

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 2015

Level 1

Writing:

The majority of learners are able to provide responses that are clear and coherent and have a logical sequence. However, a proportion of learners fail to provide sufficient detail. Learners must read the brief with care to make sure that their response answers the brief set. **As a guide we expect to see an absolute minimum response of 100 words at Level 1.**

Every report I say that one of the skill standards that many learners have difficulty with is to use appropriate language, format and structure. Letters must have two addresses, a date and a complimentary salutation and close. Articles and reports should have a title and subtitles. Emails should have an addressee and subject header. All documents should be appropriately paragraphed with an introduction/conclusion where appropriate. These are easy to teach and should be automatic.

As with the October report, my comments regarding spelling, grammar and punctuation remain the same. To reiterate:

- These skills are expected to 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 up to scratch.

For Level 1, most learners are able to very spell 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 are failing 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.

Reading:

Most learners were able to score highly when tested on 'Read and understand texts in detail'. Those that had difficulty answering these questions were generally not at Level 1. Similarly, more learners were able to answer questions that required them to identify suitable responses to texts, though some learners answered these questions very briefly.

Many learners were able to identify the main points of texts; however they often struggled to identify features of presentation or layout. The majority of learners failing to secure a pass at Level 1 found it difficult to correctly utilise information contained in texts. Low performing learners relied on their own knowledge rather than using the information provided in the documents.

It is essential that learners are taught the different formats that text can be written in and be able to identify the features of these formats. They should also be taught to recognise and explain the different purposes of text, for example, to persuade, give opinions, provide information etc, they also need to be able to identify the language and format features used that help to convey meaning.

Learners must understand that they should include sufficient detail in responses, for example, if they are asked how they would contact someone, to include a phone number or email address. While spelling, punctuation and grammar aren't marked in reading assessments, their responses must be legible enough to enable examiners to mark the paper.

Level 2

Writing:

Most learners are able to produce a logical piece of writing, however some write answers that don't quite hit the brief – they need to ensure that they read the question set with care and provide an answer that fully meets it. Some learners launch into a piece of writing with no introduction and end it equally abruptly with no conclusion. Centres should teach learners how to construct appropriate introductions and conclusions for a variety of text types.

As with Level 1 learners, many learners at Level 2 did not know how to correctly format all text types. See my comments above. Learners should be taught the correct formatting that must be used for each document type. All writing assessments must be written in paragraphs.

Some learners are clearly performing well below the required skill standards for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar. At Level 2, it's punctuation that seems to cause the biggest problems. The main errors tend to be: incorrect use of capital letters - not using capital letters at the start of a sentence, for the pronoun "I" or for proper nouns.

There are also errors with capital letters being used when they are not required. Some learners always write particular letters as capital letters. Apostrophes are commonly misused - particularly inserting apostrophes before the "s" in plural words and not putting them in to show possession.

Many learners use a comma when a full stop is needed. Finally, learners must proof read writing to check for missing words, spellings, punctuation and capital letter errors.

Sufficient response – centres should encourage learners to write a balanced response. The two writing tasks have equal weighting, so each should have a similar length of response. **As a guide we expect to see an absolute minimum response of 150 words at Level 2.**

Reading:

Learners should be advised to read the action words in the questions with care. If they are asked to explain, describe or state something, their answer needs to match what is being asked. Several learners this window seemed confused over "explain" – and often offered simple informative text as an example of explain. Many learners find it difficult to summarise information and ideas – poorer learners provided responses that simply lift text word for word from the source documents.

A proportion of learners had difficulty in identifying the purpose of a text and many confused purpose with the type of text. Of those learners who were able to correctly identify the purpose, many found it difficult to correctly identify how the meaning was conveyed. Learners should be taught how to comment on language or layout features that the author has used to convey meaning.

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. The learner may be asked to provide an example of this from the document. Features of layout may include the use of headings, subheadings, bold type, changes in font size or style and bullet points or lists.

This issue has been raised in most of my reports. It seems that students who have clearly been taught what presentational devices are succeed in these sorts of questions: those who do not know what they are can only score zero. Centres are advised to access sample mark schemes and previous reports to see what is acceptable in terms of presentational devices.

Some learners find it difficult to identify that a text is biased. And learners who can identify that a text is biased are unable to explain how they know this or to give correct examples.

Generic Overview:

It is evident in a number of assessments that the learner is significantly misinterpreting the tasks and it is likely in such cases that the learner is not yet operating at that level. Centres should consider carefully if learners are ready for the level at which they are being entered.

They should make use of diagnostic software and the sample assessments before making a live test entry. Learners must take care to follow the task instructions carefully. There are many examples where this is not the case, and learners are losing significant numbers of marks due to very simple errors, misunderstandings and omissions.

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