

Principal Examiners' Report

January 2017

Functional Skills English
Writing Level 2 (E203)

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E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2

General Comments

The paper worked well as a test of Level 2 writing skills. The first task required learners to write an article, describing a tourist attraction in their area. The second task required learners to write a speech, giving their views on examinations. Both tasks were accessible and there were very few examples of misinterpretation seen.

The full range of marks was awarded on both tasks, based on how successfully candidates expressed and developed their ideas.

Task 1

Learners responded well to this task, with most able to use an appropriate tone and include some article conventions, e.g. a heading. It was clear that learners were familiar with tourist attractions and a wide range of different places were described.

The best responses were those which gave ample detail about an attraction and explained why it would appeal to other people. These responses also used suitably descriptive adjectives and were well structured, often using sub headings.

Less strong responses lacked the clear detail needed to be functional. Sometimes, learners did not name the attraction they were writing about, or say where it was located. These responses often lacked logical sequencing of ideas and sometimes became repetitious and unclear. Other responses did little more than list features of an attraction and did not describe these features in detail.

Learners needed to demonstrate accurate use of sentence structure and paragraphing in order to develop their ideas clearly. Less successful responses were those where candidates only had limited sentence control and also did not make accurate use of paragraphs, with some written as a continuous block of text and others written in one sentence paragraphs.

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some responses demonstrated an impressive level of accuracy and most used spelling, grammar and punctuation with some accuracy. There were also responses that contained so many errors that meaning became unclear. Common grammatical errors included use of the wrong verb tense or the omission of articles. There were also responses that included several basic punctuation errors such as missing full stops and capital letters.

Common spelling errors on this task included 'artical', 'alot' and 'buisness' as well as confusion with words such as 'there' and 'their'.

Task 2

Examinations are an accessible topic for all learners and the vast majority were able to present a point of view on their usefulness. Learners used their personal experience to build on the prompt material and develop ideas. A range of different approaches were taken, with some learners being strongly for or against examinations and others taking a more balanced view. All of these approaches could achieve the top band of the mark scheme, as long as ideas were presented clearly.

Stronger learners were able to develop their ideas logically and produce a clearly structured piece of writing. These learners also developed their opinion in some detail, providing examples to back up their points. Another feature of a successful response was a clear opening stating what the speech was about and a summary at the end.

Weaker responses were those where learners struggled to express or develop their opinions clearly. These responses sometimes became repetitious and contradictory. Other learners just repeated ideas from the source material and added very little material of their own. Weaker responses also generally demonstrated limited control of sentence structure and made haphazard use of organisational features such as paragraphs.

Use of speech conventions was generally quite weak. It is expected that learners should start their speech with an appropriate opening, e.g. 'Dear ladies and gentlemen' and finish with an appropriate ending, e.g. 'Thank you for listening to me today'.

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. There were similar patterns of errors seen as in Task 1, with large numbers of grammatical errors in some responses. Some learners made mistakes with words that were in the prompt material, including 'acheivement'. Another common error was referring to the plural 'examinations' as 'its'.

Recommendations for Centres

In order to demonstrate functionality learners need to present appropriate information and develop relevant ideas clearly. Centres are recommended to reinforce the importance of reading the task and stimulus material very carefully and also to encourage candidates to plan their responses.

Prior to the test all candidates should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats and for different audiences and purposes. For Task 2 on this paper learners would have benefited from practising writing speeches and learning the relevant conventions. Practice on use of formal and informal tone and effective ways of opening and closing different types of writing would also be of benefit to learners. A strong opening and close are important components of an effective response.

Candidates should be reminded that any bullet points in the task prompt can be used to help them structure their response. Where the bullets are prefaced with 'you should,' candidates must address all the bullets to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how they want to respond.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar contribute 40% of the marks for this paper. It was clear that many candidates were well below Level 2 in these areas, as there were errors in skills such as the use of the capital letter, verb tenses and also in the spelling of common words. Centres are recommended to allocate appropriate teaching time to developing candidates' skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar and to consider entering candidates at lower levels if they are not ready for Level 2.

To aid proof-reading it is important that candidates are familiar with using a dictionary and they also need to be made aware that they should spend a few minutes checking through their work, after they have finished writing. This can have a significant impact on the mark awarded for SPG.

Pass mark for E203 in January 2017

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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