

Functional Skills

English

Level 2 Writing W2

Present Information on Complex Subjects Clearly and Concisely v1.0

Functional Skills English:

Level 2

Skill Standard:

Writing W2

Coverage and Range:

‘Learners should learn to identify the strands or elements that comprise complex subjects, giving some consideration to their relative importance, in order to address the specific components and to articulate their interconnections.

‘Learners should present information using an appropriate format (for example when writing a formal letter, report, article or essay), so that the written document is easily understood, follows accepted conventions, and is engaging to the reader.’¹

¹ QCA Functional Skills guidance: amplification of the standards June 2008 QCA/08/3700

Clarity and Concision

When writing about complex subjects, from the outset you must be clear about your audience (who you are writing for), genre (the format and style in which you are writing) and purpose (what you are writing for). In fact the actual points you make are only one part of the process, as equally important is the order in which you present the information and the level of detail you provide. Time spent on research is itself critical in terms of helping you to generate thoughts and ideas; lists and spider diagrams are essential for organising them; whilst drafting, proofreading and redrafting will allow you to create a really polished text free from grammatical, punctuation and/or spelling errors. All in all, it is crucial to balance each of these aspects in order to produce work of the highest quality.

Purpose

Why you are writing is really the key question you need to answer before you begin. Are you trying to entertain, inform, argue or persuade? Perhaps it's something different entirely or a blend of several of these aspects. Deciding on this beforehand gives your writing purpose, though – a direction if not even a destination. Once this is locked down you can then focus on the other relevant factors.

Audience

When thinking about *who* you're writing for, you should put yourself in their shoes. Are they professionals or ordinary members of the public? Are they knowledgeable about the subject or is it brand new to them? Are they young or old, male or female, native speakers or foreigners? You won't need to consider all such aspects all the time, but before you put pen to paper (or fingertips to keyboard) give thought to the key characteristics and needs of your intended audience, and how you can best reach them in order to get your points across.

Genre

For our purposes, *genre* covers not only the format of a text (e.g. article, email, letter, blog post, leaflet, etc.) but also the style in which you write it (e.g. formal or informal, serious or humorous, etc.) Building on *purpose* and *audience*, you should pick a genre that suits your reason(s) for writing and the people you are writing for. Are they receptive to formal articles composed of complicated sentences written with a technical vocabulary in a serious tone and the passive voice, or would you get a better reception from a brief, tongue-in-cheek blog post made up of a few funny, personal, colloquial anecdotes?

Order

Sequencing your points can be a complicated business, and because every piece of writing is unique, there's no truly effective way of advising you what to put where. The only good suggestion is to make your case *logically*. Pick an *angle* (how you want to approach the topic), and then decide how to link your points sequentially in order to achieve the best effect. If you're pushed for space or your audience's attention span is low, open with a bang and get your points made as quickly as you can. If, on the other hand, you've got a highbrow readership to attend to and 5,000 words to come up with, not only can you afford to be more in-depth, but you can also reach more broadly in your writing in order to give your readers a wider insight into the topic being dealt with.

Exercise 1

You receive the following leaflet through your letterbox. Read it and then answer the questions below.



1) Who do you think is the specific intended audience for this leaflet?
Circle your answer.

- People with an interest in phoning abroad
 Pensioners looking for a long-term contract
 Existing mobile phone users who are looking for a cheap deal
 Employees of BKSb itself
 Existing BKSb customers looking to upgrade and save
 Just you and the other members of your household

2) In terms of the leaflet genre, what techniques does the writer use to enhance his message to the reader?
Circle your answers.

- Sub-headings
 Rhetorical Questions
 Bullet Points
 Attractive Imagery
 Repeated Words
 Captions

Exercise 2

To get a sense of how to put together a good piece of writing, read the feature article from *The Times* (below) and then answer the following questions.

1a. Who do you think is the intended audience for this article? What evidence can you point to to justify your answer?

1b. What do you think is/are the purpose(s) of the article? What evidence can you point to to justify your answer?

2. Humour is a powerful force in writing, just as it is in speech. People tend to like (and implicitly agree with) those who make them laugh. Make a list of the effective ways in which the writer injects humour into this article, and then take a moment to assess how the writer has pieced them together to make a coherent text.

