

# Chair of Examiners Report

Functional Skills English Onscreen  
(ENR01, ENR02, ENW01, ENW02)

2011-2012

## Introduction

This report has been compiled by the Chair of Examiners for Functional Skills English. It is designed to provide guidance for centres when preparing their learners for the onscreen assessments for Functional Skills English. It is recommended that centres also consult the paper-based Functional Skills Examiner Reports which are available for each series from [www.edexcel.com/fs](http://www.edexcel.com/fs)

As we have tests that are 'live' and run concurrently, examples of successful answers will use the sample assessment materials or past papers from paper-based tests as points of reference. The report on writing also draws on paper-based responses as the issues and strengths are comparable.

## Level 1 Reading

Learners must read the whole text before they begin to answer the question. Where the answer mechanism is multiple choice, learners should read each possible answer carefully, returning to the text to confirm their answers. More successful learners do this. Learners need to look very carefully at the rubric. If a question requires them to tick two answers, a valuable mark is lost if they only tick one.

Where learners are asked to identify features of a text which show it is a particular text type, they must ensure that they do not simply produce generic responses that do not refer to the text in the reading assessment. It is important that they understand what is meant by features of a text.

More successful learners who highlight a sentence to answer a particular question, have read the question carefully and returned to the text, reading it carefully, before selecting the correct sentence.

Often in the open response learners are asked questions that begin 'Give **two** ways...'. More successful learners read the question carefully, locate the answers in the text and gain the marks. Less successful learners show misunderstanding of the question, or they re-phrase the question, or they provide an appropriate response in the first answer space and repeat the same answer, re-phrased in the second answer space, losing a mark. Learners are advised to make sure that they have two different responses, one in each answer space.

Sometimes, learners lose marks because they draw on their own experience, rather than using the text to answer the question. We often preface a question with phrases such as 'According to Text A/B...' or 'Using the information in Text A/B' to remind the learners that their responses must be rooted in the text. More successful learners read the text and locate the correct answers to the question that is being asked. As this assesses functionality, as well as questions requiring detailed understanding and/or retrieval, we also require learners to *apply* their understanding of a text. This is why they are asked to use the text to, for example, advise someone else. An example from the sample assessment materials is provided below:

*Your friend wants to save money.  
According to this text, identify **two** ways he can do this.*

Learners need to read the question carefully and use the text as a source for the answers, rather than their own knowledge/experience. Generally, we embolden the number of responses we require. In this instance, two answers are required. Throughout the assessment, learners need to read each question carefully and provide the responses as directed.

## Level 1 Writing

Each paper requires the learners to complete two tasks for which they will be given a mark for form, communication and purpose (FCP) and spelling punctuation and grammar (SPG).

### *Form communication and purpose*

Largely re-working of information and little development will prevent access to higher marks. Letter format needs return address and identification of sender to begin to be functional. If a learner is asked in a task to write an email including key pieces of information, including things like time and place and they are missing from the response, then functionality is compromised. Where a task requires essential detail, e.g. location, person's name this needs to be included in order to be functional. Successful learners complete the task as directed, develop any information provided appropriately and sustain audience and purpose throughout the response. Less successful learners may simply 'lift' the information provided without further development. They also lose sense of audience/purpose as they write their responses. When this happens, inner cohesion often breaks down. Learners are advised to plan their work and sustain the appropriate tone throughout.

Sometimes, learners are presented with a scenario and they are asked to explain why they are writing, the situation and what they want done about it. Less successful learners will use an inappropriate tone when they reach the point of 'what they want done about it' and depart from a well-reasoned response.

Although there is no set format for an email, when asked to write an email, learners must remember that they are still required to write accurately according to audience and purpose. Some learners present an email to friends as a formal letter, this is also inappropriate. Learners are advised to read the information, the task and any bullets very carefully and do all that they can to meet the requirements. Any bullet points provided are there to help learners structure their responses. If the supporting bullets are prefaced with 'you **may**' learners can use some or all as they wish, although it is recommended that learners use any bullets as scaffolding for their writing. Where the bullets are prefaced with 'you **should**', learners must address all bullets to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how they wish to respond.

