
Functional Skills Certificate

ENGLISH

Level 1

Report on the Examination

4720

June 2016

Version: 01

Overview

This qualification continues to maintain very high standards and a pass at this level is a strong indicator of ability in writing Standard English. This has been underlined through the recent Ofqual reviews which have given AQA's Functional English exams a clean bill of health, unlike a number of other providers who were required to change their papers and assessment procedures. There is every reason to remain confident of the value of this qualification. It is consistent in its standard as a test of basic English writing skills and is the basis for secure progression.

With two questions containing stimulus material leading into a task which is supported by bullet points, candidates are able to use some of the information in the question. There is an element of problem solving and functional thinking in completing the task. At this level, centres now very rarely enter candidates who have little or no chance of getting inside Band 2 Mark Scheme descriptors. Candidates seemed generally confident and able to meet the requirements of the questions with an overwhelming majority of candidates on both Question 1 and Question 2 hitting at least 4 marks for content. In this series, almost half of the candidates at the top end of the distribution with total marks of 15 or more, would be well suited to the demands of Level 2 and should be encouraged to progress. Candidates whose marks fall below a total of 15 may well need a little more in the way of skill development before they progress on to Level 2. Close examination of the centre's mark profile would be very useful in establishing appropriate progression routes for candidates.

Component 1 Reading

This report covers both the OnScreen and the paper versions of this test.

The Summer series was appropriately based on the sun. The source texts dealing with the potential dangers of over-exposure to the sun and advice about coping with the heat were well received and the overall response this series indicated strong engagement with the texts and tasks.

There were no real issues with any of the multiple choice questions this series, the average success rate being just under 79%.

Question 7

7a required candidates to offer 4 instructions on what to do if you feel unwell in the sun. Only 54% achieved full marks here, the most common reason for under-achievement being the lack of a verb which would be required to present the answer as an instruction. It is worth reminding students that “advice” or “instruction” will always need to be in the form of an imperative. Other errors occurred where candidates failed to contextualise the instruction, for example – “seek medical advice” needed to be qualified by “if you feel dizzy/weak/anxious” or “if cramps last for more than an hour/if symptoms worsen”.

7b was more successful with 74% of candidates achieving full marks. There were ten possible options for “ways to keep cool in hot weather” but some candidates confused the options for 7a and 7b or brought in advice from their own experience. Students should be regularly reminded that all answers must come from the source text, and from the correct section.

General advice will always be to read both the questions and the texts carefully and take time to select the correct answers. Copying of whole sentences is usually not needed or desired and random copying of chunks of text will inevitably be self-penalising.

Question 8

Performance on Q8 was slightly lower than in March with 29% achieving full marks and, worryingly, 14% still achieving no marks. As previously stated, many candidates compromise their achievement by writing too much and including too many devices, thus risking not establishing the link between the device and the way it aids understanding, which is required by the markscheme. Training candidates to offer, in each part of the question, **one** presentational feature with an explanation relating to **that** feature would improve performance further. Generic comments such as “the headline tells you what the text is about” will not be rewarded, as they could apply to almost any text. Candidates must make a comment which is specific to the particular text in question.

Some outstanding work was seen this series, reflected in an increase in the mean mark of over 1. This represents some excellent teaching and superb effort on the part of both teachers and learners. Indeed, the Principal Examiner did wonder why some candidates were entered for Level 1 rather than Level 2. Overall, this was clearly an accessible and enjoyable paper to which candidates responded well and thus performed well. It is hoped that they will have learned some

useful information about the need to protect themselves in the sun and remember ways to keep cool in the heat, should we ever be fortunate enough to need such guidance!

The Level 1 test is a good preparation for moving on to Level 2 and thence to GCSE and the reading skills which students develop through these tests will stand them in good stead in their everyday and working lives. Overall, it is clear that those working with Level 1 candidates are doing a fine job of preparing their students for the demands of this test and they are to be commended for their success in doing so.

Component 2 Writing

This report covers both the OnScreen and the paper versions of this test.

Question 1

This question asked candidates to write an email to Danny Niven, putting themselves forwards in a voluntary capacity to contribute to the work of The Park People, an organisation that helps to clean local parks. The stimulus material indicated that the work of The Park People enabled park users and wildlife to benefit from parks which are going 'from strength to strength'.

The question generated many solid answers which provided relevant material about the candidates in an organised manner, following the bullet points, thereby establishing the core of a reasonable application for employment.

