

3748-114 and 3748-314

Functional Skills English Level 2 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 3748-114 and 3748-314 Functional Skills English Writing Level 2.

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 report, dated August 2016 and May 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, a significant number of candidates are being entered for the exam too early and are not achieving sufficient marks to pass. Typical of a candidate who does not achieve sufficient marks to pass are poor spelling, punctuation, grammar and use of 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

Stronger candidates demonstrated a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Successful candidates generally obtained full marks for the inclusion of relevant detail and maintaining a logical sequence. Structuring and formatting of documents were also generally well executed, as was the writing of persuasive responses, when required.

An appreciation of the audience being addressed ensured stronger candidates adopted the correct tone in their writing, and that they could adapt their use of language accordingly. Recognising when the need for formality was required and when language could be slightly less formal was also evident.

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. Punctuation errors are frequent for weaker candidates. In particular, the incorrect use of commas causes significant marks to be lost. It is very important that the use of commas is addressed in the teaching of candidates. Many weaker candidates also make more basic errors of punctuation, such as omitting full stops, question marks or capital letters. If responses are handwritten, the number of errors is often augmented by poorly formed letters that appear to be upper case when a lower case letter is required, or vice versa.

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. Some candidates omit punctuation when writing emails, irrespective of the level of formality. Centres are reminded that punctuation is required in every response.
5. Candidates for whom language is a second language often lose significant marks due to grammar errors and the poor use of language. Typical errors include the omission of definite or indefinite articles, incorrect verb-tense agreement, incorrect phrasing or word order and a lack of clarity
6. Another typical error, more associated with candidates for whom English is the first language, is the use of the word *of* when the verb *to have* should be used.
7. 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.
8. Candidates should aim to write between 250 and 300 words per response. Responses that contain fewer than 130 words are penalised across all categories.
9. 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.

3 Recommendations/Advice for centres

1. Review 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. Level 2 papers no longer contain bullet pointed lists of details 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. 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 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 has been extended to 80 minutes.

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