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# FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

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Paper 0507/02

Reading and Directed Writing

## General comments

The overall performance this year was good.

Candidates were, seemingly, well prepared for the exam. Most candidates attempted to answer all the questions, showing good time management and perhaps, familiarity with the exam format. It was also good to see, in their compositions, candidates' positive reactions to the writing topic (Globalisation, Cultural and personal Individuality, Kikoku 'returnees', etc.). Many candidates discussed the topic from objective and subjective perspectives using a well-structured format.

Candidates and Teachers preparing for next year's exam, the following advice may help:

- To enhance students' linguistic knowledge, a gap-filling exercise could prove highly effective. To make the exercises more communicative, Teachers may take an appropriate passage from any 'real' material – e.g. a novel, newspaper, Internet page, manuals, etc. – and white out linguistic items for the candidates to fill in. Such linguistic items can be a conjugational form, particles, confusing expressions, linking expressions, referential expressions, etc.
- To enhance the students' communicative skills, interactive exercises such as an information - gathering game, 'paraphrasing' and 'rewriting for a particular purpose' are effective. From a piece of reading one student can pretend that s/he does not know a certain word or an expression in the passage and the other one has to rephrase/paraphrase it in an attempt to explain the mystery word/expression to the partner. The candidates can take turns in this exercise. They may agree or disagree on the paraphrase. Another exercise involves learning to write according to a specific genre. Again, a short passage is given to the students and they choose a job – such as a journalist, scientist, novelist, copywriter, etc. Depending on their 'occupation', they have to rewrite the discourse in accordance with the style appropriate to their job. Prior to this exercise, the Teacher may explain to the students about different genres, purposes and styles of writing. Alternatively, such information may be elicited from the students and discussed in class.

A truly communicative piece of writing consists of the following: candidates' good linguistic skills, good planning, a good sense of the implied audience (with attention given to coherence, relevance, logical consistency, clarity, style, etc.), and the writer's creative personality (i.e. s/he has something interesting to say in a convincing manner).

## Comments on specific questions

### **Part 1**

**Question 1** tests the candidates' ability to select, compare and summarise specific information from the two passages A and B. Further marks may be given to candidates who can express their opinions, thoughts, ideas, etc. clearly and coherently in relation to the reading. While relevance is one of the key elements, the composition cannot be a mere abridged copy of the reading passages: the candidates' original response to the chosen topic must be clearly, logically and coherently expressed. The word length is circa 400 words therefore unnecessary repetitions and circumlocution should be avoided. Good planning prior to the writing is crucial. Orthographic conventions need to be followed sufficiently, too.

A few candidates were able to produce well-planned, well-balanced compositions using a good format. An example of suitable format employed by candidates is as follows:

- First, state very briefly (no more than a sentence or two) what the shared topic (in the passages A and B) is. Alternatively, give a very brief statement about one's reaction to the reading passages (e.g. the stories are surprising, moving, familiar, etc.). This constitutes a very short Introduction.
- Secondly, refer to the contents of passages A and B. For example, give a brief summary and/or a brief account of the theme in common and differences of opinions or perspectives expressed in passages A and B.
- State one's own impression of the two passages, describing how the facts and experiences described in the passages are similar/dissimilar to his/her own viewpoints/experiences.
- Give a short concluding remark. For example, state one's thoughts, analyse the reasons for the current situations described in passages A and B, give suggestions, and/or predictions for future situations.
- Of course there are other possible formats, too, but whatever the format the candidate chooses to use, the structure of their composition must be clear and well thought-out. For this, pre-writing planning is crucial and Teachers are strongly recommended to incorporate it into their teaching items.

**Question 2** invites a response to the passages in a variety of forms (e.g. a selective summary, a letter, a report, a speech, a script of a conversation or broadcast, a continuation of a story, or expressive development of an idea in the passage, etc.)

This question tests the candidates' ability to write more creatively and communicatively using high-level linguistic skills. Needless to say, the composition must be relevant to the topic (the title in this case), logically consistent, coherent and succinct. It is also expected to follow a style accepted for the genre. Like in **Question 1**, accurate and appropriate use of Kanji, katakana, hiragana, punctuation and Genkōyōshi are also tested.

