

## Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills English

NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in English at Level 1 – 501/1660/5

NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in English at Level 2 – 600/0140/9

**January 2018**

**Level 1**

**Reading:**

### **Own knowledge and not using the text**

This is a test of reading. Learners must use the texts as the source of their answers and not their own knowledge or experience.

### **Presentation features**

The majority of struggling learners failed to correctly identify features of presentation in the texts. Presentation features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on.

### **Exam technique**

Many learners gave answers that showed they had not paid attention to the number of marks available. Some answers needed to be more detailed and specific. Some learners needed to understand issues around language and style.

### **Main point**

Weaker learners need to be able to identify the main point of a text and its intended audience.

### **Fact and opinion**

Learners must be clear on the differences between facts and opinions.

**Writing:**

### **Spelling, punctuation and grammar**

Poor SPAG, often well below Level 1, continues to be an issue for many learners. Grammar must demonstrate accurate subject verb agreement and the use of tense should be consistent. Spelling must be accurate. Punctuation at Level 1 should include correct use of full stops, commas and question marks. Punctuation was especially poor this session. Proper nouns must be correctly capitalised. The personal pronoun 'I' must be capitalised. Sentences must start with a capital and end with a full stop.

## **Structure and format**

Many learners need to work on the use of secure and accurate paragraphs. They also need to know how to format documents correctly and to introduce and conclude their writing.

## **Accurate and sufficient response**

Many learners produced answers that were far too brief. Learners must be advised to attempt every task in the paper, as not doing so will severely jeopardise their likelihood of passing the test. They must write a minimum of 100 words at Level 1 to be considered for full marks for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar, and should aim to write 200-300 words.

## **Level 2**

### **Reading:**

#### **Presentation features**

At Level 2, learners are expected to explain how presentation features are used in reference to the document they have read. Many learners struggle to do this.

#### **Exam technique**

Many learners gave answers that showed they had not paid attention to the number of marks available. Some answers needed to be more detailed and specific. Some learners simply need to read the questions and the texts with greater care.

#### **Language and style**

Some learners needed to understand issues around language and style. They need to understand terms such as bias, irony, sarcasm and be able to identify these in texts. Some learners also struggled with making inference.

#### **Comparing and contrasting**

Many learners struggled with this. They need to know that they have to compare each document and explain how they differ to the others in the document. This is not the place to give unjustified personal opinions. See below for very specific advice on this.

### **Writing:**

#### **Spelling, punctuation and grammar**

Many learners who failed to achieve were let down by poor SPAG, often far below Level 2. Grammar must demonstrate accurate subject verb agreement and the use of tense should be consistent. Spelling must be accurate. Punctuation at Level 2 should include correct use of full stops, commas and question marks. Proper nouns must be correctly capitalised. The personal pronoun 'I' must be capitalised. Sentences must start with a capital and end with a full stop or question mark, as appropriate

## Structure and format

Many learners needed to work on the use of secure and accurate paragraphs. They also needed to know how to format documents correctly and to introduce and conclude their writing.

## Accurate and sufficient response

Many failing learners produced answers were far too brief. They must write a minimum of 150 words at Level 2 to be considered for full marks for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar, and should aim to write 250-350 words.

## Generic Overview

### Reading:

Most learners could answer straightforward 'comprehension' identification type questions well. It was higher order comprehension skills, where learners had to process the information that tended to be incorrect. One persistent theme was that poorer learners tended to relate some questions to their own lives or knowledge instead of using the texts as the source of their answers. Below are my comments on how learners have performed against the coverage and range statements for reading.

### Level 1:

*1.2.1 Identify the main points and ideas and how they are presented in a variety of texts* – most learners could identify the main points. Some learners struggled with understanding what presentation and language features were.

*1.2.2 Understand different texts in detail* – all but the poorest learners coped well with this criteria.

*1.2.3 Utilise information contained in texts* – struggling learners found this higher order skill problematic.

*1.2.4 Identify suitable responses to texts* – struggling learners found this higher order skill problematic.

### Level 2:

*2.2.1 Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information* – most learners achieved against this criteria.

