

# Principal Examiners' Report

June 2016

Functional Skills English  
Writing Level 2 (E203)

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## **E203: Level 2 Writing June 2016 Principal Examiner Report**

### **General Comments**

This paper offered learners good opportunities to demonstrate Level 2 Writing Skills. The two tasks set were: writing an e-mail to a newspaper editor giving views on the topic of smartphones and writing a letter to the council giving views on which council scheme should be given funding. These subjects proved accessible to learners and a good number produced appropriate ideas for each task.

There was clear evidence that the learners had been fully prepared to write persuasively using the source, and there was much less manipulation of the source to provide a response. The use of paragraphing was also much stronger in this series. However, there was, as ever, a large variation in how clearly these ideas were expressed and the full range of marks was awarded.

Learners are encouraged to keep their responses within the pages of the answer booklet as over-long responses are often just as un-functional as ones that are too short.

### **Task 1**

Learners were required to read a brief e-mail written to the newspaper editor giving negative opinions on the use of smartphones. This information gave learners a variety of opinions and ideas to respond to in the form of an e-mail to the newspaper editor, either by agreeing or disagreeing with the views presented.

In general this was answered by learners very well with several emails convincingly arguing their case about smartphones. Some learners, however, replied directly to Ted Rusling instead of the editor and even asked for a speedy response from him. A few learners wrote about other, irrelevant problems with smartphones such as their cost and fragility rather than focusing on the issue of whether they do too much for people or encourage people to be lazy or stupid. Some learners relied too heavily on the source material and did not develop their own ideas.

Learners often wrote in a lively, engaging style, writing in detail and arguing their point of view well. Those who generally disagreed with Ted Rusling performed better, as they had more to say. Those learners who generally agreed with Ted often reiterated the material from the rubric and did not question the idea that memory equals cleverness. The more sophisticated arguments recognised smartphones as an 'aid memoire' rather than an intelligent device capable of ruling the world and humanity.

Some learners relied too heavily on the material provided as prompts, with some simply copying it from the question paper and adding very little additional material of their own, resulting in some very brief e-mails which showed little of the qualities required of a level 2 writer. More successful learners were able to use the material as starting points to help structure their article developing it using their own ideas as well.

Learners with English as an additional language often gained lower SPAG marks as their grammar, in particular, lacked accuracy. In the better responses, however, there was a greater range of punctuation used – commas were in the most part used appropriately.

Sentence structure appeared to be varied and accurate in many responses and was mainly supported by effective use of punctuation. There was, as usual, some problems with spelling key words from the source material. There were also issues with sentence demarcation and missing commas from around clauses in sentences.

Paragraphing was often successfully achieved as many learners had an introductory paragraph stating the purpose of the e-mail, a paragraph for each idea and then a concluding paragraph summarising the ideas. Whilst many learners were able to write using an appropriate range of simple and complex sentences, there was some evidence of the over-use of short sentences. More successful learners are able to vary sentence types and paragraphing structures to positively impact on the meaning of their writing. Less functional e-mails tended to have limited control of structure and their paragraphing was erratic, with some learners still writing in one sentence paragraphs and others writing the text in one continuous block. This has been noted in previous series and reflects learners who are not yet at Level 2.

Another common issue is learners who write very little. This gives the examiner little to reward as a variety of sentence types and structural devices are unlikely to be evident in a very brief, undeveloped piece of writing.

## Task 2

Learners were able to engage with the topic and there were a good number of well written letters that were fully functional. Learners often wrote with a clear sense of purpose and commented on detail on the proposals. Learners mainly wrote with apparent enthusiasm, though a few resorted to a narrative. The source was particularly well used to develop their responses. Again, while using the source, the learners did explore and evaluate, and overall structures were secure. There were some very engaging responses.

Almost all learners wrote this as a formal letter to Billie O'Dea, although some wrote to 'Billie' as if they knew him/her, or quite rudely: 'O'Dea'.

More successfully written responses used original ideas/phrases rather than relying heavily on the prompt material. Learners often showed great social awareness and fairness on the given topic, often arguing for the grant money to be divided equally for the different schemes on offer so that all of the community – young and old – benefited from the money. Overall there was a good standard of response but less developed answers often were very vague. Some of these comprised 'listed' answers without really presenting an argument and a fair number of learners just repeated the information without utilising it in a personal judgement.

Many responses were fit for purpose but did not get out of the middle band as they were quite simple, not fully developed, relied heavily on the source material and were repetitive.

As with Task 1, learners with English as a second language, wrote some thoughtful responses, but generally omitted both the indirect and direct article throughout and mixed up prepositions. Common grammatical errors tended to be regarding tense or omission of words such as definite articles. In more severe cases the errors related to weak syntax. A lot of errors could have been corrected with proof reading. Some letter writers wrote: 'I am writting' and misspelt 'sincerely'.

Many learners wrote more for this task than for task 1, which showed they had engaged well with it. Others may not have spent enough time on this response, writing very briefly; learners should allow enough time to complete both tasks.

Sometimes the quality of the handwriting was poor with legibility difficult and basic technical accuracy needs much attention.

## **Recommendations for Centres**

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose, i.e. relevant to the task. This means that they must read the task and stimulus material with great care, 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. A number of responses are written using only one paragraph and it is difficult to access the full range of marks if only one paragraph has been used, especially on task 2, so learners should be encouraged to use a variety of paragraphs in their writing.

Prior to the test all learners should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. They should be clear about the particular purpose of an article or an internet forum entry in a given context. This is also true for other functional writing tasks which require a good understanding of the nature of different audiences. This experience will be of great help to them in tackling a future L2 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. It is also important that learners understand where and when different punctuation marks should be used. The frequent use of the small 'i', when a larger one is required, is still a common error, as is the misspelling of 'receive'.

Finally it is also recommended that centres tell learners that they can plan their work on the exam paper. They will just need to rule through this if they do not want it to be marked.

Pass mark for E203 in June 2016

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Maximum mark	<b>30</b>
Pass mark	<b>18</b>
UMS mark	<b>6</b>

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