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# **Functional Skills English Writing level 1 and level 2 Chief examiner report**

**Paper-based  
April 2022**

## Overview

Learners seem to generally engage with the tasks, and responses are increasingly showing the ability to develop a relevant point of view. Good exam technique is vital. Assessments at both levels consist of 2 tasks. Learners should spend an equal amount of time on each task. One task for each level will have a recommended word limit. This is intended to support learners and encourage them to structure responses that are the appropriate length. The tasks are equally weighted so devoting time to one, at the expense of the other, can result in imbalance which affects the total mark. Responses should have an appropriate register and tone and be appropriately structured.

## Specific issues for paper-based assessments

There are a number of particular challenges for learners taking the paper-based assessment:

- it can be harder for learners to judge the length of a response and so meet the requirements of the word count – learners should be encouraged to estimate as accurately as possible the number of words used for a task when a word limit is imposed; it is **not** an expectation that learners will spend time during their assessment counting words
- handwriting can make the deciphering of spelling tricky so the importance of legibility should be stressed to learners – accurate formation of letters is also important as inaccurate formation of letters (for example, capital letters in the middle of a word) will affect the punctuation mark
- punctuation needs to be visible – a number of learners may be losing marks due to inadvertent pen marks on the page (which can be interpreted by examiners as rogue commas) or from unclear commas and full stops; learners are strongly advised to take time to ensure their punctuation is clear

Whilst examiners will always strive to give learners the benefit of the doubt, it may be that these issues could be a factor in final results.

## Level 1

At level 1, learners are set 2 writing tasks. They are required to write either an email, a formal letter, a review, a formal report or an advertising feature. Questions are scaffolded, usually with 3 bullet-pointed prompts. Successful learners use the information provided in the scenario and in the bullet points to help them structure their response. The best responses are relevant, coherent and detailed, covering all points.

Some learners lose a mark for ignoring the word count, and responses that are either too short or too long (when a word count is specified) will not be awarded the detail mark (subject content statement 22).

Some learners lose marks for formatting (subject content statement 24) errors and should ensure that their response is set out appropriately. Reports, for instance, should not look like letters, and formal emails to colleagues in the workplace should start and end with a salutation and close that might be expected in the work environment.

The format that is completed the least successfully is the formal report, which should have a title and some additional formatting such as bullet points, an author, a date or sub-headings. Learners also seem to find it harder to achieve the full formatting marks for articles and should be encouraged to consider the use of an attribution and sub-headings in addition to a headline. Setting out an article in columns, using bullet points or adding image boxes are more easily done on paper than on-screen and indicate that a learner is thinking about the layout of their text.

Responses should be structured (subject content statement 24) to include a clear beginning, middle and end. Less successful learners will immediately address the bullet points but forget the need for an introduction and, at the end, some form of conclusion.

### Advice to centres for level 1 writing

Paragraphs and the use of consistent complex sentences (subject content statement 25) appear to offer the greatest challenge to learners and very few achieve the full marks available for this area. Paragraphs are required before even 1 of the 2 available marks can be awarded. Learners would be well advised to write concisely, but with a range of grammatical constructions. This could improve marks for both organisation and, potentially, grammar.

Skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) (subject content statements 19, 20 and 21) vary widely. Given the significant percentage of marks available for SPaG, this is an area of concern. Some learners are unable to write grammatically correct sentences with full stops and capital letters. These learners' answers may also display an inconsistent use of upper-case letters; some words have letters that are capitalised mid-sentence, and some write 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 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 is 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

### Level 2

At level 2, learners are set 2 tasks. They are required to write either a formal email, a formal letter, an article, a formal report or a leaflet. A scenario establishes the purpose and audience for the task and additional details in the question further identify content that either 'could' or 'should' be included. These key words are important and 'should' indicates that the suggested content must be covered in the response.

Skills in sentence construction and use of organisational markers are often lacking, and centres should focus on encouraging the use of paragraphs and a range of grammatical constructions, clearly demarcated.

Most learners were able to score marks based on these subject content statements:

- 23. Communicate information, ideas and opinions clearly, coherently and accurately
- 24. Write text of an appropriate level of detail and of appropriate length
- 27. Use different language and register suited to audience and purpose

However, marks for the following subject content statements were often lacking:

- 20. Punctuate writing correctly using a wide **range** of punctuation markers
- 21. Use correct grammar
- 26. Convey clear meaning and establish cohesion using organisational markers
- 28. Construct complex sentence consistently and accurately, using paragraphs where appropriate

### **Advice to centres for level 2 writing**

#### **Subject content statements 20, 21 and 22**

Spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) marks can often be the deciding factor in whether a learner achieves the qualification or not. Centres should look closely at the requirements in SPaG and encourage learners to write succinctly and, above all, accurately. Longer responses often lead to careless errors; a tightly written, controlled response can sometimes more easily demonstrate the skills required to achieve.

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 used accurately** throughout, which adds to the effectiveness of the document (including subject-verb agreement, consistent use of tense, and definite and indefinite articles, as well as modality devices)

#### **Subject content statement 25**

Format and structure marks (subject content statement 25) are often lost when a learner fails to consider the codes and conventions required. Most commonly, formal letters are written with only the recipient's address (not functional) and emails can lose formatting marks when the salutation and close do not match or are inappropriately formal/informal.

#### **Subject content statements 26 and 28**

Full marks for organisation (subject content statements 28 and 26) are very rarely awarded. Centres should encourage the use of organisational markers such as 'however', 'consequently' and 'in conclusion' to establish cohesion in a text. Tabloid paragraphs should be avoided, unless clearly presented as a deliberate style choice.

## **Closing comments**

Learners appear to be engaging enthusiastically with many of the tasks, and the best responses are those where learners write about subjects of which they have personal experience. Accounts that draw on knowledge gleaned in the workplace can be particularly successful. Proofreading remains a vital skill and good examination technique should always include a final check, particularly of grammar and punctuation.

**Chief Examiner: Clare Haines**

**Date: April 2022**