

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 2015

Level 1:

Writing:

This window all but a very few learners completed each writing task. This is really pleasing as we have been stressing to centres that learners must be advised to attempt every task in the paper, as not doing so will severely jeopardise their likelihood of passing the test.

However, weaker learners are still using source documents inappropriately. Learners must be aware that this is a test of their own writing skills – lifting sections of documents and re-writing them will not gain any marks. The documents are there to provide background information only.

Learners at borderline or failing these writing tests often fail to structure and format their responses correctly. 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.

At Level 1, most learners are able to 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. 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. Learners should be reminded that they are allowed to use dictionaries in the exam.

Reading:

Some learners fail to use the reading documents to answer questions and simply provide responses drawn from their own experience rather than the information in the text. Centres should remind their learners to only use the information in the source documents to answer reading questions. At a fundamental level some learners fail to read questions carefully and therefore don't answer them correctly. Similar to the writing papers, in this window some learners failed to answer entire questions, or pages of questions. Centres should encourage learners to answer every question. They don't have to provide full sentences, unless instructed to.

Level 2:

Writing:

As with Level 1 learners, in this window, most learners completed both writing tasks.

Format and structure of common documents is also an issue for many Level 2 learners performing at borderline or failing the tests. As with Level 1, we expect to see letters with 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.

Inappropriate paragraphing is an issue with many learners. This currently manifests itself in a number of ways:

- No paragraphs at all
- Paragraphs consisting of single sentences
- Paragraphs that don't make sense

Once more, the most common errors in this window for Level 2 learners in spelling, punctuation and grammar was the incorrect use of capital letters, particularly lower case 'I' for the personal pronoun. This is especially noticeable for learners taking online tests. For those taking the tests online, they should be reminded that the program will not autocorrect their work so therefore extra care should be taken with reviewing and proofreading their answers. It is recommended that learners are provided with sufficient practice in writing on screen using non-correcting software.

Some learners are providing well-structured and sound texts in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar, but fail to answer the question and therefore are not providing a functional response. Learners must ensure that they read the question carefully and answer it to guarantee that their response is functional.

Reading:

As in most windows, some learners find identifying the purpose of a text difficult. Many learners answer this sort of question by giving an overview or comment about the text focusing on content instead of purpose. We have also seen that some learners are providing answers that are just a simple rephrasing of the question – especially in questions about features that convey information.

Centres should encourage learners to answer every question – many learners failing these papers often leave out many questions. Learners should be told that they don't need to worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar – as long as their answers make sense, they won't be penalized for these errors. Similarly, they don't have to provide answers in full sentences, unless instructed to.

Generic Overview:

I'd like to reinforce my advice to centres in that they should ensure learners are entered for the tests at an appropriate level. The entire examining team – often see entire cohorts of learners being submitted in for a Level 2 test, for example, when the learners are barely at Level 1.

Proofreading and checking writing responses is important for all writing assessments. However, learners taking the tests online should be reminded that they need to check and edit their work for spelling, punctuation and grammar. To increase likelihood of examination success learners should be taught to edit and check their work on screen as this is a different skill from doing so on paper.

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