Chief Examiner's Report

Functional Skills English Writing

Level 2 (4748)

4748-114 (e-volve)

4748-214 (paper-based)

Version 1.2

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1.1	Assessment	Document updated to reflect learner performance between April 2020 and April 2021	May 2021
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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4748-114 and 4748-214 Functional Skills English Writing Level 2. The examinations have been available since September 2019, and this report covers the period from May 2021 to January 2023.

2. Overall performance

This report covers the period from May 2021 to January 2023.

Pass rates indicate that most candidates are well prepared prior to sitting the exam and are able, to a greater or lesser degree, to write responses that meet the Functional Skills English Level 2 requirements.

Each paper requires candidates to write two responses. The purpose, audience and document type are different in each task. There are six document types required at level 2 (an article, a report, a letter, a blog, a narrative and an email), and each has its own format and structure requirements. Many candidates are able to produce these accurately, but weaker candidates often miss significant elements or produce responses that are not formatted in any way.

Many candidates adapt the two responses to suit the purpose and audience of each task. This is not always apparent for weaker candidates. Coherence, cohesion and clarity are qualities that can be seen for many candidates, aided by appropriate language selection, paragraphing and logical sequencing of the responses.

The categories that are particularly well addressed by the vast majority of candidates are the inclusion of relevant detail and producing responses of suitable length. However, some weaker candidates do not always ensure that all bullet points in the question brief are covered and expanded upon.

An issue that affects some weaker candidates is not providing any context for the reader. There is sometimes an assumption that the intended recipient has knowledge of the task.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar cause the loss of marks for many candidates. Typically, those who do not reach the pass mark are weak in at least two of the three categories. Punctuation errors are often frequent, with comma use being perhaps the most problematic area for many candidates.

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 are under the impression that only one response is required. 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.

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 2, candidates are asked to write two different text types. Those text types could be a narrative, a report, a blog, an article, a letter or an email. Candidates should be familiar with the format and structure requirements of each type of document, and centres are strongly 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 *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, for example.

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.

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.

All level 2 document types require paragraphs, but it is not uncommon to see responses devoid of paragraphs.

2. 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 blog aimed at fellow students and a brief report of an incident 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.

3. Coherence

All papers provide a scenario that gives context to the text to be written. Candidates should write their responses as if the reader (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 paragraphs and maintaining a consistent voice are just some of the other methods examiners are looking for.

4. Cohesion

Candidates should be aware of the many grammatical devices that can be used to give a response cohesion. The cumulative effect of these devices, combined with clarity of thought, paragraphing and logical sequencing, for example, impact upon the effectiveness of the response in conveying its message and successfully addressing its intended audience.

Simple discourse markers that link different parts of the text, the accurate use of pronouns, reference words, substitution and ellipsis are some of the more common ways in which candidates can demonstrate cohesion.

5. Number of responses required

All exam papers contain two questions and require two responses. A surprising number of candidates entered only one response, and time available did not appear to be the factor influencing this.

6. Detail and length

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 usually 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.

7. 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 time.

8. Punctuation

Punctuation is an area where many candidates lose marks, particularly for incorrect use of commas. The standards now specify that candidates should be able to use punctuation that goes beyond sentence demarcation, including using commas to separate clauses. In addition, candidates should be able to correctly use apostrophes for both possession and omission.

On occasion, candidates presented response devoid of punctuation. Candidates should be reminded that punctuation is required irrespective of the type of document being written, and that significant errors or a lack of punctuation can impact upon other categories of marking, such as clarity and coherence.

Comma use is particularly problematic for many candidates. Centres are reminded that commas are part of the level 2 requirements. Examiners look for instances of correct usage 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, colons, semi-colons, 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 2. 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.

9. 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 2 candidates to be regularly 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 all levels below level 2.

10. Grammar

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

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 or paragraph 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.

A common grammar error is use of the word *of* when the verb *to have* should be used, eg, *could of, should of*, etc.

11. 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 question that may be asked.

2. A 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 scenarios that may be presented and sample teaching activities.

3. Centres are strongly urged to refer to the previous Chief Examiner's reports dated March 2020 and May 2021, as the information and advice are still applicable.

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