

3748-114 and 3748-314

**Functional Skills English Level
2 Writing**

Chief Examiner's report – August 2016

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 3748-114 and 3748-314 Functional Skills English Writing Level 2.

The Chief Examiner's Report has been reintroduced as a result of feedback from centres, to give them guidance in preparing candidates for examination.

2 Overall Performance

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

For the majority of candidates, the scenarios presented in the writing exams allowed candidates to engage with the tasks and to construct well sequenced responses that addressed all the required detail. Most responses demonstrated that the majority of candidates were able to finish both tasks within the allowed time frame.

However, a significant number of candidates did not pass the exam. The reasons for this were many, but one fundamental reason was that some candidates were entered for the exam before being sufficiently secure in the knowledge and skills required at Level 2. 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.

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 in order to achieve a pass.

Areas of good performance

All successful candidates tend to be able to write concisely, in a logical sequence, and using language that is suitable for the audience and purpose. Most, if not all, relevant detail is included in responses, and formatting and structuring of the responses tends to be well addressed.

Successful candidates are also strong in at least one or more of spelling, punctuation or grammar. Weak performance across all three means candidates are unlikely to accumulate sufficient marks to pass the exam.

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. Candidates who fail tend to score low marks in at least two of the three categories of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Of these three, it is more often than not punctuation errors that cause the greatest loss of marks. At Level 2, the correct use of commas is a requirement, and this area seems problematic for most weaker candidates. In addition, lower level errors, such as a lack of capital letter for the first person personal pronoun, lower case letters to start a sentence or in postcodes, or omission of a capital letter for proper nouns, cause significant marks to be lost.
3. The correct use of apostrophes is also a Level 2 requirement. Typical errors include using an apostrophe for a simple plural, placing the apostrophe in the wrong place in a contraction, or omitting the apostrophe entirely when it is required to indicate possession.

4. It is not uncommon to see responses, especially emails, almost devoid of punctuation. Centres are reminded that punctuation is required in all responses, irrespective of the task or audience.
5. For weaker candidates, grammar is a category where significant marks are lost. The reasons are many, but a significant one is that candidates are entered too early in their learning journey, especially candidates for whom English is a second language. Poor grammar often leads to deduction in marks in other areas, such as clarity, concise writing, and use of language.
6. There is also a tendency for weaker candidates for whom English is a first language to make errors in subject-verb agreement, or verb-tense agreement. For example, it is not uncommon to see *We was*, or *I were*. Another common error for weaker candidates is the incorrect use of the preposition *of* where the verb *have* should be used. For example, *I could of given the money to charity*.
7. Weaker candidates also lose marks for incorrect register or tone. Candidates should carefully read the question and determine the correct language to use for the audience they are addressing in their responses.
8. At Level 2, candidates are asked to write one response that is persuasive. Examiners look for specific techniques, such as repetition, appealing to a reader's sense of guilt, emotive language, empathy, the use of personal pronouns such as *we* or *you*, rhetorical questions, for instance.
9. Candidates should aim to write between 250 and 300 words per response. Responses that contain fewer than 130 words are penalised across all categories.
10. Some candidates' responses are very long, causing them to either run out of time and leave a response incomplete or to make so many errors that significant marks are lost. All tasks can be fully addressed in approximately 250 words.
11. Planning and drafting of responses are not marked. Whilst planning and drafting are important, some candidates are writing a complete draft and a final version, therefore wasting significant time.

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 Centres document, available on the City & Guilds website, provides valuable guidance on the requirements of Level 2 Functional Skills English, and also contains useful sample teaching activities.
4. Level 2 papers no longer contain bullet pointed lists of detail to expand upon. Instead, the detail required is contained in the scenario or the source documents that need to be read for each question. Candidates should read these carefully to determine what should be covered.
5. At level 2, candidates will be asked to write two different types of document. Candidates should be familiar with the inherent structural requirements of formal letters, emails, reports, articles and speeches.
6. 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.
7. Encourage candidates to proofread their work.

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 can may make use of the spelling and grammar checking facilities.

From September 2016, the current 65 minutes allowed for a Level 2 writing exam will be extended to 80 minutes.

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