



Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills English: Writing

Series: 1 October-1 November 2019

Each learner's external assessment paper is marked by an Examiner and awarded a raw mark. During the awarding process, a combination of statistical analysis and professional judgement is used to establish the raw marks that represent the minimum required standard to achieve a Pass grade. As well as analysing performance on the assessment paper itself, performance standards and statistical outcomes in legacy qualifications and equivalent assessments (both within NCFE and, where available, across other awarding organisation) are considered to ensure Pass marks represent comparable standards.

Generic Overview

This qualification had only been live for four weeks before learners took these papers. Given this very short preparation time it is not unsurprising that many learners found some of the requirements challenging. At both levels, the level of expectation for spelling, punctuation and grammar is a step up from the legacy qualifications, and these skills take time to teach. Having said that, it was pleasing to note that the majority of learners seemed to engage with the tasks.

Good exam technique is vital. Assessments at both levels consist of two, equally weighted tasks. Learners should spend an equal amount of time on each task. Responses should have an appropriate register and tone and be appropriately structured.

Level 1

Successful learners were able to write appropriate content in response to each question, with appropriate structure and tone and with reasonable levels of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar, appropriate for Level 1. However, some learners were very unprepared for this assessment and they scored low marks. There were some areas of concern with particular aspects of Reformed Functional Skills which are detailed below, together with specific advice for centres.

Most learners were able to score marks based on these SoS statements:

- 22. Communicate information ideas and opinions clearly, coherently and accurately
- 23. Write text of an appropriate level of detail and of appropriate length

However, marks for the following SoS statements were often lacking:

- 19. Use a range of punctuation correctly
- 20. Use correct grammar





- 21. Spell words most often used in work, study and daily life, including specialist words
- 24. Use format, structure and language appropriate for audience and purpose
- 25. Write consistently and accurately in complex sentences, using paragraphs where appropriate

Advice to centres for Level 1 Writing

SoS 19, 20 and 21

Skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar varied widely. Given the significant percentage of marks available for SPaG and the increased demand in these areas, this is an area of concern. Some learners were unable to write grammatically correct sentences with full stops and capital letters. These learners' answers were also typified with an inconsistent use of upper case letters: some letters were capitalized mid-sentences, some wrote entire responses in block capitals. Centres should look closely at the requirements in SPaG for Entry Level learners and understand that Level 1 learners should be able to show competence in all of these skills.

In a nutshell, for top marks, examiners are looking for:

- **Accurate spelling** including some ambitious/irregular words. Two-syllable words with double consonants, the doubling of consonants with suffixes and verbs such as would and could should be correct. Errors would stand out as one-off slips and are not repeated.
- **Punctuation used accurately**, including capital letters, full-stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas and apostrophes. Meaning should be clear.
- **Grammar used accurately and to good effect**: accurate subject-verb agreement and tense. Accurate and effect syntax and sentence structure. Definite and indefinite articles are accurate. Grammar used to good effect.

SoS 24

There are clear expectations for format, structure and language. Texts should have a clear beginning, middle and end. Language used should be appropriate for the task and texts should be formatted as follows:

- A letter should have a sender and recipient address (if the sender's address is provided, this should be accurate) a date and a complementary salutation and close.
- A report should have a heading and subheadings
- An email should have a plausible email address as the addressee and a subject header, as well as an appropriate salutation and close
- An article should have an appropriate heading and may have subheadings and a lead





paragraph or an attribution.

SoS 25

It is a new requirement for Level 1 learners to write complex sentences. Many learners were unable to demonstrate this skill.

Level 2

Successful learners were able to write appropriate content in response to each question, with appropriate structure and tone and with reasonable levels of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar, appropriate for Level 2. However, some learners were very unprepared for this assessment and they scored low marks. In particular, skills in sentence construction, use of organisational markers, punctuation and grammar were particularly poor for some candidates failing the assessment. Areas of concern with particular aspects of Reformed Functional Skills are detailed below, together with specific advice for centres.

Most learners were able to score marks based on these SoS statements:

- 23. Communicate information ideas and opinions clearly, coherently and accurately
- 24. Write text of an appropriate level of detail and of appropriate length
- 27. Use different language and register suited to audience and purpose

However, marks for the following SoS statements were often lacking:

- 20. Punctuate writing correctly using a wide range of punctuation markers
- 21. Use correct grammar
- 22. Spell words most often used in work, study and daily life, including a range of specialist words
- 25. Organise writing for different purpose using format and structure
- 26. Convey clear meaning and establish cohesion using organisational markers
- 28. Construct complex sentence consistently and accurately, using paragraphs where appropriate.





Advice to centres for Level 2 Writing

SoS 20, 21 and 22

Skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar varied widely. Given the significant percentage of marks available for SPaG and the increased demand in these areas, this is an area of concern. Many learners failing the assessment were unable to demonstrate skills in SPaG above reform Entry Level 2. Centres should look closely at the requirements in SPaG for Entry Level learners and understand that Level 2 learners should be able to show competence in all of these skills as well as those outlined for Level 1 above.

For top marks, examiners are looking for:

- **Accurate spelling** including any specialist words, uncommon words, words with complex sound/symbol relationships and words with unstressed syllables. Competence should be shown in the spelling of possessive pronouns, prefixes, suffixes and homophones. Errors would stand out as one-off slips and would not affect meaning.
- **A wide range of punctuation used accurately** (this may include colons, commas, inverted commas, apostrophes and quotation marks) in a variety of sentence structures, and used for effect.
- **A full range of grammatical constructions is used accurately** throughout which adds to the effectiveness of the document (including subject-verb agreement, consistent use of tense, definite and indefinite articles, as well as modality devices).

SoS 25

There are clear expectations for format, structure and language. Texts should have a clear beginning, middle and end and be formatted as follows:

- A letter should have a sender and recipient address (if the sender's address is provided, this should be accurate) a date and a complementary salutation and close.
- A report should have a heading and subheadings
- An email should have a plausible email address as the addressee and a subject header, as well as an appropriate salutation and close
- An article should have an appropriate heading and may have subheadings and a lead paragraph or an attribution.

Where appropriate, learners can use bullet points and tables.





SoS 26

At Level 2 learners are expected to use organisational markers to establish cohesion in their texts. They need to know how to use appropriate linking words to support the purpose. For example:

- To add additional information, learners could use words such as: additionally, also, together with.
- To give an example, learners could use words such as: for instance, for example
- To show cause and effect, learners could use words such as: as a result, consequently
- To compare or contrast, learners could use words such as: however, in comparison
- To add emphasis, learners could use words such as: above all, in fact
- To persuade, learners could use words such as: certainly, clearly
- To express time, learners could use words such as: next, meanwhile, then, firstly

SoS 28

Learners must accurately paragraph their writing and employ complex sentences accurately and consistently. Paragraphs should be related to a single idea. Sentences within it should be in a logical order.

Closing comments

Learners should be taught to proofread and check their work at both levels. Many common errors, such as omitting words or incorrect use of capital letters, could have been corrected with proof-reading. It is advisable that learners taking on screen assessments are provided with practice in using word-processors without spelling and grammar checks.

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