**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**

**January 2019**

**Level 1**

**Reading:**

Most learners are able to use information in the texts to obtain relevant information. Successful learners tend to give complete and succinct answers using information found in the source documents. Learners at borderline or failing tend to dive very brief and underdeveloped responses, often consisting of just one or two words. There is no requirement for learners to write in full sentences. However, the answers they give must make sense and contain sufficient information to accurately answer the question. Similarly, spelling, punctuation and grammar skills are not tested in the reading assessment, but examiners are unable to award marks if they can’t understand what has been written. Learners should attempt to answer every question. They should also spend time at the end of the assessment checking that their answers make sense.

There is a persistent trend for weaker learners to use general or assumed knowledge to answer questions. All learners should be advised to use the information in the documents as the source of their answers.

Learners failing or at borderline often find questions based on higher order skills more challenging. So most learners are able to successfully answer questions based on the first two coverage and range statements:

* 1.2.1 Identify the *main points* and ideas and how they are presented in a variety of texts
* 1.2.2 Understand different texts in detail.

Questions based on the last two coverage and range statements are often answered incorrectly:

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

It would therefore be beneficial for learners to rehearse questions that require them to interpret meaning in texts – particularly focusing on understanding inference and using context.

**Writing:**

All Level 1 Writing papers have two questions. Most learners answer both questions; this is vital as learners cannot pass this assessment if they only answer one of the questions. The majority of learners also produce answers of an appropriate length. They should aim to write 150-250 words per task at Level 1. Short answers of less than 100 words are unlikely to have enough content to answer the task well, nor can they be considered for full marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker learners persist in losing marks for format, structure and style. Full advice for this can be found in my last report from August 2018. As spelling, punctuation and grammar skills are worth a significant proportion of the available marks in this assessment, it is essential that learners demonstrate these skills at Level 1. Again, full details can be found in the August 2018 report. In addition to this, it should be noted that words provided in the assessment should be correctly spelled.

**Level 2**

**Reading:**

As with Level 1 learners, most learners at Level 2 are able to use information in the texts to obtain relevant information. Successful learners tend to give complete and succinct answers using information found in the source documents. Learners at borderline or failing tend to dive very brief and underdeveloped responses, often consisting of just one or two words. At Level 2, there is no requirement for learners to write in full sentences. However, the answers they give must make sense and contain sufficient information to accurately answer the question. Similarly, spelling, punctuation and grammar skills are not tested in the reading assessment at Level 2, but examiners are unable to award marks if they can’t understand what has been written. Learners should attempt to answer every question. They should also spend time at the end of the assessment checking that their answers make sense.

As with Level 1, there is a persistent trend for weaker learners to use general or assumed knowledge to answer questions. All learners should be advised to use the information in the documents as the source of their answers.

Learners failing or at borderline often find questions based on higher order skills more challenging. So most learners are able to successfully answer questions based on the first coverage and range statement:

* 2.2.1 Select and use different types of texts to obtain and utilise relevant information.

Questions based on the last four coverage and range statements are often answered incorrectly or with less detail by those at borderline or failing:

* 2.2.2 Summarise information/ideas from different sources
  + The final question in most Level 2 Reading papers requires learners to answer a question that involves comparing and contrasting information across all three documents. In answers to these questions, learners must show that they have considered all three texts when answering the specific question set. Simply stating what each text is about won’t gain marks, there needs to a clear contrast of the information within the answer to the question.
* 2.2.3 Identify the purposes of texts and comment on how meaning is conveyed
  + Some learners are unclear on what presentation features are (sometimes known as layout features). Presentation features may include images, bullet points, numbered lists, headings and subheadings and so on. At Level 2, learners are expected to explain how they are used in reference to the document they have read.
  + Some learners don’t know what language features are. Language features may include rhetorical questions, repetition, irony, hyperbole etc. At Level 2, learners are expected to explain how they are used in reference to the document they have read.
  + Fact/opinion – some learners give incorrect examples of both opinions and facts.
* 2.2.4 Detect point of view, implicit meaning and/or bias
* 2.2.5 Analyse texts in relation to audience needs and consider suitable responses

For 2.2.4 and 2.2.5 it would help to rehearse questions that require learners to interpret meaning in texts – particularly focusing on understanding inference and using context.

**Writing:**

All Level 2 Writing papers have two questions. Most learners answer both questions; this is vital as learners cannot pass this assessment if they only answer one of the questions. The majority of learners also produce answers of an appropriate length. They should aim to write 250-350 words per task at Level 2. Short answers of less than 150 words are unlikely to have enough content to answer the task well, nor can they be considered for full marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker learners persist in losing marks for format, structure and style. Full advice for this can be found in my last report from August 2018. As spelling, punctuation and grammar skills are worth a significant proportion of the available marks in this assessment, it is essential that learners demonstrate these skills at Level 2. Again, full details can be found in the August 2018 report. In addition to this, it should be noted that words provided in the assessment must be correctly spelled and words expected to be spelled correctly at Level 1 should be near perfect.

