

Principal Examiners' Report

March 2018

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 2 (E203)

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The paper proved to be an effective test of Level 2 writing skills. The first task required candidates to write a letter, giving their view on a proposed council ban on dogs in parks. The second task required candidates to write an email to a friend, to persuade them to join them in taking a short summer course. Both tasks were accessible and the candidates engaged well with them.

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

Task 1

Candidates responded well to this task and most formatted their letters correctly. The most common error was the use of an incorrect close. All candidates had an opinion about dogs, with the majority appearing to be dog lovers and a significant minority seeming to regard dogs as a menace. Most candidates wrote in an appropriately formal tone for a letter to a newspaper.

Strong responses were those in which ideas were clearly developed and explained. These responses also had a clear structure including an introduction explaining why they were writing their letter and a conclusion summing up the main points. Successful responses also built on the prompt material and developed a coherent and clear argument.

Weaker responses lacked the clear presentation of ideas needed to be functional. In many cases these responses just copied out the ideas from the prompt material, without building on them. Other candidates just agreed with each of the opinions and this meant that their responses were contradictory. Some candidates wrote very long responses and lost control over sentence structure and content.

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 'exercise', and 'writting' as well as confusion with homophones such as 'too' and 'to'.

Task 2

This task required learners to persuade a friend to join them in taking a summer course. The prompt material offered a range of courses including designing computer games, foreign languages and nail art and all candidates were able to choose something that appealed to them. The task offered candidates the opportunity to write in an informal register and offered a good contrast to Task 1.

Stronger candidates were able to develop their ideas logically and produce a clearly structured piece of writing. These candidates also adopted a genuinely persuasive tone and gave several reasons as to why their friend should join them, such as learning foreign languages before their summer holiday.

Weaker responses were those where candidates struggled to express or develop their ideas clearly. These responses sometimes became repetitious and difficult to follow. Occasionally it was unclear what the email was suggesting and these responses were not functional. Other responses did little more than ask their friend to do the course and didn't explain why they wanted to do it.

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. Common misspellings on this task included 'desining' and 'experiance'.

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. 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.

Finally, candidates should be encouraged to plan and structure their work carefully. On this paper some candidates wrote very long, but poorly structured responses. A clearly written, concise response will get a better mark for form, communication and purpose than a very long response which is difficult to follow. The two pages of answer space provided should be sufficient for the vast majority of candidates.

Pass mark for E203 in March 2018

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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