Chief Examiner's Report

Functional Skills English Writing

Level 1 (4748)

4748-111 (e-volve)

4748-211 (paper-based)

Version 1.3

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4748-111 and 4748-211 Functional Skills English Writing Level 1. The examinations have been available since September 2019, and this report covers the period from February 2023 and August 2023.

2. Overall performance

This report covers the period from February 2023 and August 2023.

The overall pass rate demonstrates that the majority of candidates are able to write responses that meet the requirements of Functional Skills English Writing Level 1.

The topics seem to be engaging, and the required detail is generally well presented by many candidates. There is also evidence that candidates are able to write suitable responses within the permitted time.

Stronger candidates' responses typically demonstrate an ability to form coherent responses that contain relevant detail, are presented in a logical sequence, are formatted and structured as per the inherent requirements of the document type, and use language and tone suitable to the purpose and audience. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are correct most of the time, although it is not uncommon to see different levels of attainment across the three categories.

For weaker candidates, the primary areas for development are often spelling, punctuation

and grammar. Composition marks can be relatively high, often Band 3 or above, but poor performance in at least two of the three categories of spelling, punctuation and grammar can mean insufficient marks are accumulated. Not all weaker candidates achieve composition marks in Band 3, however. Poor grammar in a response often impacts upon marks awarded for language and clarity. Poor formatting and structuring of responses are often evident, and a complete lack of paragraphing is not uncommon, sometimes impacting upon the coherence of the response. Some weaker candidates are not adapting their language choices and register to appropriately address each task, purpose and audience.

Most candidates complete both tasks within the allocated one hour and twenty minutes, although it is apparent at times that the division of time across the two tasks is not always equal. On occasion, candidates submit only one response. As the pass mark is invariably above 50%, it is not possible to pass the exam if only one response is submitted.

For those candidates who sit the paper-based version, legibility can sometimes be an issue. In addition, it is not always possible to tell that a candidate has accurate control over the use of lower case and upper case letters. For example, it is not uncommon to see upper case letters in the middle of a word. Whilst this may be simply the candidate's handwriting, it is important that the correct formation of letters is evident, as errors will impact candidate attainment.

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.

3. Areas for development

1. Format and Structure

At level 1, candidates are asked to write two different text types. Those text types could be a narrative, a report, instructions, an explanation, a letter or an email. Candidates should be familiar with the format and structure requirements of each type of document, and centres are urged to review the requirements of each in the updated Guidance for Delivery document.

A report seems to pose problems for many candidates. Once again, centres are urged to review the Guidance for Delivery document. A report does not require any aspects of a letter to be included. Often candidates start the report with *Dear Sir,* or something similar, and conclude with, for example, *Yours sincerely*. These are not appropriate in a report. Examiners are looking for a clear title to the report, followed by other structural elements such as subheadings or bullet points.

A formal letter is one of the document types that candidates may be asked to write. It is evident that many candidates struggle to format and structure a letter following accepted conventions, often omitting a sender's or recipient's address, or using inappropriate valedictions to known or unknown recipients. The omission of a sender's address impacts upon the functionality of the response if a reply is required; therefore, detail marks may also be affected.

A narrative is also a requirement. Examiners look for a title, an appropriate introduction to the 'story', additional paragraphs and an attempt to bring the response to a natural and obvious conclusion.

Emails are required at Level 1, and these may be informal or formal. An email template is always provided but is not always fully completed by weaker candidates. Examiners are looking for a recipient's email address, a subject line, an appropriate salutation, a suitable introduction, the main body of the text presented in a logical order, an appropriate conclusion, an appropriate valediction and the name of the sender.

Centres should note that the strict rules around signing off a formal letter with either *Yours faithfully* or *Yours sincerely* do not apply to an email, where a greater variety of sign offs are accepted, such as *Kind regards*, or *Best wishes*, for example.

The final document type a candidate may be asked to write is a set of instructions.

Instructions should provide clear, structured guidance about how to perform a task.

Candidates will either be asked to write a stand-alone set of instructions or to incorporate a set of instructions into another document type, for instance an email or a letter.

