

# Principal Examiners' Report

November 2015

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills  
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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This paper worked well in testing Level 1 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were, writing an article to encourage young people and children to lead more active lives and to write a contribution to an internet discussion about noisy neighbours. 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 magazine article aimed at an audience of colleagues and peers. Some learners were not too clear in their understanding of what was meant by “more active lives” and included inappropriate examples, such as, “having barbecues” and “going to parties”. Consequently these responses lost some functionality, although they could still display minimal competency. Other less successful learners also lacked functionality through giving no detail and repeating the style of the stimulus text, using only short notes or undeveloped bullet points. These responses lacked the necessary development of ideas and information and therefore, were the not fit-for-purpose as magazine articles. These learners did not achieve the higher mark band for form, communication and purpose. The more successful learners were able to develop detailed and well developed responses, covering a wide range of feasible and imaginative initiatives to encourage and enable young people and children to lead more active lives. These contained balanced considerations of the various advantages and disadvantages of the differing ways to be adopted as well as a good understanding of the importance of these initiatives. These learners wrote fully functional articles that effectively engaged the intended audience and 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. 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 magazine article and displayed a real sense of the intended audience. This meant that they produced fully functional responses that placed them into the upper mark band. Weaker responses, however, often lacked a sense of audience and were unable to use appropriate language and tone sometimes lapsing into personal narratives without any cohesion.

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 discussion. They maintained a realistic awareness of the intended audience. The stimulus text had been well used to help structure these responses. Many learners were able to convey an appropriate understanding of the validity of both points of view provided, whilst championing their own feelings on the subject of noisy neighbours.

Successful learners were able to write balanced and considered contributions to the discussion, describing their own experiences in support of their views. They suggested how appropriate and reasonable actions could be taken to alleviate any harm to neighbourly relations. These underlined a maturity of approach and an understanding of the realities of community life and the purpose of the intended forum. Learners writing secure answers understood that they were unable to alter a community situation for the better through aggressive dialogue, but rather by adopting a balanced and understanding approach. This strengthened the functionality of these responses. Strong answers also used the stimulus text as a platform to develop an organised structure to their internet contribution. Less successful learners were unable to develop any detail and simply wrote entries that were repetitions of the stimulus text which contributed very little or nothing to the debate. Some less successful responses lost functionality through using strong, aggressive and threatening language which would be inappropriate for such a discussion whilst others misunderstood the scenario and thought the two contributors from the text were in a personal dispute as the perpetrators of the noise from loud music and fireworks. Other less successful learners were repetitive, making the same point several times, or lacking any sequential organisation. There were examples of relatively short responses placed in the top mark band as they made relevant, clear points in a concise and compelling fashion.

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.

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 November 2015

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| Maximum mark | <b>25</b> |
| Pass mark    | <b>16</b> |
| UMS mark     | <b>6</b>  |

**Ofqual**  
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