



## Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills English: Writing

NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in English at Level 1 – 603/5058/1

NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in English at Level 2 – 603/5054/4

Series: Paper Window 24 – 28 February 20

### 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 to write an email and to write a review.

Most learners were able to write appropriate content for Activity 1. 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. Weaker learners gave brief responses with undeveloped content.

Some learners ignored the email address given, which meant that their response lacked functionality. Learners are advised to use any email address given with absolute accuracy. In real life an incorrect email would not reach the intended recipient. Learners were awarded marks for giving an appropriate salutation and close.

Most learners adopted an appropriate tone for this email, which was semi-formal, however some used very informal salutations and close such as: *Hi Sam* and *Cheers!* These are not appropriate. Only a few learners used subheadings and bullet points to structure their responses, which helped them achieve additional format and structure marks. However most failed to use any additional formatting.

In Activity 2 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.





Capable learners produced a range of valid responses for this task. Less successful responses were characterised by shorter answers with limited detail that often focused on just the first bullet point.

Some learners did not know how to structure a review and instead formatted their response as if it were a letter. Reviews should be treated like an article: they need a heading, a clear introduction and conclusion. They can have subheadings, attribution and bullet points, where these are appropriate.

Skills in paragraphing and complex sentences were very mixed for both tasks, 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 both previous windows, skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar varied widely. I am including previous advice given due to the significant percentage of marks available for SPaG and the increased demand in these areas in Reformed Functional Skills. 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 effective 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.

Some learners fell below this level and were clearly very unprepared for the assessment.





## SoS 25

Each task has two marks available for this criteria, which is a new requirement for Level 1 learners. In this window it was rare for learners to score more than 1 mark, and most failed to gain marks for this skill at all. Learners need to demonstrate the ability to construct coherent paragraphs and to write complex sentences.

## Level 2

In this assessment the two activities were to write a letter and to write an article.

Most learners were able to produce appropriately detailed content for the letter in Activity 1. The majority of responses adopted an appropriate tone and register. However, some learners adopted an inappropriately strident and admonishing tone. Others seemed to ignore the instruction about who the letter was being sent to. Learners must pay close attention to the specific instructions of each assessment to ensure they are able to access all available marks.

Some learners missed key elements when formatting the letter. A functional letter must have a return address as well as a correctly spelled addressee. There should be a date and an appropriate salutation and close.

Again for Activity 2, most learners produced appropriate content. Weaker learners again did not read the specific information in the instructions and as a result missed marks by not providing all of the detail required. Some learners wrote fully developed responses with clear and interesting explanations. Some learners failed to format this as an article and wrote a block of text without a title. Articles should have a title, they can have sub-headings, bullet points, an attribution and a strapline. Language and register in this task should have been semi-formal and appropriate for the audience.

In both tasks, skills in paragraphing and complex sentences were mixed. Very few learners scored full marks as they failed to use 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 both previous windows, skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar varied widely. I am including previous advice given due to the significant percentage of marks available for SPaG and the increased demand in these areas in Reformed Functional Skills. 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





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).

Some learners fell below this level and were clearly very unprepared for the assessment.

### SoS 26 and 28

There are 3 marks available per task (so 6 in total) for using organisational markers, writing in coherent paragraphs and writing complex sentences accurately and consistently.

Learners are scoring low marks for these criteria as they are not using any organisational markers to establish cohesion in their texts. They need to be taught how to use appropriate linking words to support the purpose of their texts. Paragraphs should relate to a single idea. Sentences within it should be in a logical order. High marks are awarded when the use of paragraphs, complex sentences and organisational markers aid clarity and establish cohesion.

### Closing comments

While learners are clearly engaging with the contexts of these assessments, it is clear that many are not adequately prepared for many of the requirements of these qualifications, particularly in SPaG and format and structure. Centres need to dedicate time to teaching the new subject content and ensure learners are ready to be assessed.

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**Date: March 2020**

