Functional Skills English

Level 1 — Revision Guide

10 Key Topics with Examples and Practice Questions

1. Formal vs Informal Writing
2. Reading for Meaning — Inference
3. Comparing Texts
4. Persuasive Writing Techniques
5. Structuring Longer Writing
6. Sentence Structures
7. Punctuation — Colons, Semicolons & Apostrophes
8. Spelling Strategies
9. Understanding Text Purpose & Audience
10. Letter & Email Format

rewired for parents

1. Formal vs Informal Writing

The register (level of formality) must match the audience and purpose. Formal writing is for employers, officials, and complaints. Informal writing is for friends and family.

Key Differences:

Formal: Dear Sir/Madam, Yours faithfully, no contractions, professional vocabulary

Informal: Hi/Hey, Cheers/See you, contractions okay, chatty tone

Exam tip: If the task says "write to your manager" or "formal letter", use formal register throughout. Mixing registers loses marks.

Practice: Rewrite in formal English: "Hey, just wondering if I could have Friday off cos I've got a thing."

Answer: "I am writing to request a day of annual leave on Friday due to a prior commitment. I would be grateful if you could confirm whether this is possible."

2. Reading for Meaning — Inference

Explicit information is stated directly. **Inference** means working out what the writer means but doesn't say directly — reading between the lines.

How to infer: Look at word choices, consider what the writer wants you to feel, use evidence, say "This suggests that..."

Example: "The manager glanced at his watch for the third time." — Inference: He is impatient or frustrated.

Exam tip: Always quote from the text and explain. "The writer says [quote] which suggests [inference]" is a reliable structure.

Practice: "The café owner put up a sign: No Under-18s After 4pm." What can you infer?

Answer: The café has probably had problems with younger customers after school — perhaps noise, antisocial behaviour, or groups occupying space.

3. Comparing Texts

Compare texts by purpose, audience, tone, and language features. Use comparison connectives to structure your answer.

Similarities: Similarly, both texts, likewise, in the same way

Differences: However, whereas, in contrast, on the other hand, unlike

Example: "Text 1 uses emotive language to persuade. In contrast, Text 2 uses factual statistics to inform."

Exam tip: Compare BOTH texts in each point. Don't write about them separately — weave them together.

4. Persuasive Writing Techniques (AFOREST)

A — Alliteration: "Brilliant bargains"

F — Facts: "90% of employers prefer..."

O — Opinions (as facts): "Everyone knows..."

R — Rhetorical questions: "Don't you deserve better?"

E — Emotive language: "heartbreaking", "innocent"

S — Statistics: "1 in 4 adults..."

T — Three (rule of): "Faster, cheaper, better"

When analysing: name the technique, quote the example, explain the effect on the reader.

> **Exam tip:** In writing tasks, use 2-3 techniques. In reading tasks, identify and explain them.

5. Structuring Longer Writing

Organised writing scores higher. Use clear paragraphs with one main idea each. Follow PEE:

Point — State your main idea clearly

Evidence/Example — Give detail, facts, or examples

Explanation — Explain why this matters

Planning a formal letter: Para 1: Why you're writing | Para 2: Main point 1 | Para 3: Main point 2 | Para 4: What you want to happen next

> **Exam tip:** Spend 2-3 minutes planning. A quick bullet list of paragraph topics stops waffle.

6. Sentence Structures

Vary sentence structure to show control of language:

Simple: One clause. "The bus was late."

Compound: Two clauses joined by and/but/or/so. "The bus was late, so I walked."

Complex: Main + subordinate clause. "Although the bus was late, I arrived on time."

Subordinate starters: Although, Because, While, When, If, Since, After, Before, Unless, Even though

If the subordinate clause comes first, use a comma before the main clause.

> **Exam tip:** Start 2-3 sentences with a subordinate clause — shows the examiner you can vary structure.

7. Punctuation — Colons, Semicolons & Apostrophes

Colons (:) — Introduce a list, explanation, or quote.

"The scheme offers three sectors: construction, healthcare, and hospitality."

Semicolons (;) — Join two related independent clauses.

"The first text is persuasive; the second is purely factual."

Rule: Both sides must be complete sentences.

Apostrophes

Contraction: don't (do not), it's (it is), they're (they are)

Possession: the manager's office (one), the managers' offices (plural)

Common mistake: its (possession) vs it's (it is)

Exam tip: Using one colon or semicolon correctly shows L1-level punctuation. Easy marks.

Practice: Add punctuation: "The apprenticeship offers many benefits a qualification a wage and real experience"

Answer: "The apprenticeship offers many benefits: a qualification, a wage, and real experience."

8. Spelling Strategies

Common confusions:

there/their/they're | your/you're | to/too/two | affect/effect | practice/practise

Strategies:

Look-Cover-Write-Check | Break into syllables (Wed-nes-day) | Word families (sign → signal → signature) | Use a synonym if unsure

Exam tip: If you can't spell a word, use a different word you can spell. "Necessary" tripping you up? Write "essential" instead.

9. Understanding Text Purpose & Audience

Purpose: Inform, Persuade, Instruct, Entertain, Advise

Audience clues: Vocabulary level, tone, assumptions about knowledge, where text appears

Example: A council website about bin changes — Purpose: inform residents. Evidence: factual tone, clear dates, no jargon.

Exam tip: State purpose AND audience clearly, then give evidence from the text to support your answer.

10. Letter & Email Format

Formal Letter Layout:

Your address (top right) → Date → Recipient's address (left) → Dear [Name] / Dear Sir/Madam → Body paragraphs → Yours sincerely (named) / Yours faithfully (unnamed) → Your name

Email Format:

To: recipient | Subject: clear line | Body: Greeting → Content → Sign-off

Formal emails follow similar rules to letters. Informal emails can be relaxed but still need structure.

> **Exam tip:** Getting the format right is easy marks. The formal letter layout comes up in nearly every L1 exam. Learn it.

Key rule: Yours sincerely = you know the name. Yours faithfully = you don't know the name.