Learners will see that there is often an instruction to use Standard English. This is usually included if we ask for contributions to internet forums as learners still need to write accurately, appropriately and clearly to demonstrate functionality. More successful learners write in sentences. Less successful learners structure the writing as a series of bullets. Those who write in bullets often write sentence fragments and phrases. Learners are advised to limit the use of bullets so that they can demonstrate the ability to write in prose.

## ***Spelling, punctuation and grammar***

More successful learners spell simple or straightforward words accurately. They also use capital letters to begin sentences and for proper nouns. Less successful learners often omit basic punctuation, use capital letters indiscriminately and make basic spelling mistakes, including homophone confusion. They also misspell words that are in the information/task. Learners are advised to check their work carefully when they have completed the task in order to make corrections.

### **Recommendations for Centres**

This is a Functional Skills test, so learners will only be rewarded for writing responses that are fit for purpose. In preparation for this test learners need to understand the purpose of different types of functional tasks (e.g. formal letter, contribution to an internet forum, review, email) and should be given opportunities to practise writing in different forms for specific audiences and purposes. When they come to the test they must read the question and stimulus text with great care in order 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.

Learners should be taught the conventions of a form; this is particularly needed for letter writing, where some learners struggle. Appropriate development of any writing is necessary for a response to move into top band for *form, communication and purpose*. Some common errors in *spelling, punctuation and grammar*, occur in lack of capitalisation of proper nouns and 'I'. Responses produced in the test should not include uses of 'u' or 'gonna' or other non-standard forms. Standard English is required in both writing tasks.

Centres should also reinforce the fact that 40% of the marks are for spelling, punctuation and grammar and that learners may use dictionaries in the examination.

## **Level 2 Reading**

It is very important to stress to learners that they must read the whole text closely before they begin to answer any of the questions.

Learners will always be required to identify the main purposes of Texts A and B. When learners answer the question about main purpose, they need to link the purpose with the content. Less successful learners simply give an overview, or focus on one specific detail, or quote one phrase/first sentence/title. The most common incorrect response is for the learner to write 'the text is about...' and provide an overview or summary of the text and focus on 'content', rather than purpose. Additionally, because the answer box is usually set out to the right of the text, learners seem to assume that part of their answer must be obvious to anyone marking it, because they can see what they are talking about. Thus, some answers might simply say, 'To tell you about it' or 'to persuade you to' without any further development.

It is important to remember that the question asks for the **main** purpose. 'To inform' with no further reference to the main purpose of the text is insufficient to gain a mark. There are a variety of ways for learners to gain the marks.

Below are examples of acceptable answers from different, previous paper-based series which are now in the public domain:

- to inform the reader that car boot sales are becoming more popular
- to inform the reader about the additional driving training (Pass Plus)
- to argue the benefits of competitive sports in schools (for children)
- to persuade the reader that competitive sports are good (for children)

Typically incorrect responses to these might well have been:

- to inform the reader about Car Boots sales./it's about Car boot sales/car Boot Sales
- to tell you about driving tests/ Pass Plus Tests/ additional driver training
- to tell you about schools sports/why we need sports in schools/what's good about sport in schools
- to get more children to take part in sport/ to tell you about sport.

Learners are directed 'you do **not** need to write in sentences'. This has been included as reading is being assessed. Nevertheless, learners must produce appropriate responses, according to the question asked. Referring to the last example, had the learner written 'to persuade' on its own, or 'competitive sports are good' a mark would not be awarded.

Learners will be asked to identify features which convey information. They need to understand different features, including language and layout features and make some reference to how the feature supports the meaning of the text. For example, if an image is used the learner needs to identify what the picture does. Less successful responses are generic. Learners are advised to look at the actual text and identify features in that text. Features do vary. Responses such as paragraphs/sentences would not get the mark. Answers must be precise. If learners are asked for examples, identify them in the text. If they are asked for ways, they should give them. Generic responses such as 'gives facts' are insufficient to gain a mark. Learners should give an answer which gives a clear indication as to how a specific feature is being used within the specific text being considered. Sometimes learners are asked why it is important to give different opinions in a text. Less successful learners re-work the question e.g. 'to show different opinions.'

This type of response, which simply re-phrases the question, would not gain a mark. This typical response does not identify why it is important to show different opinions. Successful learners focus on indicating why it is important, within the specific text. Reasons and the benefits of including such comments by the writer will vary from text to text and are invariably included to assist the writer's purpose in some way. Successful learners identify this.

