

Principal Examiner's Report

January 2017

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Functional Skills English Writing Level 1: E103

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Introduction

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

1. Write a letter of complaint to Virston Music
2. Write an email to a friend

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

This was quite successful overall however not many learners achieved marks in the higher band. They coped well with sequencing of ideas but development of points was often lacking and the correct tone wasn't used for the intended audience. Quite a few of the candidates started well then descended into threats. While they weren't, on the whole offensive, it did seem a little unnecessary. A lot of learners tended to write good letters but had not included a reply address which meant the letter wasn't particularly functional. Some candidates did not finish the letter off properly, for example, no name or signature and there were a few responses which had the return address on the bottom of the letter below the signature.

Although letter layout was often correct for second language speaker responses, unfortunately, weak grammar and a lack of clarity kept these learners in the middle/lower bands.

A further concern is that many letters (even in the top band) omitted the correct closure i.e. Yours sincerely, and ended the response with just their name, 'Kind regards', 'Yours faithfully' or 'Many thanks'. Centres must ensure learners know when to use 'Yours sincerely' and 'Yours faithfully' and emphasise that 'Kind regards' and 'Many thanks' are only to be used in an email.

Stronger learners managed to pick out some relevant points from the question and some really did well on the expansion of the background and detailed problems. They also kept an appropriate style and formality.

Strong Answers

There was a clear introduction. Learners explained that they were writing to complain about the Electric Guitar Starter Kit they had bought; they explained where they had seen the advert, what had appealed to them about the Kit and why they decided to buy it. They then described in detail what was wrong with the Kit and the impact the problems had had. They closed the letter by respectfully asking for a refund which provided good structure to the letter. The very best answers showed clear evidence of planning their work and the careful construction of a detailed response: these scripts invariably read very well.

Weak Answers

There was no clear introduction and learners didn't bother explaining why they wanted to buy the Kit, they just said they'd bought it and weren't happy with it. They relied heavily on the prompt material when explaining what was wrong with it and they got threatening towards the end. Those learners who didn't address all the bullets in full, but gave a response that was fit for purpose and used appropriate tone and language, were still able to gain minimal competency.

Task 2

This question was accessible to all and gave equal scope to those who agreed or disagreed.

A high percentage of learners managed to develop the rubric and provide a good email using the correct tone/language and giving lots of detail and some good reasons as to why they could/couldn't go. The weaker learners didn't read the question properly and thought they were supposed to be contributing to a blog rather sending an email to a friend. Some candidates also wrote a letter, which included addresses, instead of an email. A few candidates gave reasons for not going which were totally unrelated to the prompt and some made a better job of this than others. Some candidates also made the error of writing either to Fest Ferret or Blah, or as if they were Fest Ferret or Blah.

Strong Answers

The best answers had a nice opening which often said hello to the friend in question and explained that they were writing to confirm whether or not they would be going to the festival. Once they had said whether they were going or not, they went on to say that they had read some internet contributions about the festival and they expanded on these giving detailed reasons for their decision; they expanded on things like the type of food they liked/disliked, the weather, their like/dislike of music, the type of tents they should take and how to overcome the mud problem. They also ended with either a request for the friend to get in touch urgently to discuss things further or an apology for not being able to go. These answers read the best and contrasted with the more generic answers.

Weak Answers

Responses were short with awkward expression and a lack of clarity affected overall success. All they did was state whether or not they wanted to go to the festival and then repeated more or less word for word the reasons either Fest Ferret or Blah had given. There was little or no development of these reasons. These were much more generic answers which still scored reasonably well but lacked the detail needed for the top band on FCP.

SPG General

With SPG, common problems included subject/verb agreement. Candidates had particular problems with "was/were". Common words misspelt were, "bought (brought)", "writing (writting)", "sincerely (sincerly)", and "because". The correct use of articles proved difficult for many learners. The use of lowercase 'i' instead of 'I' continues to be a common error. There was a considerable number of second language speakers who spelled words correctly and applied punctuation correctly but found the use of tense problematic.

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. Are/our, as well/aswell, a lot/alot

Pass mark for E103 in January 2017

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6



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