Pearson
Edexcel

Principal Examiner's Report

Functional Skills
English Level 2

Writing | July 2024

This report is based on learner performance in Functional Skills Level 2 Writing tests in 2023/24. This includes both online and paper-based tests. The structure of the papers is identical and so the below report applies to all learners however they take their tests.

The exam always consists of two tasks. The first task is longer and is allocated more marks. Learners are given three bullet points to support them in structuring their response. The second task is shorter and learners are given two bullet points to support them in structuring their response.

Composition

For Composition learners are assessed against four criteria:

- Communication of information, ideas and opinions for audience and purpose.
- Format and structure for audience and purpose.
- Use of a range of sentences
- Use of language, register and vocabulary

The key judgment is how clearly candidates communicate. To achieve the top or middle band learners must communicate information, ideas and opinions with reasonable or consistent clarity and include an appropriate level of detail. Learners who communicate with some clarity will only achieve the lowest band for composition.

Top or middle band responses clearly address all three bullet points in the Writing Task and are also usually well organised, with appropriate use of paragraphing and organisational markers.

Successful learners also generally use the bullet points provided in the task to provide structure to their responses, for instance by writing one to two paragraphs on each bullet point. Effective responses also tend to include an introduction outlining the purpose for writing and a conclusion summarising the ideas at the end.

Weaker responses sometimes lack a clear focus on the task and fail to cover one or more of the bullet points or include irrelevant information. These responses often lack a clear structure as there are issues with the use of paragraphing, sentences and the logical ordering of ideas.

Learners can be asked to write in a variety of formats, for instance articles, letters, emails, reports, reviews, contributions to internet forums and online forms. Learners should be given practice in writing in all of these formats, so that they are aware of the appropriate format and style. Some writing formats, e.g. letters and reports generally require a formal approach, whereas a contribution to an internet forum could be more informal and chatty in style.

Suggested wordcounts are given for each task and these are 250 to 300 words for Task 1 and 200 to 250 words for Task 2. While, these are only advisory, learners would benefit from not writing less than the lower word limit so that they have sufficient scope to develop their ideas. Learners are also advised not to write much more than the upper word limit as it is hard to maintain control of content and structure in a very long response. With the paper-based exam learners are given three pages of

answer space for Task 1 and two pages for Task 2 and should be encouraged to write no more than this.

Spelling, punctuation, and grammar

Responses are marked holistically for spelling, punctuation and grammar and need to be consistently correct in order to achieve a high mark. Markers make a 'best fit' judgement using the descriptors so that weakness in one area can be balanced against strengths in another. This area is slightly weaker than Composition for most learners.

Most responses used spelling, grammar and punctuation with at least general accuracy and some achieved a high degree of accuracy, coupled with a wide range of vocabulary and a range of appropriate punctuation. There were also responses that contained so many errors that meaning became unclear. Grammar was the main area of weakness, although there were also frequent errors with spelling and punctuation.

Common issues

- Grammar: Errors commonly seen include incorrect verb tenses, incorrect word order, missing words and a lack of control with articles. These errors can make meaning unclear.
- Spelling: Incorrect spelling of homophones such as 'there,' 'their' and 'they're' is frequently seen. There are also issues with 'to' and 'too,' 'its and it's' and 'your and 'you're.'
- Punctuation: Common errors including misused apostrophes, especially possessive apostrophes. There are also frequent issues with capitalisation, e.g. proper nouns not being capitalised and use of the lowercase 'I'; when learners are talking about themselves. Sentence control can also be an issue with commas being used instead of full stops.

An issue with onscreen responses is that learner work often includes typographical errors, as well as the errors also seen in handwritten work. This means that is critical that learners spend some time checking through each of the two tasks when they are finished.

Key messages for centres

Centres should encourage learners to:

- Read the task and stimulus material very carefully. This will help to ensure that their responses are fully focused on the task.
- Address all of the bullet points. Task 1 has three bullet points and Task 2 has two bullet points. All need to be addressed in appropriate detail.
- Proofread. Whilst learners do not always recognise their own SPaG errors, some common slips, such as typographical errors on onscreen tests and the misuse of lower case 'i' for the first person, could be spotted and corrected by proofreading.
- Plan how to structure a task. For instance, a three-bullet point task can typically be addressed by an introductory paragraph followed by one or two paragraphs for each bullet point and then a concluding paragraph.
- Spend sufficient time working on their spelling, punctuation and grammar prior to taking the exam. In particular, candidates need a sound grasp of grammar in order to develop their ideas clearly.

- Allocate slightly more time for Task 1 than Task 2 as this is worth the most marks. An approximate split of 35 minutes for Task 1 and 25 minutes for Task 2 would be appropriate.
- Pay attention to the word counts. It is unlikely that responses that are much shorter than the recommended word length will include an appropriate level of detail. Very long responses can often become unclear as learners lose control of sentence structure and paragraphing.
- Practise writing in various formats and for different audiences and purposes so that they adopt an appropriate style.