Candidates should use appropriate language and tone for the instructions, knowing that effective instructions:

1. use short sentences and short paragraphs
2. arrange points in logical order
3. contain specific statements
4. use the imperative mood
5. usually have the most important term in each sentence at the beginning
6. say one thing in each sentence.

2. Punctuation

Candidates should be familiar with the use of full stops, exclamation marks, commas, apostrophes (for possession and omission), the correct use of upper and lower case letters, including for the first person personal pronoun, brackets, speech marks and question marks.

Centres are reminded that punctuation is required irrespective of the type of document being written. Responses devoid of punctuation, or with very minimal punctuation, may well suffer from a lack of clarity, and are penalised accordingly. Other categories may also be impacted, such as the formation of accurate complex sentences.

Comma use is particularly problematic for many candidates. Centres are reminded that commas are now part of the level 1 requirements. Examiners look for instances of correct use of commas. This may be in lists, when marking the division between clauses in complex sentences, to introduce and/or end direct speech, in addresses (consistency of use rather than an absolute requirement), to aid clarity, etc.

Candidates are awarded between zero and four marks for punctuation. To achieve more than one mark, examiners look for evidence of punctuation use that goes beyond simple sentence demarcation (ie, a capital letter to start a sentence and an appropriate punctuation mark to end the sentence). If there is no evidence of this, the maximum mark for punctuation is one mark. Suitable evidence includes commas, apostrophes, capital letters for proper nouns, brackets, hyphens, speech marks etc. Examiners look at both the errors and the correct usage and then allocate marks accordingly.

Apostrophes to indicate possession or omission are a requirement at level 1. 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.

3. Grammar

When writing a narrative, a common trait amongst weaker candidates is to display inconsistency in tense selection, often moving from present tense to past tense within the same sentence when it is not appropriate to do so. Whilst it is appropriate at times for tenses to vary within a sentence or paragraph, some weaker candidates fail to maintain a consistency in the writer's voice when recording the events of a narrative.

Subject-verb agreement and verb-tense agreement are common areas that require development. Word order and other sentence construction errors often impact the grammar marks.

An issue for a significant number of candidates is the omission of definite and indefinite articles. Candidates should be aware that the omission of articles on numerous occasions is not treated as a single error.

Some homophone and close homophone errors are treated as grammar errors. They are: their/they're/there, your/you're, were/where/we're, been/being and our/are.

In addition, other errors treated as grammar errors include using *could of* or *could off* instead of *could have* (plus variations such as *would*, *should* etc), using the incorrect form of the indefinite articles *a* and *an*, omitting any words in a sentence, errors made in singular nouns ending in the letter y, such as family, that should be in the possessive form but are written in the plural form, for example *families* instead of *family's*, and inadvertent repetition of words, for example 'The the weather is changeable.'

4. Spelling

Centres are reminded that Entry Levels 1-3 specify words that should be spelt correctly. Whilst no such lists exist for levels 1 and 2, the lower-level requirements are subsumed into the higher levels and are indicative of the minimum levels of spelling that are required at the higher levels. Therefore, candidates should be familiar with these requirements.

Examiners are looking for the use of language appropriate to the task and audience but expect Level 1 candidates to be using ambitious words, specialist words in the given context and words with irregular spellings. There is also the expectation of correct spelling of words required at Entry Levels 1-3.

Common errors noted by examiners include the following words:

business, community, environment, available, communication, accommodation, access, suitable, through, though, thought, bought, definitely, experience, excellent, competition, knowledge, equipment, maintenance, committee, opposite, enough, centre, especially, address, difficult, guard, guarantee, remember.

5. Language

Candidates should understand the need to adapt register and word choice depending on the audience that is being addressed and the type of document being used. A set of instructions to a friend and a brief report of an accident should have different registers, yet it is apparent that weaker candidates are not always able to differentiate or are simply not familiar with the language requirements of the different text types and audiences.

Candidates are strongly advised to take note of the intended audience and the purpose of the task, and to use that information to inform their writing.

Language marks are not only awarded based on register and word choice. At times, weaker candidates' language is such that incorrect or clumsy expressions are used. Markers differentiate between language errors and grammar errors, so incorrect tense choice, for example, would be penalised under grammar. However, incorrect or clumsy expression is always penalised under language. An example of incorrect language would be, "I am writing to complain on my purchase." The correct expression is 'to complain about'. An example of poor or clumsy language use is continually starting a sentence with the word *Also*, or creating overly-long sentences by using conjunctions where a full stop would be more appropriate.

