

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

February 2017

Level 1

Writing:

Coverage and range

Overall, performance has remained the same. The majority of learners answer both questions set and appear to engage well with the tasks and questions.

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 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 am 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.
- Articles and reports with a title and subtitles.
- Emails with an addressee and subject header.

Learners must read the instruction with care to ensure that if they are asked to write a letter, a letter format it used. Many seem to ignore these important instructions and lose valuable, easy to achieve, marks.

- 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**

Once more, for borderline and failing learners, a lack of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar continues to be a major 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 are still the inability to separate sentences and the widespread use of 'i' for the personal pronoun. The most common grammar error is the omission of definite (the) and indefinite (a / an) articles.

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.

Please note that spelling skills should subsume those required at previous levels.

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 and layout features remains a real gap in many learners' skills.

- b) Read and understand texts in detail**

This is proving to be very straightforward for the vast majority of learners.

- c) Utilise information contained in texts**

Borderline learners failing to achieve find this to be the most challenging coverage and range statement. Careful reading of the question would help.

- 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 show the ability to provide good responses for this coverage and range statement. Poor responses are characterised with a lack of order, waffle and 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. This skill can be taught and honed and is something that centres could focus on.

c) Use a range of writing styles for different purposes

If learners read the question carefully and are adequately prepared for the assessment, they should find this straightforward. 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.

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

This can be a big leap for some learners from Level 1. 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. 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.

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.

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.

Some learners fail to demonstrate spelling skills above Level 1. 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. More able learners seem to find the use of the apostrophe and inverted comma difficult. 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.

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.

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.

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

Learners finding this difficult tend to provide very simplistic answers or simply focus on one or two of the documents when they should be referring to all three.

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. Conversely some learners are entered at Level 1 when their responses indicate they may be capable of passing Level 2.

Straightforward exam technique should be reinforced. For reading, at both 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. In the last few weeks for the writing papers a few learners have chosen to answer just one of the two tasks in the Level 1 Writing papers. They will not be able to pass this assessment if they only complete one of the two tasks.

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