

Principal Examiners' Report

January 2016

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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Principal Examiner Report: L1 Writing January 2016 Series

Introduction

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

1. Write an article for a magazine about proposed changes to the town centre
2. Write a contribution to an internet discussion about issues surrounding animal cruelty in horse and dog racing.

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

The question's content was answered quite well by all candidates. On the whole, most candidates remembered to include a title and were able to clearly air their views about the council's proposals. Many candidates used the information and adapted their own advantages and disadvantages. Layout was good for the vast majority of answers however there was a significant number of candidates who still used letter layout rather than article format. Top scoring candidates gave very mature, well-reasoned, detailed responses. They planned their work so that they moved logically from a clear introduction, through the advantages and disadvantages and closed requesting a response from the Readers of the article. These scripts read very well. The candidates who stayed in the middle band for FCP tended to write from the wrong standpoint. They wrote as if they were a Council Member, urging the Reader to support the development plans. There was also direct repetition of stimulus phrases when explaining the plans and then noting the advantages and disadvantages.

Strong Answers

Responses were well thought through. They had a good sense of audience and purpose and used language which was intended to grab the reader's attention. Information was really well organised, they correctly explained in their introduction that they had attended a Council meeting about planned changes for the town centre and that they were going to write an article discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the proposals. They covered advantages such as the increase in visitors to the town and how it would have a positive impact on the economy, better educational facilities and more jobs for local people. The disadvantages they covered were increased traffic congestion, more pollution and the distance to the new school. Overall, they gave a balanced account of the plans and asked Readers to send in their views in their closing statement. In relation to SPG, there was a variety of appropriate vocabulary used and capitals and full stops were used correctly.

Weak Answers

Although learners could still relate to the Task, there was some misunderstanding of the stimulus material. Candidates were concerned that the school would be knocked down before the new one had been built and that children would miss out on education. Candidates tended to repeat themselves; they would make one point (which was generally copied from the stimulus material, eg. more jobs) and then further on down would make the same point again. This meant lower marks awarded for content.

Some candidates did not understand what an article should be. For example, some candidates wrote letters instead of an article. This showed that they did not really understand the type of document they were supposed to be writing.

In relation to SPG, punctuation was non-existent, there were no capitals to start sentences and sequencing was poor. Switching between tenses proved difficult for many candidates who have English as an additional language.

Task 2

The responses towards the forum were answered quite well and candidates seemed able to give detailed descriptions of their views on the treatment of animals; this may be due to the rise in forum sites. Questions seemed to be answered well with lots of realistic comments. Some candidates simply repeated the material from the stimulus text. These answers often lacked the development of appropriate detail which kept them out of the top band for FCP. There were very few issues with this Task other than a few pupils not understanding the task and writing about how their pets should be treated.

Strong Answers

Better candidates wrote their contribution thoughtfully. The responses were knowledgeable, generally showing a good understanding of horse/dog racing. Responses were also written in sentences rather than bullets.

In relation to SPG, there was good use of tenses and accurate subject/verb constructions. There was also good use of correct prepositions.

Weak Answers

Learners just repeated the ideas from the stimulus material instead of developing their own ideas. A few Candidates produced just one short sentence as a contribution. There was confusion on what an internet discussion was and how to contribute to it. Instead they commented on what the other two bloggers had written instead of contributing themselves. In relation to SPG, spellings were a weakness, with some candidates not being able to copy words used in the questions correctly. Errors with grammar were also a problem and past tense was often confused with present and future tense which resulted in responses being confused.

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. article and internet discussion) 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 articles and contributing to internet discussions, 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 articles and internet discussions 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'

Pass mark for E103 in January 2016

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

Ofqual
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