

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

June 2016

Level 1

Writing:

Most learners are able to provide a clear response that uses the source material to an extent. Poorer learners tend to produce responses that are shorter in length and usually lack paragraphs and other suitable formatting appropriate to the task in hand. Learners scoring high marks know how to use appropriate language, format and structure. These learners know that:

- Letters have two addresses, a date and a complimentary salutation and close.
- Articles and reports have a title and subtitles.
- Emails have an addressee and subject header.
- All answers should be appropriately paragraphed with an introduction/conclusion where appropriate.

Feedback on spelling, grammar and punctuation:

- These skills should be beyond that required at Entry Level 3.
- Centres must ensure that learners are taking the test at an appropriate level and that their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills are at the level being tested.
- For Level 1, most learners are able to spell very simple or straightforward words correctly. However, there are a number who do not.
- Omitted punctuation, indiscriminate use of capital letters and basic spelling mistakes are common in learners failing to gain a pass.
- Many of the very poorest learners fail to show spelling, punctuation or grammar skills above Entry Level 2.
- Learners should be reminded that they are allowed to use dictionaries in the exam.
- A number of learners don't accurately copy from the source material – they often miss out words or spell given words incorrectly.
- Learners can't gain the full marks available for SPaG unless their response is a minimum of 100 words at Level 1.

Some learners are able to demonstrate good spelling, punctuation and grammar skills, but lose most of the marks available for content by completely missing the point of a task. For example, when asked to write a formal complaint, they may write a text with an overly aggressive tone with insufficient information to back up their answer.

Reading:

Learners failing to gain sufficient marks to gain a pass in these tests are mostly able to correctly answer simple comprehension questions – when being tested on ‘Read and understand texts in detail’. However, some use their own knowledge to answer some questions this means the answers aren’t using reading skills from the source document and will not score marks.

Many borderline learners, find it difficult to identify features of presentation or layout. Learners should be taught the different formats of texts and be able to identify the features of these formats. Similarly, some learners find it difficult to answer questions about how a text is written to achieve its purpose – for example, how a text attempts to engage the reader. Some learners simply list persuasive techniques or features of language with no reference to the text. Learners achieving full marks in these questions are able to refer to such features and explain how these helped to engage the reader.

Finally, 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.

Level 2

Writing:

Most learners are able to use the source material to produce a logical piece of writing, and some make especially good use of the source material to inform their answers. However, a number of learners choose to simply lift the wording in the source material and reuse it verbatim, in their answer.

Other learners produce an answer that doesn’t actually answer the question or may write using a different format than that required – for example, many write a letter when asked to write an article. This is a basic exam technique issue. Learners must read the question set with care and provide an answer that fully meets it.

Many learners taking Level 2 papers do not know how to correctly format all text types. Learners should be taught the correct formatting that must be used for each document type. All writing assessments must be written in paragraphs and if appropriate the text should have an introduction and conclusion.

Learners need to use the following formats:

- Letters need two addresses, a date and a complimentary salutation and close.
- Articles and reports need a title and subtitles.
- Emails need an addressee and subject header.
- All answers must be appropriately paragraphed with an introduction/conclusion where appropriate.

Feedback on spelling, grammar and punctuation::

- Some learners are performing well below the required skill standards for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar at Level 2.
- Centres must ensure that learners are taking the test at an appropriate level and that their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills are at the level being tested. Very poor learners often have skills at below Level 1.
- As with Level 1 learners, some of the very poorest responses have omitted punctuation, indiscriminate use of capital letters and very basic spelling mistakes
- Learners should be reminded that they are allowed to use dictionaries in the exam.
- Learners can't gain the full marks available for SPaG unless their response is a minimum of 150 words at Level 2.

Reading:

As with the same advice given to Level 1 learners, learners should pay attention to the number of marks a question is awarded. Many miss this altogether. For example, in a question worth 4 marks, as a general rule, examiners are looking for 4 points. The question may tell the learner the number of points to make, but this isn't the case for every question.

Understanding and explaining features of language or features of presentation seems to be a difficulty in this window, as with the last one. Students need to be aware of presentational devices and be prepared on how to comment on language features serve to convey meaning. Features of layout or presentation may include: headings, subheadings, bold type, changes in font size or style, bullet points, lists, the use of images/graphics. Language features might include persuasive language, formal/informal language, the use of humour, addressing the reader directly, the use of questions (rhetorical or otherwise) and the use of the imperative.

At the end of the paper, learners are required to answer questions that use information from more than one of the texts. This type of question tests the ability of students to select and use relevant information and to analyse texts in relation to audience needs. Those learners who rely on one text, will inevitably score low marks. Learners need to read these answers with great care to ensure their answers accurately reflect the question/s set.

Generic Overview:

This has been a busy marking window with high numbers of learners taking tests. It's been encouraging to see that many centres have heeded our advice that learners should only be entered for these tests once all learning is completed and they are fully prepared. However, some centres continue to enter learners who are insufficiently prepared.

Finally, it is rare to see evidence that learners are taking the time to proofread their responses. Learners should be taught how to proofread their responses and make sure they do so during the examination as in writing papers, even small changes – such as adding a heading/subheading or indicating where paragraph breaks should be, could be the difference between achieving and not achieving.

When proofreading reading papers – if they have time, I recommend learners read both question and their answer to check they match. Some learners leave questions unanswered, even multiple choice ones. Every point counts so do encourage learners to answer every question. While SPaG isn't assessed in the reading papers, learners should take care to ensure that their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills don't obscure meaning or make their answer unclear.

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Date: June 2016