

Principal Examiners' Report

October 2016

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Principal Examiner Report: L1 Writing October 2016 Series

Introduction

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

1. Write a letter to Kindon Express outlining ideas for a day to remember
2. Write an email of complaint to Wadey's Watches

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 as many learners achieved marks in the higher band as the previous series. They coped well with sequencing of ideas but development of points was often lacking. The minimally competent learner tended to just focus on the first two bullets, saying where they would like to go and gave a very brief outline of the activities they wanted to do. They failed address the final bullet and explain why it would be a day to remember. 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. Stronger learners were imaginative and closed the letter with a good summary of why it would be a day to remember.

We are still seeing a lot of responses with only one address, 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'. Centers 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.

Strong Answers

There was a clear introduction. Learners explained that they had seen the request for ideas for a day to remember in the Kindon Express and said what their idea was. They then outlined the day in detail and closed the letter by summarising why this would be a day to remember. This provided 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, learners didn't mention the fact that they had seen the request in the paper, they just opened the letter by saying something along the lines of 'I'd like to go to Alton Towers for the day'. Responses struggled to be fit for purpose and there was very little detail about the actual day itself. Invariably, the last bullet was completely ignored which meant there was no real closure to the letter.

Task 2

This was a good task and saw some interesting responses. Learners performed better overall with a higher percentage gaining marks in the top band than Task 1. There were fewer very low marks which is encouraging. The minimally competent learner didn't explain why they had decided to buy the watch in the first place, therefore missing out bullet one. All they did was briefly explain that they had bought a watch, it didn't work properly and say that they wanted a refund. Responses were short with awkward expression and a lack of clarity affected overall success. As is common with complaints, tone and language were also sometimes inappropriate.

Strong Answers

The best answers had a good introduction which saw candidates linking their reasons for wanting to buy the watch to their work or social life, eg. saying they were a swimming coach so needed a good watch which was waterproof and had a stop watch function. They then went on to say that these features weren't working when they received the watch and explained how the defects had impacted them at work. These answers read the best and contrasted with the more generic answers.

Weak Answers

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, "writing", "sincerely", "experience" 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 October 2016

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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