**Generic Overview:**

**For reading papers**: Learners should pay close attention to how many marks a question is worth and provide sufficient information accordingly. If an answer is worth 3 marks, for example, examiners are likely to be looking for three separate points. I would also suggest more attention is paid to understanding the specific wording of questions as many learners must work on answering the precise question set.

**For writing papers:** Learners must answer both questions and spread their time equally between them. They should write answers of an appropriate length for each question: aiming for 150-250 words per question at Level 1 and 250-350 words per question at Level 2.

**Overcoming an area: Sentences and Paragraphs for Level 1 and 2 Writing**

**Level 1**

At Level 1 sentences and paragraphs must be used with accuracy. Learners are awarded marks for the accurate use of sentences. Sentences should be complete. Learners should be able to construct both simple and compound sentences. A simple sentencecontains a subject, a verb and an object and makes sense on its own. A compoundsentenceis two simple sentences joined together using a conjunction. Use of run-on sentences, where commas are used in place of full stops, will mean that marks are deducted.

Learners are awarded marks for writing in clear paragraphs. Paragraphs should be clear and coherent. Learners should therefore write in paragraphs and not one continuous block of text. It may help to explain that

* A paragraph is a group of sentences about **one** main idea.
* There is no set length for a paragraph. It can be as long or short as it needs to be, as long as it is about just one main idea.
* The sentences should fit logically together. All the details should be clearly connected.
* A paragraph should contain enough detail for the main idea to be sufficiently discussed.

The following are tips on paragraph structure. They aren’t mandatory, they are just suggestions.

**Structuring a paragraph**

As with a full text, paragraphs need a beginning, a middle and an end.

* Beginning: It’s a good idea to start a paragraph with a topic sentence. This contains the main idea of the paragraph.
* Middle: Next come supporting sentences. They give extra information in support of the main idea. This could be extra details, examples or facts.
* End: The ending sentence closes a paragraph. It can rephrase the topic sentence or give the writer’s own opinion on the main idea or topic.

**Level 2**

Learners must use sentences and paragraphs with accuracy. Learners are awarded marks for the accurate use of complex sentences. Sentences must be complete. Use of run-on sentences, where commas are used in place of full stops, will mean that marks are deducted. At Level 2 examiners expect to see evidence that learners can accurately construct complex sentences. A complex sentencehas a main clause and at least one subordinate clause. Learners are awarded marks for the accurate use of complex sentences. It may be helpful to explain that:

* good writers form complex sentences to combine ideas and make their writing more interesting and effective.
* complex sentences can be used to stress importance. When one idea is more important than another, the writer can put the most important one last so that the reader remembers it best

Learners are awarded marks for writing in coherent paragraphs. They should therefore write using clear and coherent paragraphs. The ideas in a paragraph must all relate to a single main idea. It may help to explain that:

* A paragraph must have unity – a sense of togetherness. Even if just one sentence is off topic it can confuse the reader.
* The sentences in a paragraph should fit logically together. This makes the paragraph coherent – with all the details being clearly connected.
* Paragraphs need to contain a developed amount of detail so that the main ideas are sufficiently discussed.

The following are tips on paragraph structure and linking paragraphs. They aren’t mandatory, they are just suggestions to indicate the level of demand.

**Structuring paragraphs**

* The topic of the paragraph is often given in the first sentence. This is the ’topic sentence’. It usually gives the main idea of the whole paragraph.
* Supporting sentences follow. They give more details or evidence about the topic sentence.
* The ending sentence closes the paragraph. It might repeat the topic sentence in a different way, or give the writer’s viewpoint.

**Linking paragraphs**

Writing should flow smoothly, so that the transition from one paragraph to the next feels natural. Links can be used for different purposes.

* To show time (firstly, so far, next, etc.)
* To show cause and effect (until, as a result, because, whenever, etc.)
* To persuade (certainly, surely, clearly, etc.)
* To add a point (in addition, furthermore, etc.)
* To emphasise (in fact, more importantly, notably, etc.).

Further advice and guidance including the aforementioned suite of resources that can support learners at all levels can be found at:

[**www.ncfe.org.uk**](http://www.ncfe.org.uk)

**Email: service@ncfe.org.uk**

**Call: 0191 239 8000**

There are also a number of Common Learner Error Videos, and Overcoming Learner Error Videos which can be found at:

[**https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL05CIlRfHw9jh4n5ChWeVdVtEkm4A1P0Y**](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL05CIlRfHw9jh4n5ChWeVdVtEkm4A1P0Y)

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