

Principal Examiner Report

November 2011

FS English Writing Level 2

E203

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General comments

This paper worked well in testing Level 2 Writing Skills. The tasks set were writing a letter to ask for a £1000 grant for a community centre and contributing to an internet forum on whether CCTV surveillance is a good idea. Learners found these tasks accessible and there were very few examples of misinterpretation. However, there was a large variation in how successfully learners expressed and developed their ideas and the full range of marks was awarded.

Task 1

The responses to this task showed that learners were familiar with community centres and the services they provide. They engaged with the topic and most were able to explain why the money was required and what they would do with it. Learners gave a variety of reasons as to why their community centre should get the grant, with keeping youths off the street being the most popular one.

Stronger learners remained focused on the task throughout and developed ideas logically. They also used a range of sentence structures accurately to produce a coherently argued response. Less successful responses lacked structure and tended to jump from one idea to another, demonstrating a lack of planning. These responses also did not make accurate use of paragraphing to organise their ideas, with some written as a continuous block of text and others written in one sentence paragraphs. These responses reflected learners who were not yet at Level 2.

Most letters were written in an appropriate style and used a formal and persuasive tone. Some learners wrote in an inappropriately aggressive or emotive tone, eg telling Lynn Burton that it would be her fault if children ended up on the street as a result of the centre not getting the grant. It was clear that a lot of learners had an unrealistic view of what £1000 would buy, as they optimistically proposed plans such as building an extension! However, they weren't penalised for this, as they were being tested on their writing skills.

Successful responses included an appropriate opening such as 'I am writing on behalf of my community centre to explain why we should get this grant.' They also concluded with an appropriate final sentence, such as 'Thank you for taking your time to read this letter and I hope that you will consider us for this grant.' Less successful responses often started and ended very abruptly and these lost functionality through not making their purpose clear.

Many learners laid their letters out with reasonable accuracy. This shows that centres are successfully addressing this issue. Most learners showed some knowledge of the conventions of letter writing, but often only one address was included and a number of learners finished with 'yours faithfully,' rather than 'yours sincerely.'

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some responses were written to a very high degree of accuracy,

whereas others contained so many errors that meaning became unclear. Common errors included confusion between their/there and its/it's and some words given in the prompt were also misspelt, eg 'recieve.' There were also issues with non capitalisation of proper nouns and inaccurate use of comas and apostrophes.

Task 2

Learners responded with enthusiasm to this task, with the topic of CCTV provoking some strong views. The majority of learners were in favour of the cameras, but a number also argued strongly against. Some also chose to argue both sides, with all of these responses able to gain full marks if they were fit for purpose. Many responses were well argued and displayed good logic, eg in arguing that you shouldn't expect privacy when you are in public, or saying that there was no way of telling how many crimes CCTV cameras had discouraged.

Logical development of ideas was a key component of more successful responses. This task did not have any bullet points aiding the structure of the responses and so learners needed to organise their own ideas. Less successful responses tended to lose structure and were often repetitive. Stronger responses maintained a coherent structure using paragraphs to deal with each element of the response and finishing with a conclusion giving their overall view.

Most learners heeded the instruction in the rubric asking them to give their detailed views. They did this by looking at both sides of the argument before giving their views. However, there were a number of very short responses seen and these were not able to get into the higher mark bands due to lack of development. The opposite problem was also seen where learners wrote too much and their responses became self-contradictory and unfocused.

Most learners wrote in an appropriate tone and heeded the requirement to write in standard English. Weak sentence structure reduced the clarity of a number of responses, with commas often being used incorrectly where full stops were needed. This led to responses losing functionality as it was difficult to tell what the learner's view was.

The full range of marks was awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar, with issues similar to those raised in Task 1. Again, it was the case that a number of words given in the prompt were misspelt, eg 'camaras.'

Recommendations for Centres

Centres should continue to reinforce the fact that this is a test of functional writing skills. Learners need to produce responses that develop relevant information and remain focused on the task. In order to be able to do this they must read the task and stimulus material very carefully, before they start to write their response.

Prior to the test all learners should be given opportunities to practice writing in various formats, for different audiences and purposes. Developing the

skill of writing in a clear and persuasive tone would be useful for learners. Work on effective ways of opening and closing different types of writing would also be of benefit.

Centres should also remind learners that 40% of the marks on this paper are for spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is important that learners are familiar with using a dictionary and, also, that they are aware that they should spend a few minutes checking through their work, after they have finished. This can have a significant impact on the mark awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is also important that learners understand where and when different punctuation marks should be used. In this series a number of learners used possessive apostrophes incorrectly in simple plural nouns, e.g. camera's.

Accurate use of a range of sentence structures and paragraphing is also a key component of a successful response, as this enables learners to organise their ideas clearly. Centres are strongly recommended to ensure that learners have developed these skills before entering them for this test. 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 November 2011

Maximum mark	25
Pass mark	16
UMS mark	6

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