

# Principal Examiner's Report

November 2017

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills  
English Writing Level 1 (E103)

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## **Principal Examiner Report: L1 Writing November 2017 Series**

### **Introduction**

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

- Write a letter about a person you want to thank
- Write an email applying for a volunteer's job

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**

As usual, there was a whole range of responses here. Whilst not a requirement for the top band FCP, most did include a return address and wrote in the form of a letter. Better answers brought candidates own ideas and content without relying too heavily on prompts, and most seemed to be able to dig deep and write quite a heartfelt and personal response. These responses were touching as it was clear that some candidates had had very difficult early lives. The responses which missed the top band were still good but lacked the required detail and development. A significant number misunderstood what was required, thanking the Editor of the newspaper rather than someone they knew.

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 bands for FCP and lower band for SPG.

A good handful of learners still continue to omit the correct closure i.e. Yours sincerely, and ended the response with just their name, 'Kind regards', 'Yours faithfully' or 'Many thanks'. Centres must ensure learners know when to use 'Yours sincerely' and 'Yours faithfully' and emphasise that 'Kind regards' and 'Many thanks' are only to be used in an email.

### **Strong Answers**

There was a clear introduction. Learners explained that they were writing to thank someone they wanted to thank. They named the person and set the scene for how this person had been involved in their lives. They described in detail how the person had helped them and why it meant a lot to them. They closed the letter by thanking the Editor for taking the time to read it and saying they hoped it would be published so that their 'special' person could see how much they appreciated them. The very best answers showed clear evidence of planning their work and the careful construction of a detailed response: these scripts invariably read very well.

## **Weak Answers**

Learners tended to thank their mum for giving birth to them, feeding them and buying them x boxes! There was no real introduction and no closing statement.

## **Task 2**

This worked well and responses were generally longer than often seen for task 2. Learners answered confidently, some using many details about themselves as if it was a job application. The prompts were used well to help and very often the candidates had their own experience of voluntary work. A few of the top end for candidates went off on a tangent slightly, writing about the importance of supporting those in the community rather than what they could do to help.

## **Strong Answers**

The best answers had a really good opening, explaining that they had seen the advert on the community website notice board and just had to get involved! They made it clear which of the jobs in the community centre they were suited to or whether they could be of more use helping the person who had come out of hospital. This was followed with examples of previous experience or just the general skills they had which made them suitable. The email ended with the learner clearly stating how they thought they could make a difference in the community, eg. making life easier for people, helping people to bond, bringing the community closer.

These answers read the best and contrasted with the more generic answers.

## **Weak Answers**

Weaker responses relied heavily on the information given in the question. There was nothing by way of an introduction, and learners said little more than "I would like to help the person coming out of hospital because I'm good in my own garden" or "I would be good in the community centre because I'm good at making tea".

## **SPG General**

Weak spelling and use of punctuation resulted in some learners receiving marks in the lower bands. Many also produced long sentences with little or no punctuation making it harder to follow and develop ideas clearly.

Common problems included subject/verb agreement. Candidates had particular problems with "was/were". The correct use of articles proved difficult for many learners. The use of lowercase 'i' instead of 'I' continues to be a common error. There was a considerable number of second language speakers who spelled words correctly and applied punctuation correctly but found the use of tense problematic.

## **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 very 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 themselves with the different formats
3. Practice writing articles and internet contributions, focusing 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. Writing a good introduction that sets the scene
3. Making a statement: learners need to be encouraged to make a statement then develop and support the reasons for making the statement
4. Sequencing: how to use bullets in the question to aid development and sequencing of ideas
5. 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 November 2017

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Maximum mark	<b>25</b>
Pass mark	<b>16</b>
UMS mark	<b>6</b>



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