw on personal experience to give full answers. There was no shortage of ideas and learners usually organised their ideas successfully. Most responses covered both points indicated on the task and responses that achieved the higher marks for FCP gave developed, independent ideas - often 2 or 3 ideas. Mid-range answers tended to stay close to the ideas already given in the task - just adding a little more e.g. put a TV in the chill out room, put a swimming pool in the gym or have a day out at a theme park.

Stronger responses:

There were many ways of helping this project along. Some evaluated the ideas put forward and suggested places they could visit and the reason why. There were people who said that they thought the ideas wouldn't suit everyone (the pool table and gym equipment were seen as mainly male friendly). There were some that thought that people would appreciate the gym as it would save them money and make exercise easier once it was in-house.

Weaker responses:

Tended to list the details from the question and not put any development in at all. Or say "Yes, that's a great idea". The least successful learners did not acknowledge the sender of the email but delved straight in with their suggestions.

SPG Performance

Again, a very mixed set of abilities regarding punctuation. Some had apostrophes for missing letters, but then used lower case i for the pronoun. Most learners showed poor sentence construction and those that used correct sentence construction usually achieved the highest band. Spelling varied.

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. article 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 tell 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 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 learners 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, focusing on structure, 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 of an article: Heading, introduction, sub-headings, closing, underlining to highlight important points

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. Practice needed with you/your/you're and they/there/they're and their

Pass mark for E103 in June 2018

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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