6. Coherence

All question briefs provide a scenario that gives context to the text to be written. Candidates should write their responses as if the reader (the intended audience as specified in the brief and the examiner) does not know that context. Some weaker candidates' responses assume knowledge on behalf of the intended audience, whereas in reality the reader would be baffled by what they were reading.

As an example, a candidate might be asked to write a formal email. It is important that the candidate's response makes clear at the beginning why the reader is receiving the email. Similarly, any response should be drawn to a conclusion in an appropriate way to provide additional coherence.

These are by no means the only requirements when ensuring coherence in a response. Clarity of thought, paragraphing, planning an argument (if appropriate), logical sequencing, making use of discourse markers, referencing previous points are/or paragraphs and maintaining a consistent voice are just some of the other methods examiners are looking for. These techniques should be considered when deciding how to address the bullet point list of detail to be covered in the response provided in the question brief.

7. Detail and length

A surprising number of candidates complete only one response. Each exam version requires the candidate to write two responses. As the pass marks are invariably above 50%, it is not possible to pass the exam through completing only one response.

A suggested word count is provided for each question, and candidates should endeavour to write a response that is roughly the same length as the suggested word count. If a piece is unduly short, it will probably impact upon the functionality of the response and the marks awarded.

The tasks will always include a bullet point list outlining the points that should be expanded upon in the response. Candidates should make sure that each has been covered sufficiently so that full marks can be credited for inclusion of relevant detail. Candidates should also consider the functionality of the response in terms of relevant detail. If, when writing a letter and requesting a response, for example, the omission of their own address affects the functionality of the letter, this will be taken into account by the examiners.

Responses that are significantly longer than the suggested word count are not penalised on length, but candidates should be aware that all tasks can be fully addressed within the suggested word count. For weaker candidates, producing significantly longer responses increases the likelihood of errors occurring.

8. Planning

Candidates are encouraged to plan their responses, but they should be aware that planning is not marked and does not contribute directly to the marks awarded. However, good planning should increase the likelihood of higher marks.

At times, some candidates seem to write out an entire draft of the final response. This is ineffectual planning and a waste of precious exam time.

9. Proofreading

Candidates should be encouraged to proofread their work, checking for errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and the composition elements of the qualification, such as coherence, register, structure, format and paragraphing.

4. Advice for centres

1. Candidates should only be entered into the exam once sufficient learning has taken place. In order to maximise the chances of success, candidates should have previously made use of sample papers and model answers, as these will not only give an indication of candidates' progress but will also ensure they are familiar with the types of scenarios that may be presented.

2. An updated Guidance for Delivery document is available on the City & Guilds website. This is essential reading for all tutors or other support staff involved in the delivery of Functional Skills English, as it provides further detail about the Subject Content Statements, examples of the types of question that may be asked and sample teaching activities.

3. Centres are strongly urged to refer to the previous Chief Examiner's reports, as the information and advice are still applicable.

4. Centres are reminded that dictionaries and spellcheckers are no longer permissible for , Functional Skills English Writing exams.

5. Centres should refer to the lists of Entry Level (1-3) words provided in the Functional Skills English Subject Content document issued by the Department for Education. These tables should be used to inform the teaching of the spelling requirements at Level 1.

6. Some candidate's responses were significantly longer than the indicated word count. Whilst this is not penalised per se, the likelihood of more errors occurring is increased for many candidates. All questions are designed so that they can be fully answered within the given word count. Centres are reminded that responses significantly below the given word count may well be penalised across several marking categories.

7. Candidates will always be asked to write two responses, and each response will be of a different document type and directed at a different audience. Centres should ensure candidates are familiar with all the format and structure requirements (outlined in the Guidance for Delivery) of the following document types: a narrative; a report; a set of instructions; an explanation; a letter; an email.

8. Effective planning of a response should ensure a higher mark is awarded, so how to plan should form part of all candidates' learning programmes. Many candidates either neglect this activity or write out a draft of the entire response. However, centres are reminded that there is no absolute need to show planning and no marks are awarded for planning.

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