



Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills English: Writing

NCFE Level 1 Functional Skills Qualification in English (603/5058/1)

NCFE Level 2 Functional Skills Qualification in English (603/5054/4)

Window: 14th October – 18th October 2019 (Paper)

Level 1 Pass Mark	23 / 40
Level 2 Pass mark	26 / 44

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 organisations) 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 the number of learners in the window was low, nor that some 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.





Level 1

In this assessment learners were asked to write a letter of complaint about noisy neighbours and to write a review telling newspaper readers how a proposed theme park might impact the local area.

Very few learners sat this paper, of those who did, most were able to write appropriate content in response to each question. They used 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 correspondingly low marks. These learners wrote short responses to the questions and had issues with incorrectly formatted answers. Similarly, spelling, punctuation and grammar fell below the level expected. Some learners had errors in words expected at the level: *faithly* for *faithfully*, muddled homophones (*there* and *their*). Punctuation errors included the incorrect use of capital letters mid-sentence and commas used incorrectly. Some learners had basic errors in grammar with subject/verb agreement issues.

Most learners scored marks for SoS 24 (use format, structure and language appropriate for audience and purpose), however some did not. For example, some did not include an appropriate salutation and close in their letter, some letters were undated. Some of the reviews did not have a title. Some tasks lacked a clear introduction and/or conclusion.





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 capitalised 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 effective 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

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

In this assessment learners were asked to write a letter of complaint to the council about problems caused as the result of bad weather and an advertisement feature to encourage people to volunteer at an animal sanctuary.

Most learners were able to write developed responses for both tasks. For the advertisement features, some produced appropriately persuasive and cohesive texts that were especially engaging. These successful learners not only wrote appropriate content, but were also able to use structure and tone and demonstrated reasonable levels of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar, appropriate for Level 2. It was pleasing to see that some learners were able to produce well-crafted responses for the advertisement feature using invented quotations from happy volunteers with correct punctuation: *“Volunteering at Bain Sanctuary was the best decision I ever made. It is extremely rewarding.”*

Learners unprepared for the assessment scored low marks. Skills in sentence construction, use of organisational markers as well as spelling, punctuation and grammar were particularly poor for some candidates failing the assessment. Learners are unlikely to achieve a pass in an assessment if errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar have an adverse effect on meaning. In this window some specific errors included incorrect spelling in words expected at L2, such as: *manger* for *manager*, *serve* for *severe* and *appauling* for *appalling*. Grammatical errors included misformed plurals and *should of* for *should have*.





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

Only one of two scripts had evidence that learners had spent time checking their answers. 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 proofreading.

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