

Principal Examiner's Report

June 2017

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Principal Examiner Report: L1 Writing June 2017 Series

Introduction

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

1. Write a letter to the council asking for advice on how to deal with noisy neighbours
2. Write an email suggesting someone you think should receive a 'Person of the Year' award

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 respond to the tasks.

Task 1

The vast majority of students were able to access this task and clearly understood what was required of them. There was some good 'scene setting' in the opening to the letters which was a real improvement on previous series. Some letters also contained a lot of detail and across the range there were some good closing statements. However, far too many candidates copied the text verbatim and did not demonstrate the development of their own ideas. This kept many answers in the low middle FCP band. A significant minority of candidates were accusatory and threatening to the council advice officer. This showed lack of awareness of the audience and appropriate tone which kept the answers in the middle band.

Strong Answers

Two addresses were included and there was an appropriate opening with candidates clearly stating the purpose of the letter. There was then much detail about the problems they were having with their neighbours and an in-depth explanation of how much it was upsetting them. Candidates used the right tone and language for the intended audience and there were good concluding statements which were fit for purpose and gave a satisfactory overall shape to the piece of writing.

Weak Answers

These did not include a return address which meant the letter was not functional and some candidates did not include any addresses at all. Problems with the neighbours were copied from the stimulus material and no independent ideas were added or an explanation given of how the problems impacted on them. Closing sentences were often absent or weak which meant that too often the letters did not end clearly.

SPG

The use of pronouns proved more problematic than usual as the pronouns had to be changed from the stimulus text to be used appropriately to make a point about the neighbours. This created confusion in places (your wall) and kept SPG marks to the middle band. Accurate and correct punctuation was not used in many cases. Sentence demarcation was generally weak with many examples of comma splices. This detracted from the clarity of meaning of many sentences. Common words misspelt were "alot" instead of "a lot", various forms of "because", "environment" "wrighting (writing) " and "rubbish". The homophones their/there/they're proved particularly problematic in this question as the description of the situation called for accurate use of them in quick succession. This was generally poorly executed. Hear and here were also often confused.

Task 2

There were some excellent responses which were clearly written and well structured. Many answers were moving and thoughtful and scored well for FCP. Some were related to both the Manchester and London incidents, which were very moving to read. The best answers started with a personal reason for the choice of nominee and panned out to a wider reason for why the community should honour this person. This was a good structure to use to score highly. The weaker answers neglected to include enough detail about why they had chosen the candidate for, "Person of the Year", which kept them in the middle band for FCP. Vocabulary choices were often limited. Words such as, 'great', 'nice' and 'kind' were often repeated throughout the response.

SPG

The correct use of articles proved difficult particularly for learners who have English as an additional language. Many candidates did not use capital letters correctly. This was especially evident for names and sentences which began with the letter, 't'. Common spelling errors were "charity", "thoughtful", "donate" and "personality".

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 task 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 practise 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 practising 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. Ensure candidates improve time management by sitting mock tests using past papers
2. Ensure learners read letters and emails to familiarise themselves with the different formats
3. Practise 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 June 2017

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6



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