

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

October 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.

b) Present information in a logical sequence

Only the poorest learners find this criterion difficult – and their answers tend to lack paragraphs too. Able learners produce logical responses with clear paragraphs.

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

This criterion catches many learners out – particularly structure and format. Language is less of an issue, with most learners able to produce responses appropriate to the task set. 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.

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

Learners who were performing poorly against criteria d) and e) showing spelling, punctuation and grammar skills far below that expected at this level. 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. Conversely there are a small number of learners being entered at Level 1 who are clearly more capable as they have gained almost full marks.

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

All but the poorest performing learners score well for this statement. Those who find this one difficult often provided completely incorrect answers to most questions. One of the trickier aspects of questions for this statement centres of how texts are presented. Here learners fall into two camps – they have either been taught this or they haven't. Centres must ensure that this has been taught.

b) Read and understand texts in detail

Less able learners often misread these questions and provide incorrect answers. More able learners are able to answer these questions with ease. Learners must read both the text and the questions with care to ensure they are able to use the detail in the texts to provide a correct answer.

c) Utilise information contained in texts

Coverage and range statement c tends to differentiate learners. Able learners have no difficulty while those struggling to master the lower level reading skills of a) and b) will inevitably find this much more of a challenge. The skill is to ensure that they have a deep understanding of the text and to then be able to use the information in response to a problem or question.

d) Identify suitable responses to texts

Learners scoring highly in these assessments find this criterion straightforward. Those struggling to achieve a pass seem to find questions that address this criterion quite difficult. Centres should ensure that basic reading skills are secure and then provide learners opportunity to read and respond to texts to prepare for this skill area.

e) In more than one type of text

Learners were able to respond well to most text types provided.

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 200-250 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 performing poorly against criteria e) and f) display spelling, punctuation and grammar skills far below that expected at this level. 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

This tends to be the easiest of the skill standards at Level 2 and most learners are able to successfully extract and use relevant information from the texts. Those who find this challenging often fail the assessment entirely. If learners are finding this difficult, the centre should double check that they have been submitted at the most appropriate level. Additional practice in basic reading comprehension skills using a variety of texts will be beneficial.

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.

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

Learners finding this question difficult often misunderstand or misinterpret the question. Some overlook the word 'purpose' and fail to answer the specific question set – for example they may say something like 'the document is about television licences' when the answer should be 'the document's purpose is to persuade people to buy a television licence'. Questions about conveying meaning can be about language and textual features and learners should be prepared for both of these options.

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

Some learners clearly don't understand the word 'bias', this should be explicitly taught. This is a higher order skill. Learners failing to pass find questions for this skill standard difficult and should be given more support in reading texts in order to identify point of view, inference and bias.

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 her 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.

Generic Overview:

In general learners have responded well to papers in this marking window. However, examiners still encounter completely blank responses – both online and paper – where learners have chosen not to do any work. Centres must ensure that learners are adequately prepared to take the assessments and are being entered at the right level.

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