

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

December 2016

Level 1

Writing:

Coverage and range

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. They should be advised to aim for 200-250 words per response. Some learners don't answer the question set or give an inaccurate response because they have ignored the question and scenario setting.

b) Present information in a logical sequence

Some learners continue to write documents without any use of paragraphs.

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

This criterion continues to be a sticking point. A few learners either 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)

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, as a consequence, lose 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**

Accuracy, or the lack of it, continues to be a major issue. For spelling this includes words used in the scenario and tasks; punctuation, in particular an inability to separate sentences and the widespread use of 'i' for the personal pronoun; grammar, including 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.

As I mention in every report, spelling skills should subsume those required at previous levels. So at Level 1, we would expect to see all of the following:

Entry Level 2: Construct compound sentences using common conjunctions and punctuate correctly using capital letters, full stops and question marks. Use common conjunctions – for example so, and, but, or – to connect two clauses; use capital letters to denote the start of sentences, the personal pronoun I, and for proper nouns. Signify questions or queries with question marks. Spell correctly a range of common words Include personal details, high-frequency words (for example most commonly used 200 words).

Entry Level 3: Use basic grammar, including appropriate verb–tense and subject–verb agreement Write grammatically correct sentences using the past, present and future tenses as needed (for example the bus was, the buses were) with correct subject–verb agreement. Spell accurately and check work for accuracy. Spell correctly common words and relevant key words used at work, leisure and study.

Level 1: Use correct grammar, including subject– verb agreement and correct and consistent use of tense. The writing needs to be accurate with few errors expected at this level. Sentences should be complete and where necessary use appropriate conjunctions. Singular and plural subject–verb agreement should be used consistently.

Consistent and accurate use of tense is required. Errors should not undermine the meaning or purpose of written documents, as the focus remains on the effectiveness of the outcome and the written material's usefulness, appropriateness and applicability to the situation or context.

Ensure written work includes accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling and that meaning is clear. Spelling of regular, common words should be accurate, including those from work, study and daily life. A high level of accuracy is expected in certain applications and contexts.

In a formal letter of application, there should ideally be no errors. In a long document such as a formal report, errors may be acceptable, but generally a high level of accuracy is required. Errors must not alter the intended meaning of the writing, and should not substantially diminish the impact, validity or seriousness of the document.

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, however many lack knowledge of language / layout features and identification of the techniques used, either of language (e.g. emotive language) or layout (e.g. use of headings / sub headings). Identification of purpose also remains weak.

b) Read and understand texts in detail

This is a straightforward criterion for all but the very weakest of learner.

c) Utilise information contained in texts

This criterion is more challenging. The key is to read the detail in the question with great attention to detail to ensure that learners answer the question being asked and don't simply provide a very generic and ultimately incorrect answer.

d) Identify suitable responses to texts

Some learners provide answers from their own experience, rather than information provided in the text.

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

Good responses for this skills standard demonstrate clever use of language and the ability to write concisely. Poor responses provide a muddled answer with inaccurate paragraphs and are frequently a stream of consciousness rather than being logically structured. Some learners produce inappropriately short responses. They should be advised to aim for 250-300 words per response.

b) Present information on complex subjects clearly and concisely

Able learners are able to provide responses that meet this skills standard with ease. Learners who struggle with this tend to find it difficult to write concisely and clearly. 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

The key to meeting this skill standard is to concentrate on the question to ensure that the writing style in the response is entirely appropriate. Some learners, even those who are very capable, miss this by misreading the question. All learners should take care to read the question and carefully consider the style of their response.

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

The poorest learners fail to write in sentences and use commas in their place. Centres should teach sentence structure and how to write in accurate paragraphs. These are fairly easy marks to gain.

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.

Learners' over-use of bullet points or lists leading to a lack of evidence of competence in grammar or punctuation.

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.

In punctuation, even more able learners seem to find the use of the apostrophe and inverted commas difficult.

For top marks at Level 2 we are looking for accurate use of the full range of punctuation including commas, apostrophes and inverted commas. Grammar should 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 waste valuable time providing explanations where these are not required by the question.

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

This is a more challenging skill. Learners failing assessments tend to find this particularly difficult and often get these questions wrong. Learners need to understand what a summary is and to practice summarising skills. There are an increasing number of learners sitting Level 2 assessments who are clearly performing far below the level. This coverage and range statement is impossible for these learners who are simply being entered at the wrong level.

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

Again, this is a difficult one for weaker learners. Learners finding this question difficult often misunderstand or misread the question. Some overlook the word 'purpose' instead just say what they think the document is about. For example the purpose of an advertisement is to persuade someone to buy something, but many learners would simply say 'It's an advert'.

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

While understanding the explicit meaning of the texts, many learners are unable to identify implicit meaning.

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

To master this skill, learners must master close reading skills and check that their answers match the question being asked. Many wrong answers to these questions are completely incorrect, so close and careful reading of the questions is essential. Learners must then read the texts with care to ensure that the answer provided answers the question set.

f) In three or more texts

Weaker learners find it difficult to compare ideas or opinions across texts.

Generic Overview:

Reading – at both Levels 1 and 2 weaker learners do not read questions thoroughly and therefore their responses do not answer the questions. Learners need to take care with precision when writing all answers.

Performance of learners overall does not appear to have changed much over the past 12 months. There are still centres who are entering learners for Level 2 when they are clearly not operating at this level. Conversely many learners are entered at Level 1 when their responses indicate they are capable of passing Level 2.

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