

Principal Examiners' Report

February 2016

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 2

E203

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E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2

General Comments

This paper offered learners good opportunities to demonstrate Level 2 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were: writing a speech to be delivered at a public meeting about the advantages and disadvantages of turning Greenland Meadows into a new shopping and leisure complex and writing an e-mail applying to be a volunteer for Future Sunbeams Children's Charity. These subjects proved accessible to learners and a good number produced appropriate ideas for each task. However, there was, as ever, a large variation in how clearly these ideas were expressed and the full range of marks was awarded.

Task 1

Learners were required to write a speech to be delivered at a public meeting about the advantages and disadvantages of turning Greenland Meadows into a new shopping and leisure complex using the material from the prompt to guide their focus.

A large number of learners engaged with the task and were able to present information clearly and adopted an appropriate tone for this task, using a good range of ideas and examples to illustrate the issues presented. There were a good number of well-developed speeches and many were structured appropriately with a reasonable number of paragraphs utilised.

There were a small number of learners who did not understand clearly what the main issues were but the vast majority were able to write a speech. Some learners, however, were uncertain of the audience/ purpose of their speech, which was to be delivered to a public meeting. This resulted in some overly-informal comments in places. It is important that learners are fully prepared for a range of possible audiences and purposes.

There were also some learners who relied too heavily on the material provided as prompts, with some simply copying it from the question paper and adding very little additional material of their own, resulting in some very brief speeches which showed little of the qualities required of a Level 2 writer. More successful learners were able to use the material as starting points to help structure their speech, developing it using their own ideas as well.

The vast majority of learners gave a number of valid points about the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals, explaining in detail what they were and suggesting, in some detail, how these problems could be resolved. Less functional speeches tended to be repetitive, lack detail or were unable to clearly explain some of the ideas presented.

As there is no set format to writing a speech, provided the material was structured clearly and logically, the learner was able to present material in an appropriate manner. The effective use of paragraphs were features of successful

speeches. There were, however, a number of less functional speeches which did not any paragraphs at all, or were written in bullet point or note format.

There was a large range in quality of Standard English with some very accurate responses. There were speeches which had many incorrectly structured sentences showing evidence of learners who were not yet ready for this level. There were also some very brief responses which did not develop ideas sufficiently for the speech to be clear and functional.

Errors in the grammatical use of English was an issue e.g. subject verb agreement, incorrect use of prepositions, incorrect syntax etc. This sometimes had an impact on speeches which had good content, but this content was not communicated successfully. Spelling was also variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate and only a very small number contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. There was evidence of the use of the small 'I' as a Pronoun and 'recieve' was also commonly misspelt. Stylistically, very often attempts at developed sentence structures consisted of little more than a succession of additive clauses, underpinned by comma splicing.

Paragraphing was often successfully achieved as many learners had an introductory paragraph stating the purpose of the speech, a paragraph for each idea and then a concluding paragraph summarising the ideas. Whilst many learners were able to write using an appropriate range of simple and complex sentences, there was some evidence of the over-use of short sentences. More successful learners are able to vary sentence types and paragraphing structures to positively impact on the meaning of their writing. Less functional speeches tended to have limited control of structure and their paragraphing was erratic, with a number writing in one sentence paragraphs and others writing the text in one continuous block. This has been noted in previous series and reflects learners who are not yet at Level 2.

Task 2

Learners were able to engage with the topic and there were a good number of well written e-mails that were fully functional. Learners often wrote with a clear sense of purpose and used their own ideas, rather than simply re-using material from the prompts. There were several very short applications offered, but most were well developed in terms of content and showed a sufficient range of devices to be functional.

A small number of learners used too much of the material presented and did not develop their own ideas, simply listing each area mentioned such as gardening, sport, cooking and music – briefly saying that they could do all these things without explaining, in detail, exactly what they could offer the charity. More successful learners were conscious of the purpose and gave clear persuasive reasons why they should be chosen to work for the charity. Many learners used paragraphing effectively to aid meaning and cohesion. There were also some one paragraph responses with little overall sense of structuring.

A few learners spent too long on when they could work, rather than what they could offer as skills. More functional responses took one or two of the areas highlighted in the advertisement and then explained what made them suitable, illustrating this with appropriate examples of when they had used these skills. They made the comments relevant to working with children, rather than just generalising on the skills they had. Less functional responses did not mention working with children, or this was not seen as a key requirement for the voluntary position.

Many learners wrote more for this task than for task 1, which showed they had engaged well with it. Others may not have spent enough time on this response, writing very briefly; learners should allow enough time to complete both tasks equally.

There were some problems with incorrect grammar/ syntax. Some sentences and paragraphs were well written until a major lapse. There was also evidence of the use of overlong sentences/ comma splicing and some use of the lower case 'I'.

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 in hand. 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 speech or application e-mail 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 Level 2 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 misspelling of 'receive'.

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.

Pass mark for E203 in February 2016

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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