

Principal Examiners' Report

November 2015

Functional Skills English

Writing Level 2

E203

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E203 - Functional Skills English, Writing Level 2

This paper proved to be a successful test of Level 2 writing skills. The first task required candidates to write an email to apply for a role as a volunteer in their local community. For the second task the candidates needed to write an article on fly-tipping, using notes that were provided in the prompt material. Both tasks were accessible and there were very few examples of misinterpretation.

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

Task 1

All learners were able to include some ideas on why they would make a good volunteer. The prompt material gave ideas on the kind of help needed (e.g. visiting shopping and dog walking). There were some very convincing emails, where learners successfully linked their qualifications and/or experience to the demands of the different roles. It was nice to see that there are obviously some very public spirited people out there.

Learners usually completed this task more successfully where they focused their application on one or two specific roles. Learners who did this were able to develop their ideas logically and give an appropriate level of detail. These responses also included an appropriate opening and close, explaining why they were writing and then finishing on an appropriately positive note.

Less functional responses were often quite brief and lacked a clear structure. These responses also often lacked detail on why a learner was interested in a particular area. On occasion, learners lost control of their ideas and these responses became repetitious and unclear.

Structure was an important feature of a successful response, with candidates needing to demonstrate some accurate use of sentence structure and paragraphing in order to get their points across 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. A common error on this task was use of the lower case 'i' when learners were talking about themselves. Common grammatical errors included use of the wrong verb tense or the omission of articles.

Common spelling errors included confusion between 'their' and 'there' and there were also errors with words given in the prompt material, e.g. 'experiance.'

Task 2

Most learners engaged well with this task and clearly had strong views on fly-tipping and its effect on their local area. Learners had plenty to say and so this task worked well as a fifteen mark Task 2 question.

Stronger responses built on the bullet points provided, by giving examples of the problem in their area and explaining the impact of these. Successful learners also used an appropriate tone for an article and presented ideas clearly. There were some very sensible ideas suggested for tackling fly-tipping, including more frequent bin collections and neighbourhood wardens.

Weaker responses relied too heavily on the prompt material, often doing little more other than rewording it slightly. Some responses also lost the appropriate tone for an article and a few turned into a rant on what should be done to fly-tippers.

As in Task 1, successful responses used a range of sentence structures effectively and showed the successful organisation of ideas, generally through paragraphs or the use of headings and sub-headings. This helped to maintain a fluency and flow to the response. Less successful responses often lost control of sentence structure and made limited use of organisational features.

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.

Recommendations for Centres

Both tasks in this paper are now equally weighted at 15 marks. The time for the paper has also been extended to one hour. It is important that learners plan their time carefully to ensure that they have sufficient time to fully answer both tasks.

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, for different audiences and purposes. 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. If the supporting bullets are prefaced with 'you may,' candidates can use some or all as they wish, although it is recommended that candidates use any bullets as scaffolding for their writing. 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 November 2015

Maximum mark	30
Pass mark	18
UMS mark	6

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