



## 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 2020**

**Level 1**

### Reading:

Most learners responded well to the assessments and attempted to answer all questions. However, errors were often seen in questions about presentation features. At Level 1, learners need to understand what presentation features of texts are and be able to identify them in a document. The majority of struggling learners failed to correctly identify features of presentation in the texts. Presentation features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on.

Similarly, learners must pay close attention to the specific information required. For example, some questions ask learners to quote two words from the document, and this instruction is often ignored, with many learners writing out entire sections of text from the source document.

### Writing:

Poor spelling, punctuation and grammar skills are an issue for many learners. The following skills are expected at Level 1:

Entry Level 3: Use basic grammar, including appropriate verb-tense and subject-verb agreement. Write grammatically correct sentences using the past, present and future tenses as needed (for example, the bus was, the buses were) with correct subject-verb agreement. Spell accurately and check work for accuracy. Spell correctly common words and relevant key words used at work, leisure and study.

Level 1: Use correct grammar, including subject-verb agreement and correct and consistent use of tense. The writing needs to be accurate with few errors expected at this level. Sentences should be complete and where necessary use appropriate conjunctions. Singular and plural subject-verb agreement should be used consistently.

A high level of accuracy is expected in certain applications and contexts. In a formal letter of application, there should ideally be no errors. In a long document, such as a formal report, errors may be acceptable, but generally a high level of accuracy is required.





Errors must not alter the intended meaning of the writing and should not substantially diminish the impact, validity or seriousness of the document.

Spelling should have the following:

- Regular, common words are spelled accurately. Words provided in the document are accurate.
- Two-syllable words with double consonants are correct (common, kettle), and able to use -ful for doubling consonants with suffixes.
- Would, could, should be 100% correct.
- Words with suffixes: -al, -ary, -ship, -ness, -ible, -able, -tion, -sion should be accurate.
- Entry Level 3 requirements should be accurate: vowel digraphs, familiar compound words (eg football), words with common prefixes (un-, dis-, de-, re-, pre-), words with silent letters (kn, gn), words with common suffixes (-ful, -ly, -less).

Punctuation should be totally secure at Level 1. Capital letters should only be used for proper nouns and at the start of sentences. Commas must not be used at the end of sentences. Proper nouns must be correctly capitalised. The personal pronoun 'I' must be capitalised. Sentences must start with a capital and end with a full stop.

Grammar must demonstrate accurate subject-verb agreement and the use of tense should be consistent.

Many learners need to use paragraphs with greater accuracy. They should also know how to format documents correctly and to have a clear introduction and conclusion for each text they write.

Expectations for format and structure are as follows:

- A letter should have two addresses, a date and a complementary salutation and close. If a name is given for the addressee, then the letter should be addressed to 'Dear Mr/Mrs Smith' and signed off with 'yours sincerely'. Letters without a given name should be addressed to 'Dear Sir or Madam' and signed off with 'yours faithfully'. Writing the sender's own name above the address is not appropriate. It isn't appropriate to write 'To whom it may concern'.
- A report should have a heading and subheadings.
- An email should have a plausible email address as the addressee and a subject header, as well as an appropriate salutation and close, depending on the task set (formal emails need a salutation and close as in letters in the bullet above).
- An article should have an appropriate heading and may have subheadings and a lead paragraph.





## Level 2

### Reading:

At this level, learners tended to demonstrate good skills in basic comprehension. As with Level 1, presentation features were often a problem. At Level 2, learners are expected to explain how presentation features are used in reference to the document they have read. Many learners were unable to do this.

Use of language was also a sticking point for some learners. At Level 2, there will be questions requiring learners to comment on the writer's use of language and to provide an example from the text to support their answer. Learners should also note that if they are asked for an example from the text, this means they should provide a specific quotation from the text when asked, and **not** a paraphrase.

The last question in Level 2 Reading assessments requires learners to answer a question based on comparison of all three texts. Many learners continue to struggle with this. They must discuss each document in their answer, explaining how they differ to the others in the assessment in regard to the question set. Unjustified personal opinions should not be given.

### Writing:

It has been evident that many learners do not have the spelling, punctuation and grammar skills required for Level 2 Writing.

For top marks at Level 2, learners should be able to accurately use the full range of punctuation including commas, apostrophes and inverted commas. Learners using lower case for the personal pronoun 'I' will not score high marks. Punctuation must demonstrate progression from Entry Level.

For spelling, the following from Level 1 should be near perfect: regular, common words spelled accurately. Words provided in the document should be accurate. Two-syllable words with double consonants are correct (common, kettle). Learners should be able to use -ful for doubling consonants with suffixes. Would, could, should be 100% correct. Words with suffixes: -al, -ary, -ship, -ness, -ible, -able, -tion, -sion should be accurate. For Level 2, the demand is for: possessive pronouns to be spelled accurately (their, theirs, your, yours, my, mine). Trickier prefixes should be correct: auto-, bi-, trans-, tele-, circum-. Suffix -cian should be correct. Words with unstressed vowels should be correct, eg interest, different. Homophones should be correct: ate, eight, grate, great, rain, reign, rein.





Some learners have been writing entire answers in block capitals, which means that punctuation cannot be adequately assessed and learners will inevitably score low marks. Conversely, it was pleasing to see that some learners had been very well prepared for this assessment and wrote convincing, fluent responses that were entirely appropriate for the tasks set.

## Generic Overview Level 1 & Level 2:

Learners should be adequately prepared prior to being entered for an assessment. Even though we are at the tail end of the life of this qualification, some learners were evidently not at the level being assessed, with some very low marks being awarded. We advise that all learners undertake an initial/diagnostic assessment prior to being entered for any assessment, so that learners can be entered onto the correct level. This will also enable learners and centres to identify gaps in learners' skills and formulate a learning plan that meets these needs prior to undertaking the required level of assessment.

Basic exam technique is an issue. Learners need to check the precise wording of a question. This applies to both reading and writing assessments. If learners are tasked to write an article but produce a letter, or if they ignore the context of the instructions, they will lose valuable marks. Learners should be advised to answer all of the questions in an assessment. This is vital in writing assessments, where learners simply cannot achieve a Pass if they only answer one of the questions. It is also highly advised that they answer each question in the reading assessments too. Learners should provide sufficient detail in their responses. Answers should also be suitably clear. In reading tests, one word answers may sometimes be appropriate, but this is not always the case. Learners should take care that their answers make sense.

In reading assessments at both levels, most learners were able to answer straightforward 'comprehension' type questions. At Level 1, some learners struggled to demonstrate skills in these areas:

- 1.2.3 Utilise information contained in texts
- 1.2.4 Identify suitable responses to texts

At Level 2, many learners failed to compare texts when addressing questions for 2.2.2, Summarise information/ideas from different sources. Similarly, 2.2.4 Detect point of view, implicit meaning and/or bias and 2.2.5 Analyse texts in relation to audience needs and consider suitable responses, were also a struggle for borderline and failing learners.

In writing assessments, learners need to take note of the specific format required (ie a letter, email, article and so on). They should also adopt appropriate language and tone. An informal email to a friend would not be overly formal, and an article for a newspaper would not be informal, for example. Learners should aim to write a minimum of 100 words at Level 1 and a minimum of 150 words for Level 2.



In both assessments, learners should spend time reviewing and checking their answers.

A full suite of learning resources is available on the NCFE website that can provide opportunities for learners to fully prepare for their assessments. This includes sample assessments and resources, such as subject content specific information sheets, customisable PowerPoints and learner activity and answer sheets along with checklists, that can be used in teaching environments or for self-directed study.

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