*2.2.2 Summarise information/ideas from different sources* – poor and borderline learners found this criteria difficult. See below for specific advice on this.

*2.2.3 Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed* – most learners could identify the purpose of a text. Some struggled to express how meaning was conveyed, these could be questions about language or presentation features. Learners are expected to understand terms such as bias, irony, sarcasm and they may be expected to find examples of how the writer uses such techniques.

*2.2.4 Detect point of view, implicit meaning and/or bias* – poorer learners struggled with this criterion.

*2.2.5 Analyse texts in relation to audience needs and consider suitable responses* – again, poorer learners struggled with this criteria.

## **Writing:**

Most of the real issues with learners who struggle to achieve a pass in writing either come down to very poor spelling, punctuation and grammar or poor exam technique. I can't stress enough how vital it is to read the question with great care and to write precisely what is required. Some learners write letters when they have been told to write an article, for example, and will therefore lose format and structure marks.

Other learners produce answers that don't answer the brief and while they may have written lots and with good spelling, punctuation and grammar, they will inevitably lose significant marks for content if they fail to answer the question. Below are my comments on how learners have performed against the coverage and range statements for writing.

## **Level 1:**

*1.3.1 Write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail* – many learners who failed this test didn't write a sufficient response as highlighted above.

*1.3.2 Present information in a logical sequence* – this was an issue for some learners. Learners need to be taught how to write a text with a clear beginning, middle and end.

*1.3.3 Use language, format and structure suitable for purpose and audience* – some learners don't know how to write a formal letter using standard formats and matching salutations and close. In formal emails, learners should sign off 'yours faithfully' if they don't have a name and 'yours sincerely' if they do have a name.

*1.3.4 Use correct grammar, including correct and consistent use of tense* – as mentioned above, this was an issue with many learners, particularly ESOL.

*1.3.5 Ensure written work includes generally accurate punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear* – as mentioned above, this again was an issue with many learners who fail this test. Some skills in punctuation were very poor.

## **Level 2:**

*2.3.1 Present information/ideas concisely, logically and persuasively* – strong learners could do this with ease. Poorer learners tended to provide less, or even scant detail.

*2.3.2 Present information on complex subjects clearly and concisely* – strong learners could do this with ease. Poorer learners tended to provide less, or even scant detail.

*2.3.3 Use a range of writing styles for different purposes* – most learners were able to adopt an appropriately formal or informal style depending on the demands of the tasks set. Some poorer learners tended to use overly strong language when writing a complaint or voicing a negative opinion.

*2.3.4 Use a range of sentence structures, including complex sentences, and paragraphs to organise written communication effectively* – this was a real area of weakness for many learners, even stronger ones.

*2.3.5 Punctuate written text using commas, apostrophes and inverted commas accurately* – as with Level 1, punctuation remains one of the weakest criteria. It is relatively straightforward to teach, and should be addressed. Many failing learners had punctuation skills well below Level 1.

*2.3.6 Ensure written work is fit for purpose and audience, with accurate spelling and grammar that support clear meaning in a range of text types* – again learners are expected to demonstrate Level 2 skills for this criteria. Those learners scoring low marks here often had exceptionally poor skills that were below Level 1.

Centres must ensure that learners are being entered for examination at an appropriate level. Once more, there were several learners, entered for both Level 1 and Level 2 papers who were some considerable way off achieving the level and often were not operating at even the level below that for which they had been entered.

## **Overcoming an area: Comparing and contrasting texts for Level 2 Reading**

The last section of Level 2 Reading papers usually asks learners to answer a question by comparing and contrasting all the documents they have read. This section is worth 3 or 4 marks. For borderline learners, in particular, this is often the difference between a pass or a fail.

Poorer learners tend to simply write about one of the documents and explain its contents without really addressing the question at all. This approach is unlikely to score any marks at all.

For top marks in these sorts of questions examiners are looking for:

- a well-considered and justifiable answer
- supported with two or more reasons
- explanations that are detailed and from all three source documents
- answers may compare both language and content.

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