

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

April 2017

Level 1

Writing:

Coverage and range

Overall, performance has remained the same as in my last report. The majority of learners answer both questions set and appear to engage well with the tasks and questions. Learners must pay careful attention to the specifics of the question. If asked to provide two items, they should do so and not give a list of more than two as examiners can't tell which two items should be marked and they are likely to lose marks.

a) Write clearly and coherently, including an appropriate level of detail.

Most learners are able to write clearly and coherently. However, some learners produce inappropriately short responses – often just one or two short paragraphs. They should be advised to aim for 200-250 words per response. Learners need to read the question with care to ensure that they don't give an inaccurate response.

b) Present information in a logical sequence

Most learners have no problem with this. However some learners continue to write documents without paragraphs.

c) Use language, format and structure suitable for purpose and audience

This criterion remains the most challenging for borderline and failing learners. Some do not attempt to format their response or they use minimal formatting which would not be functional (i.e. not including a sender's address in a formal letter).

I write this in every report, but I'm reinforcing it here. We expect all answers to be appropriately paragraphed with an introduction/ conclusion where appropriate. In addition we expect to see:

- Letters with two addresses, a date and a complimentary salutation and close. Learners should NOT write their own name above their address. They should take care that the salutation and close match **AND** are appropriate to the task. In a formal text where they are given a name, we would expect to see Dear Mr/Miss/Ms/Mrs X with yours sincerely as a close. Informal texts shouldn't have 'yours faithfully or sincerely' as a close.
- Articles and reports with a title and subtitles. Level 1 learners seem to find it difficult to structure and format a report correctly.
- Emails with an addressee and subject header.

- d) Use correct grammar, including correct and consistent use of tense**
- e) Ensure written work includes generally accurate punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear**

Please note that learners can't gain the full marks available for SPaG unless their response is a **minimum** of 100 words at Level 1. Learners should be encouraged to write 250-300 words.

As I mention in every report, spelling skills should subsume those required at previous levels.

Once more, for borderline and failing learners, a lack of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar continues to be a significant issue. The poorest learners are unable to correctly reproduce the correct spelling of words provided in the scenario or source document. Common errors in punctuation remain using commas in place of full stops to separate sentences and the widespread use of 'i' for the personal pronoun. Learners writing in block capitals will score 0 for punctuation. The most common grammar error is the omission of definite (the) and indefinite (a / an) articles.

Reading:

- a) Identify the main points and ideas and how they are presented in a variety of texts**

Most learners are able to identify main points and ideas in texts. Knowledge of language, presentation and layout features remains a real gap in many learners' knowledge with lots of learners uncertain of the terminology. Even if these learners can identify a presentation feature, many lack awareness of the effect or purpose of individual presentation features.

- b) Read and understand texts in detail**

This continues to be very straightforward for the vast majority of learners. Those struggling with this would be advised to check the number of marks available for the answer and to provide sufficient detail accordingly. Some learners are giving answers with just 2 or 3 words that don't actually answer the question.

- c) Utilise information contained in texts**

It remains the case that borderline and failing learners find this to be the most challenging coverage and range statement. Careful reading of the question would help, as would additional practice specifically for this purpose.

- d) Identify suitable responses to texts**

Poorer learners still tend to provide answers from their own experience, rather than using information provided in the source documents.

- e) In more than one type of text**

Learners were able to respond well to most text types provided, though some learners struggle to provide sufficient detail or explanation in their responses.