Section	Point(s) Made
Headline	Reveals that the writer is on a diet but craving food. Humour induced through hint towards prison rations and demands for jam sandwiches.

3. List the textual features (e.g. sub-headings) that the writer makes use of in order to help him construct an effective piece of writing.

I've been on porridge and soup for two days. Get me a jam sandwich – fast
Can fasting work for Roland White, or will he soon have a bellyful of testing his willpower?

By Roland White

I could kill for a raspberry jam sandwich. It's 3pm, rain is pummelling against the window, and I'm feeling desperately peckish. One of the dogs ate a glove this morning, and I'm wondering how many calories there might be in the other one. The other glove, not the other dog.

Our wise ancestors drank and feasted to cheer themselves up in winter. And what do we do? We make January even more miserable by punishing ourselves with ever more elaborate diets.

Down the years, dieters have tried the Atkins, the cabbage soup, the GI, the low-carb, high-fat and the low-fat, high-carb, to name but a fashionable few. And how has that gone? Well, last week the government called for some "national soul-searching" to discover why we're all such porkers.

Fasting is now the fashionable way to lose weight. Benedict Cumberbatch used the 5:2 diet — fasting for two days a week — to shed weight for Sherlock. Two stone of Alex Salmond, Scotland's first minister, declared independence after three months on the same regime. The very latest fad is the 4:3 fast — basically, one day on, one day off. So how hard can this be?

DAY 1

Here's what I ate:

- Porridge, made with half water and half semi-skimmed milk (about 150 calories)
- Half a can of vegetable soup and a small slice of white bread (about 210 calories)
- Evening meal 50g of ham with three small florets of broccoli (about 120 calories).

I must also own up to three cups of tea, which is about 50 calories. To be honest, I'm pretty much guessing about the calories. The porridge box suggests a 40g helping is 271 calories, but as no man can weigh porridge with dignity, I am sticking to 150. I did weigh my ham — I suppose I will have to live with the shame.

DAY 2

I have discovered that there are vast numbers of hungry bloggers telling other dieters what they've been eating, even though the others are surely desperate to avoid thinking about food. Somebody called Steve John fasted for 21 days and put the results on YouTube. That's just showing off.

Today I follow day 1's regime, except that the only soup left is cream of tomato. This has more calories than Heinz vegetable, and I feel ashamed that I know this.

In the evening disaster strikes. Mrs White doesn't realise I'm still fasting and makes pasta with a creamy sauce. I am too polite to refuse. It is surely more than my 250-calorie limit.

DAY 3

In two days I have lost 2¾lb. If I can just keep this up for 50 days, I will completely disappear.

I'm wondering whether an actress somewhere is trying the All Chocolate Biscuit Diet, for in the world of showbiz no diet is too bizarre. Beyoncé reportedly lost 1 stone in two weeks by consuming nothing but maple syrup. Uma Thurman and Alicia Silverstone supposedly never cook their food, and Jennifer Aniston seems to swear by the baby food diet, in which two meals a day are replaced with purées. Gwyneth Paltrow currently recommends a 300-calorie-a-day winter detox.

But if that's not odd enough, try this. One weekend a couple of years ago I was recruited to play the butler in a murder mystery event. It's hard work being a butler: long hours and snatched meals. Over three days I lost 6lb. If only I could get Gwyneth on board for the marketing.

Exercise 3

Imagine you are a county councillor with a child in a local primary school. The school itself is on a main road, and many parents are concerned that a child might be injured or worse during the dark winter months. The council is thinking of reducing the speed limit to 20mph on a 200 yard section outside the main gates, and perhaps installing more street lights, roadside fencing, a speed camera and road humps. You are not convinced that any/all of these are necessary, or that alternatives wouldn't produce better results. You have therefore been asked by a local newspaper to write an opinion piece (basically a formal article for the paper's readers) to publicise your thoughts, as you are in a relatively unique position of having a child at the school and working for the council itself.

Use the grid below to help you plan your writing before you start, and remember to use your imagination as well as proofreading and redrafting your work in conjunction with your tutor.

Topic

Audience	Genre	Purpose

Order of Points	

