

Principal Examiners' Report

June 2018

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 2 (E203)

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General Comments

This paper offered learners good opportunities to demonstrate Level 2 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were: writing a review about a recent holiday or day trip and an email giving a friend, Jo, ideas about how people can exercise more. These subjects proved very 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 learners writing reviews and using the correct tone for an email to a friend. However, there was, as ever, a large variation in how clearly ideas were expressed and the full range of marks was awarded.

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.

Task 1

Learners were required to read a brief webpage giving them the context for the first task. This gave learners some idea of the areas to focus on in their review.

A large number of responses were successful with some strong, engaging and detailed reviews of their recent trip/holiday. There were, however, a number of very short, list-like or repetitive pieces which were written in a very simple style and had no sense of being a review.

Learners often wrote in a lively, enthusiastic style, with detailed comments on where they stayed, what they did on their trip or holiday and what problems there may have been.

The majority of responses were characterised by the 'I/We had a lovely time ...But...' theme, and most learners would have happily returned to their chosen respective destinations. These destinations were both wide-ranging geographically and wide-ranging in terms of relative appeal. There were 'home' delights such as the ubiquitous Blackpool, St Leonards, Southport, Butlins at Minehead, Skegness etc. There were international treats such as Spain with its cities such as Barcelona, Madrid, and Malaga; Turkey, Morocco, Egypt and so on; and other European cities such as Paris and Amsterdam.

Quite a number of learners wrote narrative accounts of their holidays/trips out as opposed to reviews with structured sections. These narratives thus included irrelevant details of the journey such as traffic or distance as well as details of fellow holidaymakers. Most reviews or narratives focussed on sites visited, the weather, the cleanliness of hotels, the quality of food, and the friendliness of the hosts. Most reviews were positive in the main but a few were very negative such as the review about a Turkish hotel in Place el Mana which was described as a

'hell hole' with 'utter filth' and 'stained sheets' and a 'crumbling building' which looked nothing like the travel brochure photograph.

Other reviews were not quite so negative and were quite philosophical such as the 'really nice visit to Barcelona... apart from food poisoning and a terrorist attack'. One account described a memorable 'trip' to, and in it would seem, Amsterdam where the reviewer enjoyed 'weed brownies and cakes' but was 'disgusted by the prostitutes'. One traveller to Russia obviously enjoyed it by concluding the review with 'We made our way back home knackered and happy'. Some learners, it appears, need to be reminded of the requirement for standard English as well as what might be considered both acceptable or unacceptable in publication of this sort in terms of both register and content.

Paragraphing was often successfully achieved as many learners had an introductory paragraph stating the purpose of the review, followed by a variety of paragraphs. Many learners were able to write using an appropriate range of simple and complex sentences and paragraphing structures were varied to positively impact on the meaning of their writing. There was some over-use of simple sentences and one sentence paragraphs, showing learners working below level 2. There were also some issues with sentence demarcation and missing commas from around clauses in sentences in less functional responses.

Many responses had problems with the omission of articles, constant switching of pronouns, much comma splicing, and failure to establish an appropriate tense. When the latter was employed successfully it often became 'would of' as opposed to 'would have' for example. Common grammatical errors of learners working below level 2 included: 'I am write to you to say about my holiday', 'I like to say that it was good holiday' and 'I am strongly advice everyone to go to holiday Malaga'.

Task 2

Learners were able to fully engage with the topic of giving advice on how to get fit and there were a good number of well written emails that were functional at level 2. Learners often wrote with a clear sense of purpose and had many ideas.

Many learners correctly wrote this as an email, but some read like an article or were written as letters.

Many learners wrote about the introduction of severe exercise regimes for combatting lack of fitness and/or obesity. One or two called for the introduction of compulsory workouts at work with employee competitions such as lunchtime races – anyone not taking part would be dismissed. Other more gentle – and sensible – learners called for less strenuous exercise routines which could be carried out in the 'comfort of home' with simple exercises such as press ups and sit ups. It was noted that this would eliminate costly, overpriced gym fees, and give confidence to those too diffident to face the full glare of public scrutiny in such gyms. There were some thoughtful responses which advocated additional exercise by slight alteration of one's routine such as get out of the lift one floor before yours or get off the bus one stop before yours and walk the rest of the way.

Most of the responses were appropriate but, some included inappropriate content such as: '[I'm going to] sack my gardener whom I suspect is having an alliance with my wife and do the gardening myself and use the potting shed for its intended purpose and not for their secret trysts'.

There were a number of learners who wrote extensively but made too many errors, as they had clearly concentrated their efforts on quantity, not quality. Over-long responses are often not functional as readers lose interest or the errors become so serious as to impact the meaning.

Other responses were fit for purpose, but did not get out of the middle level as they were quite simple, not fully developed and were repetitive. As with Task 1 some learners wrote some thoughtful 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.

Sometimes the quality of the handwriting was poor with legibility difficult and basic technical accuracy needs much attention.

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 review 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 use of the small 'i', when a larger one is required, is still a common error, as is the misuse of commas and over-use or lack of full stops. Common spelling errors still include the misspelling of 'receive' and using the wrong their, there or they're and too/to/two.

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.

Key Points for learners:

- Use standard English
- Use an appropriate register for the task in hand
- Make sure the content is acceptable in terms of audience
- Make sure the content and structure matches that required by the task
- Check response for grammatical accuracy.

Pass mark for E203 in June 2018

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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