



## Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills English: Writing

**NCFE Level 1 Functional Skills Qualification in English (603/5058/1) NCFE Level 2 Functional Skills Qualification in English (603/5054/4)**

**Window: 09th December – 13th December 2019 (Paper)**

<b>Level 1 Pass Mark</b>	<b>24 / 40</b>
<b>Level 2 Pass Mark</b>	<b>26 / 44</b>

Each learner's external assessment paper is marked by an Examiner and awarded a raw mark. During the awarding process, a combination of statistical analysis and professional judgement is used to establish the raw marks that represent the minimum required standard to achieve a Pass grade. As well as analysing performance on the assessment paper itself, performance standards and statistical outcomes in legacy qualifications and equivalent assessments (both within NCFE and, where available, across other awarding organisations) are considered to ensure Pass marks represent comparable standards.

### Generic Overview

Most learners responded well to the activities in these assessments and produced appropriate content. However, many learners appeared to be unprepared for some of the specific demands of Reformed Functional Skills English Writing. Skills in some Scope of Study areas were very weak, for Level 2 notably 20, 21 and 22 (spelling, punctuation and grammar); 26 and 28 – using organisational markers, paragraphs and complex sentences. For Level 1 spelling, punctuation and grammar (19, 20 and 21) and using complex sentences and paragraph (25) were the main issues.

### Level 1

In this assessment the two activities were:

1. Write a review of 150-250 words describing their favourite film and explain why they should win free cinema tickets for the year.
2. Write an email giving their views to the council about proposals to create wildlife area in some fields that currently lie empty.

In Activity 1 learners were provided with three bullet points to support their response:

- give details of your favourite film





- explain why it is your favourite film
- say why you should win the tickets

Most learners were able to write appropriate content in this section of the paper. Successful learners used the information in the bullet points to structure their response and provided answers that clearly addressed each point. Learners giving very detailed and fully coherent responses gained all available marks. Some learners ignored the word count and either wrote very brief or very long answers. Centres should let learners know that there is a mark available for writing content of an appropriate length within a word count (if specified). If a word count is given, learners will not be awarded this mark if they provide responses outside of the range given.

Some learners did not know how to format a review and instead wrote a letter. A review should have a title, it can have sub-headings, bullet points, an attribution and a strapline. It should use formal language and be informative and descriptive. All written responses should have an appropriate introduction and conclusion. Ideas within the text should be linked.

In Activity 2 the three bullets given were:

- give the advantages and disadvantages of this idea
- explain if you think this is a good idea and why
- suggest any ideas of your own

Capable learners were able to come up with a range of valid responses for this task. Less successful responses were characterized by shorter answers with limited detail that often went off at a tangent and failed to fully address the brief.

An email address was provided in the task, learners needed to use this email address accurately and provide an appropriate subject heading. Examples of awardable subject headings were 'Wildlife area' and 'New community area'. Some subject headings were left blank, some consisted of inappropriate full sentences: 'Here are my ideas about how to improve the fields for a wildlife area'. Learners scoring full marks for format, structure and language were able to write a response with a clear introduction and conclusion, a correct email address and appropriate subject heading, an appropriate salutation and close using formal language and a polite tone. A name was not provided, examples of acceptable salutation/close in this activity included: 'Dear Sir/Madam, Dear Council, Good morning' coupled with 'Yours faithfully'. Some learners wrote inappropriately informal salutations such as 'Hi' and 'Hello'.

Skills in paragraphing and complex sentences were very mixed, as were skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar. See my advice on this below.

### Advice to centres for Level 1 Writing

#### SoS 19, 20 and 21





As with the previous window, skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar varied widely. Given the significant percentage of marks available for SPaG and the increased demand in these areas, this is an area of concern. Some learners were unable to write grammatically correct sentences with full stops and capital letters. These learners' answers were also typified with an inconsistent use of upper case letters: some words had letters that were capitalized mid-sentences, some wrote entire responses in block capitals. Centres should look closely at the requirements in SPaG for Entry Level learners and understand that Level 1 learners should be able to show competence in all of these skills.

For top marks, examiners are looking for:

- **Accurate spelling** including some ambitious/irregular words. Two-syllable words with double consonants, the doubling of consonants with suffixes and verbs such as would and could should be correct. Errors would stand out as one-off slips and are not repeated.
- **Punctuation used accurately**, including capital letters, full-stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas and apostrophes. Meaning should be clear.
- **Grammar used accurately and to good effect**: accurate subject-verb agreement and tense. Accurate and effect syntax and sentence structure. Definite and indefinite articles are accurate. Grammar used to good effect.

