

Principal Examiners' Report

May 2016

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Principal Examiner Report: Level 1 Writing May 2016 Series

Introduction

This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were, writing a letter of complaint to the manager of a sub-standard hotel and writing a contribution to a travel blog about a town or city the candidate had visited. These subjects proved accessible to the majority of learners and many produced appropriate ideas, views and descriptions for each task. However, there was a large variation in how clearly these ideas and views were expressed and the full range of marks was awarded.

Task 1

Most learners were able to complete the task using appropriate language and tone for writing a letter of complaint to a hotel manager. Some learners had unrealistic expectations of what actions the hotel manager should take and the recompense he should make to them. Consequently these responses lost some functionality, although they could still display minimal competency. Other less successful learners also affected functionality through giving little or no detail and simply reversing each of the positive points from the stimulus text into negatives without further embellishment. These responses lacked development of ideas and information and therefore, at best, were just minimally competent. The more successful learners were able to develop detailed and well developed responses, covering a wide range of points linked to the hotel experience. They were able to describe realistic scenarios as to why they were staying at the hotel and then use these scenarios to enhance the reasons why the hotel's poor facilities and shortcomings had impacted so much on their stay. This linking of points, for example, staying at the hotel for a business meeting and then not being able to prepare properly because of the poor Wi-Fi combined well giving responses enhanced functionality. These learners wrote fully functional letters that were considered and well-balanced in the complaints made and the writers' expectations of the hotel manager. Consequently these responses were more likely to be placed in the highest mark band. Some less successful learners had no development or lacked control. This resulted in a few very short responses that did not have the necessary development of ideas and information, or longer, but repetitive, responses also lacking detailed development, or responses that lost cohesion. Consequently, these responses lost functionality and were placed in the lower mark band or the lower end of the middle mark band.

The more successful learners wrote to structure using a clear introduction, detailed development of ideas and finishing with a strong conclusion all linked to the Task's bullet points. They were able to develop these points with detailed information and a logical sequencing of ideas. These successful learners were comfortable with the task of writing a letter of complaint using appropriate language and tone. This meant that they produced fully functional responses that placed them into the upper mark band. Weaker responses, however, often lacked a sense of proportion and were unable to use appropriate language and tone, sometimes lapsing into personal threats to the manager and making totally unrealistic claims. Frequently these

responses lost control and cohesion and were generally placed in the lowest mark band for FCP.

Spelling and grammar were variable in quality. Some responses were highly accurate, whereas others contained too many errors for meaning to be supported. Many responses were reasonably accurate, with the clarity of meaning only occasionally impaired, but there was a higher proportion than usual where this was not the case. There were issues in a significant number of responses with non-capitalisation of proper nouns and incorrect sentencing. There were some learners who made basic errors in subject-verb agreement and lacked definite and indefinite articles. A number of responses had been written only in capital letters and the correct use of capital letters could not be given, thus affecting the mark band for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar.

Task 2

Most learners were able to sustain an appropriate tone for a contribution to an internet blog. They maintained a realistic awareness of the intended audience. The stimulus text had been used to help structure these responses with learners following a similar pattern to describe their own visit. This structure was further enhanced when learners used the task bullet points to help shape their response. However, a number of learners misread the task and wrote about their visit to Glengroak, the fictional town in the stimulus text.

Successful learners were able to write balanced and considered contributions to the blog, describing their own experiences in engaging ways. They described towns or cities they had visited and really enjoyed. Learners were particularly attentive to the section on the food eaten during their trip, as well as describing what they most enjoyed about the visit. These points really did capture the imagination of learners and brought back good memories leading to responses that were authentic and fully functional. Learners writing secure answers had a strong sense of the intended audience and wrote using appropriate tone and language for an open blog. These responses were written with real enthusiasm for the places visited and the experiences enjoyed.

A significant number of less successful learners were unable to develop any detail about a personal visit and simply wrote entries that were repetitions of the stimulus text. These entries contributed very little, or nothing, to the blog. It appeared as if these learners had misunderstood the task, as they wrote about their weekend in Glengroak simply mirroring the stimulus text. These responses lost functionality as the task required them to write about a town or city they had visited. Learners following this pattern struggled as they limited themselves to the things described in the text, as they had not actually visited the place. Consequently in these instances the mark for FCP was affected. Some less successful responses lost functionality through using inappropriate tone and language as well as describing inappropriate situations and events. Other less successful learners were repetitive, making the same point several times, or lacking any sequential organisation.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar were generally secure enough not to compromise the meaning and coherence of many responses, but there was a significant proportion where this was not the case. Common errors were, as in the previous task, mostly in capitalisation, sentence definition, missing omission apostrophes and confusion of words like “there and their”, “are and our” and “you and use”. Some responses lacked any punctuation and were simply written as one sentence. Some others were confused between the use of commas and full stops. Many learners continue to wrongly use a lower case “i” for the personal pronoun and add random capitals in the middle of words. Some struggled with the correct verb form and again a proportion neglected to use the definite or indefinite article. In these less successful responses the clarity of meaning was affected as was the ability to communicate information and ideas.

Overall there were some strong, mature responses to both tasks. These understood the need to address the purpose of the tasks to achieve functionality. However, there were significant numbers of less functional answers that lacked organisation, cohesion and a sense of audience.

Recommendations for Centres

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose. In preparation for this test learners need to understand the purpose of different types of functional task. 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. This was particularly the case in this series for Task 2 where many wrote answers based on the fictional place in the stimulus text instead of a real place that they had visited.

In preparation for this test, learners need to understand the purpose of different types of functional task (e.g. formal letter, internet forum, magazine article) and should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats and for different audiences. 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. This plan could also address the question of the purpose of the task so that the learner focuses on what information needs to be included in their response. This plan can also aid the learner in ensuring they have read the question correctly. They will just need to rule through this plan if they don't want it to be marked. It is also worth noting, however, that a long draft, instead of a plan, can be an impediment to success because of the limited time available. This practice was encountered in several scripts this series which resulted in final

responses being hurried or incomplete. This advice needs reinforcing with learners who have progressed from Entry Level 3 where the Draft stage is an essential element of the Writing paper.

Pass mark for E103 in May 2016

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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