

3748-111 and 3748-311

Functional Skills English Level 1 Writing

Chief Examiner's report – February 2017

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 3748-111 and 3748-311 Functional Skills English Writing Level 1.

2 Overall Performance

This report covers the period from August 2016 to February 2017. However, centres are strongly urged to review the previous Chief Examiner's reports, dated May 2016 and August 2016, as the comments and advice still apply.

The scenarios presented to candidates appeared to be engaging and well understood, and enabled successful candidates to present written responses that allowed them to demonstrate their skills across the Functional Skills English criteria, suggesting that adequate preparation and learning had taken place prior to being entered for the exam.

However, for a significant number of candidates it remains obvious that they are being entered for the exam too early and are not achieving sufficient marks to pass. Whilst no individual assessment criterion proves to be more problematic than any other, candidates who fail tend to lose significant marks in two or more of the categories of *Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar* or *Language*.

The Ofqual review of Functional Skills English demanded that a higher weighting be given to accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Whilst these three categories still make up 45% of the available marks, the pass mark for all papers was raised slightly to ensure a minimum level of accuracy was needed to achieve a pass.

Centres are reminded that Functional Skills English is a summative exam that should be taken only when candidates are sufficiently prepared and have demonstrated success when sitting practice papers.

Areas of good performance

Formatting and structuring of documents seem to pose few problems for successful candidates. Candidates are asked to write two of a letter, an email, an article, a leaflet or a speech, each of which has a set of layout and/or sequencing conventions that appear to be well understood.

Including relevant detail, for which up to six marks are awarded, is generally well addressed. Each question is accompanied by a bullet pointed list of information that should be expanded upon in the responses. Stronger candidates ensure that all items in the list are addressed in detail.

Areas for development

1. Centres are strongly urged to read all previous Chief Examiner's reports, as the advice and guidance is still applicable.
2. It is important that candidates read the scenario presented and understand the type of document they are being asked to write. For each different type of document, candidates should be aware of the associated layout conventions.

3. Candidates should check that all the relevant detail included in the question briefs has been covered in their responses. Weaker candidates lose marks through insufficient or perfunctory coverage of the detail and/or omitting certain points entirely.
4. Candidates should think about the sequencing of their responses. A newspaper article, for instance, will always address the main point of the article in the first paragraph; a letter, email or leaflet should clearly explain the purpose of writing in the first paragraph; a speech, after greeting the audience, should outline its purpose.
5. Candidates should be aware of the layout and/or sequencing conventions associated with each type of document they may be asked to write. A total of six marks are available for formatting and structuring the two responses.
6. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar are areas where weaker candidate lose significant marks. As 45% of the available marks are awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar, a candidate who is weak in two of these three categories is unlikely to pass.
7. Punctuation is required in all responses, irrespective of the task or audience. Candidates should be secure in their knowledge of the correct use of full stops, upper and lower case letters, and question marks. Capital letters should be used at the start of a sentence, for proper nouns and in postcodes.
8. Candidates should be taught to identify the audience they are writing or speaking to. This will affect their choice of language and the tone or register they adopt in their writing style. Weaker candidates often demonstrate a lack of appreciation of their audience.
9. Candidates for whom English is not the first language often lose marks for poor use of language. In addition, marks for clarity and coherence are often affected by poor language choice.
10. Candidates should aim to write between 200 and 250 words per response. Responses that contain fewer than 100 words are penalised across all categories.

3 Recommendations/Advice for centres

1. Review all previous Chief Examiner's reports.
2. Practice papers and worked examples are available on the City & Guilds website. Centres should make use of these in their preparation of candidates.
3. The Functional Skills English Guidance for Delivery document, available on the City & Guilds website, provides valuable guidance on the requirements of Level 1 Functional Skills English, and contains useful sample teaching activities.
4. Functional Skills English exams are available in either a paper-based version or an on-line version. If centres select the paper-based route, candidates are still permitted to word process their responses. If candidates handwrite their responses, it is important that the text is legible, and that the formation of upper and lower case letters is unequivocal.
5. Many candidates' marks would be significantly higher if proof reading was a routine action, both during and after a piece is written. In addition, candidates should check the content of their responses to ensure all the requirements of the brief have been covered.

4 Additional Information

Centres that enter candidates for the paper-based version of the exam should be aware that candidates can word process their responses and may make use of the inherent spelling and grammar checking facilities.

From September 2016, the 60 minutes allowed for a Level 1 writing exam has been extended to 80 minutes.

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