In **Question 2** the candidates' are asked to write a brief letter for a reader's column in a newspaper with the title "Internationalisation at/in school". First, the candidates must decide on a title which "reflects their idea", and then write in circa. 300 words their opinions, thoughts, ideas, etc., as well as giving a specific suggestion to make the letter convincing.

A few of the candidates were able to satisfy all the above requirements. However, many candidates struggled to express their ideas clearly and succinctly. Interestingly, weaker candidates, who lost the thread of their arguments in the middle of the writing, also omitted the title. Generally their final article was unclear and repetitive. Notably, stronger candidates gave a short title, which encompasses the argument to follow, and proceeded to discuss one clear idea, giving an example and a specific suggestion to conclude the piece.

Writing a shorter composition can be more challenging than an extended one because of the necessity to be succinct. Again, good planning prior to the writing is essential. Teachers are advised to incorporate into future lessons exercises such as 'giving a title to a reading passage' and 'writing a title'.

## **Part 2**

Questions in **Part 2** test the candidates' linguistic flexibility. Stronger candidates were able to express their ideas in various ways by rephrasing and paraphrasing, using appropriate words, grammar, expressions, etc. The exercises mentioned above might benefit the candidates greatly.

<p><b>Paper 0507/03</b> <b>Continuous Writing</b></p>
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**General comments**

The majority of candidates were able to write coherently with varied degrees of linguistic fluency. Some candidates displayed competence in writing in a discourse structure that is essential to Japanese composition and produced natural, convincing and interesting compositions as a result.

General improvement was seen in the following areas: Relevance of contents to the chosen topic, grammatical accuracy, Kanji, appropriateness in use of words and expressions. High-level linguistic skills were observed in paraphrasing and in the use of signposting and referring expressions.

**Comments on specific questions**

A selection of nine titles were given and called for the candidates' imaginative, narrative or argumentative response in an appropriate style.

Areas considered when marking are as follows.

- Material (Interesting, Appropriate, Mature, Detailed, Explained)
- Style (varied vocabulary, Sentence Structure, Sense of Audience, Linguistic Sophistication, Awareness of Style in Varied Situations)
- Structure (Paragraphing, Paragraph Links, Unity – Coherence, Structural effect - Cohesion, Start and Finish)
- Accuracy (Grammar, Punctuation, Usage of GenkōYōshi, Kanji).

Candidates are expected to write not only with linguistic accuracy, but also with clarity of argument and originality in the content. Furthermore, an appropriate style and discourse structure must be chosen according to the genre to which s/he is writing. For example, a fantasy requires originality and appealing story-telling methods, while a socio-cultural or a socio-scientific essay requires analytical and logical arguments and convincing reasoning.

Topic 1 is in the genre of fantasy writing, and thus, creativity and originality as well as coherent and appealing story-telling skills are necessary. Topic 9 is similar to Topic 1, but it uses a visual stimulus (a photo), and thus, the candidates' are expected to describe vividly what they see in the picture using appropriate expressions. Topics 2, 4, 5 and 8 require the candidates to indicate their standpoint first, then to develop analytical and logical arguments consistently. This, of course, requires an appropriate Introduction, Contents and Conclusions sections. Topic 3 is a free-essay in which candidates are tested for their creativity and richer linguistic skills to express a semi-fantasy world effectively. Topics 6 and 7 require candidates to give a clear and succinct explanation of the idiom and/or proverb – i.e. paraphrase the fixed expressions in more ordinary language. Candidates are then expected to give an original discussion in a coherent manner.

Across these topics, the writing contents should be relevant to the chosen topic, and needless to say, a clear structure – such as the typical Japanese format consisting of four sections KI, SHÔ, TEN, KETSU – in the composition is indispensable. Candidates are encouraged to plan carefully the contents prior to the actual writing. It was good to see that a few of the candidates displayed mastery of the “KI, SHÔ, TEN, KETSU” structure and the candidates and their Teachers are highly commended for this.