Close reading is essential and this is particularly necessary when learners answer the final question. Text C consists of three shorter texts which may be descriptions/options/choices/advertisements. The nature of Text C is different for each test. Learners are required to choose **one** only from Text C. The more successful learners give three **unique** reasons for their choice. Less successful learners provide answers that are either not unique, repeat the same point twice or draw on their own experience, rather than responses that are rooted in the text. Reasons for choices or selections should be made from within the specifically selected option in Text C. Less successful learners arrive at a choice through a process of elimination of the other choices. Eg 'I choose option one': Reason 1 I don't like B: Reason 2 I don't like C. Less successful learners speculate on the content or outcomes of selecting their chosen text for example a response such as: 'Because I'll have a great time.'

More successful learners root their answers in the text. Often, the question is prefaced either by 'According to Text' or 'Using the information in Text'. This is a signal to learners to use only what is in the text in their responses and applies to all questions in both Level 1 and Level 2 reading.

## Level 2 Writing

Each paper requires the learners to complete two tasks for which they will be given a mark for form, communication and purpose (FCP) and spelling punctuation and grammar (SPG).

### *Form, communication and purpose*

More successful learners fulfil the task with only occasional lapses. They read the information and the task with care and this is demonstrated in the responses which are fit for purpose. Less successful learners produce responses that in some cases lack development, or the sense of audience is not secure throughout. There are also occasions where there is a loss of clarity or the sequencing of ideas lack inner logic, for example, where the learner moved from one aspect of the writing to another and back again, for no clear reason. When learners are asked to write a formal letter, layout is very important. The sender's address should be included, the date, and appropriate opening and closing should also be evident. Where vital pieces of information are omitted, for example sender address/name, the response cannot demonstrate functionality. Key pieces of information required in the task regardless of the form, need to be included to demonstrate functionality.

As is the case with Level 1 Writing, any bullet points provided are there to help learners structure their responses. If the supporting bullets are prefaced with 'you **may**' learners can use some or all as they wish, although it is recommended that learners use any bullets as scaffolding for their writing. Where the bullets are prefaced with 'you **should**', learners must address all bullets to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how they wish to respond.

Learners will see that there is often an instruction to use Standard English. This is usually included if we ask for contributions to internet forums as learners still need to write accurately, appropriately and clearly to demonstrate functionality. More successful learners write in sentences. Less successful learners structure the writing as a series of bullets. Those who write in bullets often write sentence fragments and phrases. Learners are advised to limit the use of bullets so that they can demonstrate the ability to write in prose.

At Level 2, learners are expected to paragraph their response appropriately in order to demonstrate functionality. Successful learners exercise appropriate control of their paragraphing for the majority of the response. Less successful learners are erratic and their writing can contain one sentence paragraphs or they present sections or all of their response in a solid block of writing. Learners must use paragraphing in their writing. Some learners have made the error of placing a bullet point in front of each paragraph. This is inaccurate and should be avoided.

### *Spelling, punctuation and grammar*

Spelling, punctuation including internal punctuation of sentences and a range of punctuation needs to be demonstrated. Spelling and grammar need to be of sufficient accuracy so that meaning is not impaired. Learners need to ensure that they avoid lapses in the use of appropriate punctuation. Common errors include missing possessive apostrophes and apostrophes used in plural nouns. Increasingly in email responses learners are using 'i' instead of 'I'. Learners need to understand how to punctuate first person pronoun, I.

## **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 in hand. This means that they must read the question 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. Prior to the test, all learners should be given opportunities to practise writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes.

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.

Centres should ensure that their learners are at the appropriate level when they are entered for a component. Centre assessment, prior to entry would be advisable. Quality, not quantity, is the key to a successful response. Although development is essential, there are occasions when some learners write far too much and lose all control of what they are writing. Learners need opportunities to practise their responses to ensure a balance between developing their answers and meet a requirement of the criteria to write clearly and concisely in order to demonstrate functionality. Clear and crisp openings and closings can lift a response, so learners should be taught these as part of structuring and shaping their writing. It is vital that learners check their spelling as errors are also made when 'typos' occur.

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