Level 2

Writing:

Coverage and range

a) Present information/ideas concisely, logically and persuasively

Able learners provide good responses for this coverage and range statement. Poor responses lack order, contain waffle and have inaccurate paragraphs. Some learners are still producing inappropriately short responses. They should be advised to aim for 250-300 words per response.

b) Present information on complex subjects clearly and concisely

The majority of learners are able to do this well. Those at borderline or failing write confused responses that don't address the question.

c) Use a range of writing styles for different purposes

Centres need to both reinforce the need to read questions with care and to provide learners with opportunities to use writing styles for a range of purposes. This should be straightforward provided learners read the question carefully and are adequately prepared for the assessment.

d) Use a range of sentence structures, including complex sentences, and paragraphs to organise written communication effectively

Many of those failing or at borderline do not write in complete sentences. Instead they use commas and don't demonstrate that they can write complex sentences at all and are falling below Level 1 in some instances. Centres must teach sentence structure and how to write in accurate paragraphs. Remember that at Level 2 we expect to see evidence that learners are capable of writing **complex** sentences.

Learners should also heed the same advice as for Level 1 learners:

We expect all answers to have an introduction/ conclusion where appropriate. In addition we expect to see:

- Letters with two addresses, a date and a complimentary salutation and close. Learners should NOT write their own name above their address. They should take care that the salutation and close match **AND** are appropriate to the task. In a formal text where they are given a name, we would expect to see Dear Mr/Miss/Ms/Mrs X with yours sincerely as a close. Informal texts shouldn't have 'yours faithfully or sincerely' as a close.
- Articles and reports with a title and subtitles. Level 1 learners seem to find it difficult to structure and format a report correctly.
- Emails with an addressee and subject header.

e) Punctuate written text using commas, apostrophes and inverted commas accurately

f) Ensure written work is fit for purpose and audience, with accurate spelling and grammar that support clear meaning in a range of text types.

Some learners fail to demonstrate spelling skills above Level 1, and in some instances are falling some way below this. In punctuation, for top marks at Level 2 we are looking for accurate use of the full range of punctuation including commas, apostrophes and inverted commas. I find even the more able learners seem to find the use of the apostrophe and inverted comma difficult. Learners writing in block capitals will score 0 for punctuation.

Grammar must demonstrate accurate subject-verb agreement, consistent use of tenses and pronouns and the use of complex sentences. Learners should be able to accurately spell and any lapses are more likely to be one-off errors.

Please note that learners can't gain the full marks available for SPaG unless their response is a **minimum** of 150 words at Level 2. Learners should be encouraged to write 250-300 words.

Reading:

a) Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information

Some learners provide irrelevant information or waste valuable time providing lengthy explanations where these are not required by the question, or a one word answer would have been sufficient to gain the available marks. Conversely, some learners are giving very short 3 word phrases as answers that don't quite answer the question.

b) Read and summarise, succinctly, information/ideas from different sources

Learners failing assessments tend to find this particularly difficult and often get these questions wrong as they don't understand what a summary is, or only use one of the documents. Learners must read the specific requirements of these questions with greater care. They are often tasked with compare and contrast all documents and should take care to clearly signpost this in their answers.

c) Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed.

This is proving difficult for borderline and failing learners. Learners often misunderstand or misread the question. A common error is that they write about the document's content rather than explain its purpose.

d) Detect point of view, implicit meaning and/or bias

This is a challenging issue for some learners with those struggling to achieve a pass being largely unable to use inference or understanding bias.

e) Analyse texts in relation to audience needs and consider suitable responses

Learners often misread the questions that address this coverage and range statement. Reading questions with care is vital to ensure that answers match the question being asked so that they can use the source documents appropriately.

f) In three or more texts

I'll take this opportunity to reiterate, that learners **must** read the specific requirements of questions with greater care. They are often tasked with comparing and contrasting all documents so they should take care to clearly signpost this in their answers so that examiners can understand their argument.

Generic Overview:

Performance of learners overall has not significantly changed since my last report. Some centres still enter learners for Level 2 when they are clearly operating some way below this level, in the last few weeks this has been especially the case with large numbers of ESOL students.

For both reading and writing at Levels 1 and 2 learners should be reminded to read questions thoroughly. Learners should be advised to attempt every question for both reading and writing tasks. Missing the odd reading question will jeopardise their chance of success. However if they complete just one of the two writing tasks, a failure is certain.

Chief Examiner: Jayne Garner

Date: April 2017