The minimum awardable content at Level 1 is:

- **Spelling** of many straightforward words correct (including some with irregular prefixes and suffixes, as well as homophones)
- **Punctuation** at the start of sentences is correct. Commas usually used accurately in lists with occasional errors in clauses. Some inconsistent use of other punctuation marks.
- **Grammar**: some consistency in use of tense and subject/verb agreement.

## SoS 25

It is a new requirement for Level 1 learners to write complex sentences. Many learners were unable to demonstrate this skill. Learners also need to be able to construct coherent paragraphs.

## Level 2

In this assessment the two activities were:

1. Write an article of 200-300 words detailing activities you have planned and asking colleagues for ideas to celebrate your organisation's 25 year anniversary.
2. Write a letter to the council explaining the problems for yourself, neighbours and motorists caused by blocked drains and request that action be taken.





Most learners were able to produce appropriately detailed content for Activity 1. Learners tended to draw on their own experiences and we saw a range of responses based on places of work, social clubs and schools/colleges. Some responses provided excellent detail which included logistical arrangements as well as clear and interesting descriptions of planned activities. Some learners ignored the word count and either wrote very brief or very long answers. Centres should let learners know that there is a mark available for writing content of an appropriate length within a word count (if specified). If a word count is given, learners will not be awarded this mark if they provide responses outside of the range given.

Some learners did not know how to format an article and instead wrote a letter. A few learners simply wrote a completely unformatted block of text. An article should have a title, it can have sub-headings, bullet points, an attribution and a strapline. Language and register in this task should have been formal and appropriate for the workplace.

For Activity 2, the same pattern emerged, with the majority of learners being able to produce appropriately content, though the level of detail provided was more varied. Developed responses that gained high marks provided a range of detailed explanations of the problems the blocked drains had caused. Learners scoring lower marks for content produced limited answers with undeveloped ideas.

Most learners were able to format a formal letter, though some failed to provide a sender's address. Having a sender's address is a minimal requirement for a letter to be functional. Letters should have both a sender and recipient address, a date and an appropriate salutation and close. Language and register in this task should have been formal and appropriately polite. Some learners adopted a threatening tone and used strident vocabulary to threaten the council with legal action, this was not appropriate.

Skills in paragraphing and complex sentences were very mixed, hardly any learners are using organisational markers. Similarly, skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar were very mixed. See my advice on these issues below.

### Advice to centres for Level 2 Writing

#### SoS 20, 21 and 22

As with the previous window, skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar varied widely. Given the significant percentage of marks available for SPaG and the increased demand in these areas, this is an area of concern. Many learners failing the assessment were unable to demonstrate skills in SPaG above reform Entry Level 2. Centres should look closely at the requirements in SPaG for Entry Level learners and understand that Level 2 learners should be able to show competence in all





of these skills as well as those outlined for Level 1 above. Punctuation errors included indiscriminate use of

For top marks, examiners are looking for:

- **Accurate spelling** including any specialist words, uncommon words, words with complex sound/symbol relationships and words with unstressed syllables. Competence should be shown in the spelling of possessive pronouns, prefixes, suffixes and homophones. Errors would stand out as one-off slips and would not affect meaning.
- **A wide range of punctuation used accurately** (this may include colons, commas, inverted commas, apostrophes and quotation marks) in a variety of sentence structures, and used for effect.
- **A full range of grammatical constructions is used accurately** throughout which adds to the effectiveness of the document (including subject-verb agreement, consistent use of tense, definite and indefinite articles, as well as modality devices).

The minimum awardable content at Level 2 is:

- **Spelling** of simple, everyday words, including some plurals will be correct, but there may be frequent errors in more complex words
- **Punctuation** at the beginning and end of sentences is correct with some attempt at punctuating complex sentences. Some inconsistent use of other punctuation marks.
- **Grammar:** basic grammatical constructions are used accurately most of the time (including definite and indefinite articles).

## SoS 26

At Level 2 learners are expected to use organisational markers to establish cohesion in their texts. They need to know how to use appropriate linking words to support the purpose. For example:

- To add additional information, learners could use words such as: additionally, also, together with.
- To give an example, learners could use words such as: for instance, for example
- To show cause and effect, learners could use words such as: as a result, consequently
- To compare or contrast, learners could use words such as: however, in comparison
- To add emphasis, learners could use words such as: above all, in fact
- To persuade, learners could use words such as: certainly, clearly
- To express time, learners could use words such as: next, meanwhile, then, firstly





### **SoS 28**

Learners must accurately paragraph their writing and employ complex sentences accurately and consistently. Paragraphs should be related to a single idea. Sentences within it should be in a logical order. Use of paragraphs and organisational markers should aid clarity and establish cohesion.

### **Closing comments**

Centres should ensure that learners are being submitted for assessment at the correct level. Some learners in this cohort were operating at a level far below that expected at Level 2 and really struggled with the assessments.

**Chief Examiner: Jayne Garner**

**Date: January 2020**

