

Principal Examiners' Report

October 2015

Pearson Edexcel 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 application
2. Write an email putting forward views on the tarmacking of a cobbled street

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 a good question which gave candidates a lot of scope. There was a clear structure which candidates could follow easily which led to fewer bottom band marks being awarded for FCP. Most candidates understood the question well. Top scoring candidates planned their work so that they moved logically from a clear introduction through their skills and experience to a solid closing statement. These scripts read very well. The candidates who stayed in the middle band for FCP didn't focus on one job but said they were suitable for a range of jobs. They mentioned briefly why they were suitable, but rather than expanding on skills gained in previous employment, they just said where they had worked before. Responses from those learners who didn't address all the bullets in full, but that was fit for purpose and used appropriate tone and language, were still deemed functional. Layout was good for the vast majority of answers however there was a significant number of candidates who still didn't put a reply address which is imperative on a letter of application.

Strong Answers

Responses were well thought through. They used standard letter conventions and there was good organisation of information. They stated where they had seen the job advertisement and which job they were interested in. They then spoke in depth about why they thought they were suitable, discussing previous jobs, skills gained and any relevant qualifications they had. They also provided a really good closing statement. In terms of language, generally tenses were good and there was some ambitious relevant vocabulary.

Weak Answers

Although learners could still relate to the Task, there was poor organisation of the response with no mention of where they had heard about the job. Candidates failed to focus on one job; instead they said they were suitable for two or three of the jobs and didn't really explain in any depth why they

were suitable. They didn't discuss their relevant skills they just said that they had done that type of work before.

Switching between tenses proved difficult for many candidates who have English as an additional language.

Task 2

The question was good and most candidates were able to engage with the task. Some candidates simply repeated the material from the stimulus text. These answers often lacked the development of appropriate detail which kept them out of the top band for FCP.

Strong Answers

Better candidates wrote their email thoughtfully and gave really detailed views on the tarmacking of Market Street. A lot of them picked up on the impact it would have on the local economy if visitors stopped coming due to the town losing its historic appeal. Vocabulary provided was used, but learners adapted constructions to fit comments. In terms of language there was good control of constructions and appropriate use of idioms.

Weak Answers

Learners just repeated the ideas from the stimulus material instead of developing their own ideas.

The correct use of articles proved difficult particularly for learners who have English as an additional language. The use of correct subject verb agreement was also an issue for some learners. The most common spelling/homophone errors were, "are" instead of "our" and "their/there/they're" were often used incorrectly.

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 really good responses and that centres have obviously been practicing writing articles, 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 of application and email contributions to familiarise them with the different formats
3. Practice writing letters and emails, focussing 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. Making a statement: learners need to be encouraged to make a statement then develop and support the reasons for making the statement
3. Sequencing: how to use bullets in the question to aid development and sequencing of ideas
4. 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'

Pass mark for E103 in October 2015

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

Ofqual
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