

Principal Examiner's Report

March 2018

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

March 2018

Publications Code E103_01_1803_ER

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Pearson Education Ltd 2018

E103: Level 1 Writing March 2018 Principal Examiner Report

Introduction

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

- Write a reference for a friend applying to be a volunteer at a dog rescue centre
- Write an email to a friend giving advice on preparing for exams

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

Overall, the candidates found this task engaging and most were able to produce a reference that scored over all three bands. The better responses were able to add in a lot of significant (and creative) detail as well as developing ideas well. The weaker responses were able to respond to a certain extent but tended to focus too much on their friend's qualities and not enough on skills or relevant experience with dogs or other animals. Some did not develop any significant or additional detail. In general, this was a task that encouraged candidates to engage well and there were relatively few who did not attempt the task at all.

There were a lot of good examples of good writing with some well-written responses that produced good references clearly showing why their friend would be a good volunteer. For those in the higher bands information was presented well and in a logical sequence with a good to excellent level of appropriate detail. Some were able to produce responses that gave good examples of what qualities or skills their friend had but neglected to reference experience with animals or dogs bringing their marks into the middle band. Some did not use a letter format which meant they could only score on the lower band. This was a shame for some who had written a good piece of work but the criteria is to use a letter format.

Strong responses: there were some good examples of strong answers with some well-planned and well thought out responses giving detailed letters and convincing references. The best answers often gave interesting supplementary details beyond the basics of liking and having dogs such as feeding and helping stray wild animals, relevant work experience, working at a zoo and sometimes quite specific examples of animal rescues. The best answers also developed a confident tone in recommending the individual for the role and reflecting this in the structure (eg in an introductory and concluding sentence).

Specific examples:

- "she has tons of experience working with animals."
- "One reason I believe Ryan would be an outstanding volunteer for your charity is because he has had plenty of experience around dogs."
- "... who believes dogs have just as much rights as humans do."

Weaker responses: the idea of a reference seemed confusing, some managed it well, but many were confused and so didn't include the name of the person. A few assumed it was for themselves and some thought a dog fosterer was wanted. There were occasional lapses where candidates nominated themselves for the position or wrote recommending a friend without stating they had been asked to provide a reference, perhaps demonstrating a lack of comprehension of the rubric.

Task 2

This was a good task as all the candidates engaged with it and were able to produce responses. Many clearly felt the same as Kieran and were able to give good responses showing empathy and a lot of detail. It allowed a level of discrimination as the stronger answers were well written with a good level of detail and personal suggestions on how to help with exam revision. There were some who did not develop enough detail and focused on one of the subtasks and not the other.

In general candidates responded very well to this task and were able to communicate a lot of good ideas with clear strategies on how to prepare for exams. Many were able to give relevant personal examples to help their friend. Not all referred to all three subtasks which kept their marks in the middle or lower bands. A minority used inappropriate formal language such as "I am writing to inform you...". Some were too short and lacked details and a few answered the questions from the text e mail rather than the subtasks.

Stronger responses: there were some excellent examples of detailed and developed responses with good use of vocabulary. The best followed the suggested structure well, responding in a lively and personal way, sharing their own worries and passing on tips (often displaying a heartening faith in teachers to give advice!). Some good strategies were offered including, stress-balls, Q cards, flashcards, timetables, activities to take mind of revising, getting fresh air, past papers and websites. There were also some very nice personal and encouraging sign-offs.

Specific examples:

- "Get seven hours sleep to wake up fresh with a clear mind."
- "Staying in your room really isn't going to help you stay focused."
- "Use flashcards and check back in your notes."
- "Don't overload your brain with stress."
- "I recommend not cramming your mind with only thoughts of exams."
"
- "Have fun without the weight of exams on your shoulders."
- "don't procrastinate"

Weaker responses: examples of weak answers included a response of one or two sentences or disjointed chaotic and incoherent sentences offering no detail with very weak spelling impacting clarity of meaning. Some were too short and had no developed details. Some candidates wrote a formal letter instead of an email and the tone of some of the emails was formal rather than informal. A minority just gave advice about the actual exam rather than preparing for it. For example, get to the room on time and bring a pen.

SPG

In general SPG was weaker than FCP for most of the responses and brought marks down. Spelling was particularly weak for many and punctuation was often used incorrectly even in good responses with lots of detail. In particular, there was a lack of full stops. There were numerous examples of first language interference. There was a lack of control over tenses, especially the use of auxiliary verbs. Incorrect use of syntax and lexis, causing a lack of comprehension. Collocations such as verb – preposition and noun – preposition. A lack of control of articles. Incorrect use of discourse markers causing a lack of cohesion. Poor control of subject verb agreement.

- Task 1: there was confusion for many with you/your/you're.
- Task 2: there was common confusion in the use of breaks/brakes, stressed/stressful and advice/advise.

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

Pass mark for E103 in March 2018

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

