

Principal Examiners' Report

July 2016

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Principal Examiner Report: L1 Writing July 2016 Series

Introduction

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

1. Write a letter to Kindon Council about the proposal to open a new fish and chip shop
2. Write an email to thank Eldford Ballooning on a successful trip in their hot air balloon

This paper engaged candidates and the majority responded very successfully, especially to the first task. Both tasks were accessible, with the source material offering support to weaker candidates, allowing them gradually to work their way into a response. There were almost no responses where no attempt had been made to answer the tasks.

Task 1

This was a functional task that offered an opportunity for learners to explain their views about the proposed fish and chip shop. Learners were asked to imagine that they had made notes at a meeting in the Kindon Town Hall and to use these to formulate an opinion and structure a response. The provision of notes as a source of information is now becoming more common at Level 1 and is, perhaps, something which learners might do well to practise. In this case the notes were reasonably balanced: three ideas in favour of the proposal were balanced by five against it. Stronger learners were imaginative, expanding on the potential benefits of the proposal (a wider range of choice; good for the local economy; no similar outlet nearby). Points against were a little more obvious. Almost all learners were able to mention the problems with litter and noise which might occur.

Whether for or against, ideas were well developed with some offering suggestions on how to overcome the negative aspects (litter and noise again figured largely). Some learners attempted to cover both sides of the argument before making a final decision. In general these answers showed a high level of development and thus scored well.

A concern was that there was often only one address, usually that of Kindon Town Hall. This has been an on-going problem. Learners should always include two addresses as well as the date, an appropriate salutation and valediction. This is a test of functionality and so the inclusion of a contact address is needed, especially when a learner ends "I look forward to your response". The valediction does need to be more than just a name, i.e. "Yours sincerely, X Y".

Task 2

The task provided a great deal of information about the joys of balloon flights. Most learners were able to reproduce the material, often using the same adjectives ("the majestic lake, the glorious hills") without making the writing their own, so to speak. Many learners developed the task by stating why they went on the balloon ride and who accompanied them, for example, partners, parents or entire families. Birthdays and anniversaries were often mentioned.

Stronger responses looked beyond the information given and showed a sense of personal engagement. This might be the mention of the picnic provided or the charm of the balloonists and other staff. A few learners wrote well about such things as imagined sunrises.

As with all Level 1 Tasks, it is the sense of the learner using the structure and information provided and then adding something further in terms of development or detail which places their responses in the Top Band for FCP.

Learners should pay attention to the format of their response as quite a few contained an address and formal salutation. While there is no strict email convention, emails are less formal and applying letter conventions is unnecessary.

SPG

The same problems are always with us.

By and large tenses and other grammatical construction were reasonably secure although there was something of a pattern of what might be terms ESOL problems: missing articles and errors in verb tenses. "Was / were" and "We was" remain common problems.

Some learners still use comma splicing which in its turn produces problems with capitalisation. Learners also have some problems with the consistent capitalization on "I".

Learners continue to misspell words such as "sincerely", "experience", "because" and there continue to be mistakes with homophones such as "you're / your", "there / their", "witch / which". There is widespread confusion over "to" and "two" with some learners resorting to "2".

The use of "textese" such as "2" still appears. Learners use abbreviations such as "4" and, especially, "u". This causes lost marks.

There are also recurrent confluences such as "alot" and "aswell" which should be discouraged.

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. In some cases failure to read the Task carefully results in low marks. 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.

Tips to Centres for Improving Learner Performance

It is worth repeating the advice given for the June 2016 Level 1 Test for nothing has changed over the past month and what was good advice In June remains so in July.

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 and that all bullets have been addressed

IN CENTRE

1. Encourage candidates to improve time management by sitting trial tests
2. Encourage learners to read letters and emails to familiarise them with the different formats
3. Practise writing articles and internet contributions, 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. Punctuation: using full stops instead of commas to break up sentences and avoid 'run on' sentences
4. Punctuation: absolutely no comma splicing
5. Connectives: suggest alternatives to 'and'
6. Subject verb agreement: 'we were' not 'we was'
7. Are/our, as well/aswell, a lot/alot

Pass mark for E103 in July 2016

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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