

Principal Examiners' Report

June 2016

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Principal Examiner Report: Level 1 Writing June 2016 Series

Introduction

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

1. Write a letter explaining why Dintone Festival should or shouldn't take place
2. Write an email describing a couple who deserve a free holiday

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 functional task that offered lots of opportunity for learners to explain their views about the festival. Stronger learners were imaginative, expanding on the benefits to the local economy and the community and offering ideas on potential bands and entertainment. Whether pro festival or otherwise, ideas were well developed with some offering suggestions on how to overcome the negative aspects such as noise, litter etc. Surprisingly, the majority were not in favour of holding a festival and largely listed reasons from the prompt ie. creation of too much traffic, litter and the noise waking babies.

There was generally one address on many responses 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.

There was a considerable number of second language speakers who spelled words correctly and applied punctuation correctly but found the use of tense problematic.

Strong Answers

There was a clear introduction which outlined the event that was being attended and the problems that were encountered. This provided structure to the letter. Learners then went beyond just mentioning that the driver was late and rude and gave examples of the driver's unacceptable behaviour. The very best answers showed clear evidence of planning their work and the careful construction of an argument: these scripts invariably read very well.

Weak Answers

There was no clear introduction, learners simply started by saying that the minibus turned up late. Learners then tended not to elaborate or develop the ideas and simply commented that the driver was late and rude. A minority of learners suggested ridiculous resolutions which, although many not have been penalised in the mark scheme, detracted from the way the answers read. Sometimes candidates did not use appropriate tone for a formal letter of complaint.

Task 2

These were interesting to read and it seemed most enjoyed sharing their thoughts

Again a functional task with learners taking the opportunity to identify a deserving friend or family member for a free holiday. Writing from their personal experience, they were able to offer varied reasons to support their choice, from couples who had spent their lives raising money for charities to illness or lack of affordability. Stronger responses sequenced their ideas and supported the task with a secure understanding of punctuation and grammar. Too many responses were short with awkward expression and similarly to task 1, a lack of clarity affected overall success.

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 can be time restricting when it is unnecessary.

Strong Answers

Candidates were able to draw on real life experiences and this led to some very good answers. The best answers had a clear introduction and some sort of sentimental or good luck wish to conclude the piece. It was good to see the apparent enthusiasm that learners had for their experiences at school and many seemed genuine. Answers which gave specific stories or anecdotes read the best. These contrasted with the more generic answers, many of which still scored reasonably well but lacked the detail needed for the top band on FCP.

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. In particular candidates had problems with "was/were" in reference to the minibus. "We was" was also a common mistake. Common words misspelt were "drive (instead of driver)", "sincerely", "experience", "celebration" and "because". The correct use of articles proved difficult for many learners. The use of correct subject verb agreement was also an issue for some learners particular the addition of 's' in the first person, "I likes the teacher". Many candidates did not accurately capitalise 'East Leys Primary School', while use of lowercase 'i' instead of 'I' was a common error.

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 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 them with the different formats
3. Practice 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. 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 June 2016

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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