

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

August 2016

Level 1

Writing:

This has been a very busy period and it has been pleasing to see that once more, the majority of learners are able to provide a clear response that uses the source material. Learners who passed well are able to use the source material appropriately and also know how to use appropriate language, format and structure. Learners at borderline or failing tended to be unable to use these features, even simple structure ones. 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.

The poorest learners produced very short responses that lacked paragraphs and displayed 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.

Reading:

Many learners are passing these assessments with high marks. However, while those learners at borderline tend to be able to correctly answer simple comprehension questions – when being tested on 'Read and understand texts in detail', they find higher order reading skills much more challenging. Many don't use the texts to answer the questions and rely on their general knowledge or personal experience instead. Some fail to attempt to answer the question at all.

In my last report I recommended that learners should pay attention to the number of marks a question is awarded. For example, in a question worth 3 marks, as a general rule, examiners will be looking for 3 points. Sometimes the question states to learners the exact number of points to make, but this isn't the case for every question. This remains the case in this report.

Level 2

Writing:

It has been pleasing to see that once more, the majority of learners are able to provide a logical response that uses the source material. Some learners however, use the texts verbatim and instead of using them as a reference, are copying entire chunks of text – this results in zero marks being awarded.

Many learners taking Level 2 papers do not know how to correctly format all text types. The poorest learners omit format altogether. Examiners are looking for writing in secure paragraphs with an introduction and conclusion, if this is appropriate to the task set. 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.

The poorest learners produced very short responses that lacked paragraphs and displayed 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.

Reading:

Many students continue to be caught out by questions about features of language and features of text – some muddle these up, while others simply select phrases from the documents as their answer. Students need to be aware of presentational devices which could be:

- headings
- subheadings
- bold type
- changes in font size or style
- bullet points
- lists
- the use of images/graphics.

Learners should also be prepared to comment on how language features convey meaning and these could include:

- persuasive language
- formal/informal language
- the use of humour
- addressing the reader directly
- the use of questions (rhetorical or otherwise)
- the use of the imperative.

Most learners at borderline or failing this assessment tend not to pay attention to the number of marks a question is worth – some learners give unnecessarily lengthy answers to questions worth just one mark and then give inappropriately short answers to questions worth 3 or 4 marks. In a question worth 4 marks, as a general rule, examiners are looking for 4 points. The question may or may not explicitly state the number of points to make.

Generic Overview:

This has been an extremely busy marking window with high numbers of learners taking tests. As in the last window, it was good to see that the majority of centres have heeded our advice that learners should only be entered for these tests once all learning is completed and are fully prepared. However, some centres persist in entering learners whose skills fall way below the level at which they are being tested.

As marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar are worth a significant proportion of the total in writing assessments, it is essential that learners are fully prepared for the standards required at the level at which they are being entered. They should pay particular attention to these skills during the test and should carefully check their responses for errors.

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