The strongest answers did more than simply provide information about the candidate. Some of them looked at the work of The Park People and expressed admiration and support for the organisation. They went on to say that their interest in applying was not simply to undertake voluntary work in parks, but to work for that specific organisation. Other candidates wrote about the appeal of the advertisement, the fact that it was in a local shop window and represented the work of a local group. One of the strongest features that came across was the sense of shared responsibility for the natural world and the need to ensure that we maintain features of parklands that we enjoy so much for future generations. Strong candidates, of course, provided relevant information about themselves, pointing to educational and work related qualifications and experience. Specific details were included which gave the email a strong sense of a real functional communication. The language and sentences were clear and well-constructed, using appropriate tone and vocabulary. Many adopted the jargon of job application to good effect, writing about their 'strong people skills', their ability to work as part of a team and their potential leadership abilities.

Weaker candidates who struggled to establish themselves in Band 2 or who remained in Band 1, struggled to provide the basic information required to produce a functional document. A number of candidates baldly stated that they wanted to work for The Park People and that they would be good at the job. Some added simple information such as the fact that they were able to pick up litter or tidy gardens, but did not establish a sense of coherence throughout their answer. Often information was unconnected and had a disorganised or random quality. Language in such

answers was often very simple and choice of vocabulary limited. It is important, however, to appreciate that fewer than 20% of answers were in this category.

Question 2

For this question, candidates were asked to write a review of Crow's Nest Theme Park for a holiday website. Candidates were asked to write their review to reflect a favourable day at the theme park with a group of friends.

This was an opportunity for most candidates to write about something that they had experienced for themselves and to enable them to incorporate detailed narrative to provide the backbone of the review. Most candidates also ensured that they commented favourably on their experiences and gave a summative score or recommendation in line with their (assumed) website's style.

As with previous questions of this sort, the best candidates use a range of descriptive and narrative skills to get across the experience of the theme park. Most contextualised the visit in terms of their previous knowledge of the place, or the fact that they had planned the visit for a long time or that they were going on the basis of a friend's recommendation. Candidates then chose to write about their experience in a range of different categories such as customer care, the rides and their qualities, food and refreshment and peripheral aspects such as parking and under-16 discounts. It was not surprising that the most animated parts of the review were those which dealt with the rides themselves, particularly the descriptions of the impact of the ride on the young person's stomach, hear and intestines. Descriptions of the food and catering tended to reflect how this feature of the day enhanced their enjoyment, rather than focusing closely on the quality of the burgers or the range of flavours available in ice-creams. Most candidates chose to end on a very positive note, explaining that they would have no difficulty in recommending the theme park to others or that they planned to visit it again. A number of candidates gave it a star rating, which added to the sense of realism in their review.

Weaker candidates (bottom Band 2 and below) provided very limited information and sometimes the topic was only barely evident. Factual information about the park was delivered through the use of simple statement, often in unpunctuated sentences. Descriptive language was very limited and comments about how enjoyable the day had been tended to be of the 'it was cool' or 'it was fun' type. Planning was not an evident feature and therefore structure was generally lacking. As with Question 1, though, only a small percentage of candidates were in this category.

Accuracy

The most important descriptor for Band 2 achievement is 'meaning is clear' and in this series the vast majority of candidates reached this band.

Band 2 nevertheless represents a modest level of achievement with written Standard English. Candidates in this band would typically provide some grammatical sentences, syntax would be largely appropriate for Standard English and the spelling of common words would be mostly accurate. When these are not present, the candidate's work will fall into Band 1 for accuracy.

The construction of grammatical sentences with clear full stops and capital letters remains elusive. Some examiners also noted an inconsistency in the use of upper case with weaker candidates displaying hit and miss approach. Some candidates made errors such as omitting words which could have been self-corrected through proof-reading.

Spelling was generally of a good standard although weaker candidates resorted to phonetic transcriptions of more difficult words.

I would also like to emphasise the importance of checking writing. This is particularly significant for those candidates taking on-screen assessments or providing word-processed answers. Generally, the performance for on-screen tests is not as strong as that for the traditional format and centres are advised to think seriously about this when entering candidates. Practice in the use of word processors without spell/grammar check is very important and candidates should be advised to write concisely as longer answers are often packed with errors. Also, when candidates produce very short answers, with unchecked typos dominating the reader's experience, it is highly unlikely that the candidate would score well for either content or accuracy.

Examiners pointed out the following specific issues in relation to accuracy:

- very poor or extremely small handwriting is problematic in judging the accuracy of the candidate's answer
- mistakes with the use of past tense
- usage issues such as 'very fun'

- agreement issues with was/were seemed to be an increasing problem
- upper case was randomly present in answers
- common spelling issues with 'ie' words particularly 'view' and 'believe'
- inconsistent tenses or verb agreement was an issue for some - possibly EAL candidates
- increasing use of US style contracted forms: 'wanna' and 'gonna' as well as creeping text language such as 'yr' and 'u'.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)