

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/02

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

Candidates across institutions performed competently. The majority of candidates were able to complete all sections in the time allotted and this was an improvement on previous years. Having answered all the questions, stronger candidates used the remaining time to make stylistic improvements to their work. Some candidates wrote rough notes on a separate sheet of paper and made improvements to those notes before copying the work into their answer booklets. This clearly showed not only the candidates' competence in writing, but also very good training.

Most candidates responded well to **Part 1, Question 1**, carefully selecting the key points in passages A and B and summarizing them succinctly, while contrasting the messages in the two passages. Weaker candidates tended to spend too long on lifting text from passage A and ran out of words to mention passage B.

Responses to **Question 2** varied in their levels of appropriate content and effectiveness of language use.

Part 2 is designed to test candidates' linguistic knowledge such as grammar, vocabulary, syntactic and discourse structures as well as socio-cultural appropriateness in language use (e.g. politeness indicated by Japanese grammar and vocabulary).

Candidates who score high marks in **Part 2** generally also achieve good scores in **Part 1** as they write fluently and with greater accuracy. However, there were a few interesting exceptions where linguistically weaker candidates produced good essays for **Part 1**. Typically, they employed simple vocabulary and basic, but accurate, grammar, and made maximum use of their simple style of writing to express themselves in an accessible and straightforward manner. The result was positive. Their style was consistent, and their discourse highly coherent.

No matter how advanced a candidate's vocabulary may be, if he/she fails to write coherently, or if his/her work is full of basic grammatical errors, the written communication simply breaks down, and thus the candidate cannot score high marks. This is an important point that should be made clear to candidates at this level.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Candidates' reading comprehension and writing skills are tested in two questions.

Question 1 tests skills in selecting, comparing and summarising specific information taken from the two passages (A and B). Further marks may be given to candidates whose writing demonstrates higher language proficiency and originality. Candidates are expected to write a short composition (circa 400 words) on a topic that is shared by the two passages. The composition cannot be a mere summary, but rather the material must be developed and expanded through clear, logical and coherent discussion. Given the required length of the composition, unnecessary repetitions and circumlocution should be avoided.

A typical format used by competent candidates is as follows:

- (1) First, state very briefly (no more than a sentence or two) what the shared topic is in Passages A and B. Alternatively, give a brief opinion of the passages (e.g. the stories are surprising, moving, familiar, etc.). This constitutes a very short introduction.

- (2) Secondly, refer to the contents of [A] and [B]. For example, give a brief account of the theme in common and list the differences of opinions in [A] and [B].
- (3) Thirdly, explain how the facts and experiences described in the passages are similar or dissimilar to one's own viewpoint/experience.
- (4) Fourthly, develop the argument further by analysing the personal viewpoint/experience, etc., then compare that to the situations/viewpoints that are described in [A] and [B]
- (5) Lastly, give a short concluding remark. This can be, for example, a short summary of the main points followed by suggestions, and/or predictions for future situations.

The above format is an example, and there are other possibilities, of course. The structure of the composition should be clear and well thought-out. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, good planning is essential.

Stronger candidates wrote a summary of circa 300-350 words (including a brief introduction) comparing the messages of passages A and B. The summary was followed by a personal opinion, suggestion, etc. in 50-100 words. Arguments arose naturally from the two passages, and a clear case was made for the chosen option using excellent grammar and wide vocabulary.

In contrast, weaker candidates developed the material in a somewhat wooden way and used less varied sentence structures and vocabulary. Nevertheless, some of them still managed to communicate messages sufficiently making the most of simple but accurate language use. These weaker but successful candidates' essays can be characterised by good paragraphing and accurate basic grammar and conjunctive expressions.

Question 2 invites candidates to respond 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, etc.). This question tests the ability to write creatively and communicatively in a given genre. Needless to say, the composition must be relevant to the topic. It should be logically consistent, coherent and succinct. At the same time a specific type of register and format deemed acceptable for the genre should be followed. As in **Question 1**, accurate and appropriate use of *Kanji*, *katakana*, *hiragana*, punctuation and *Genkô-Yôshi* are also tested.

This year, candidates were asked to write a brief article in circa 300 words on the theme of "Current state of the *free-ter*s (i.e. part-time jobbers)" for a short speech to be delivered over the school's public announcement system. Candidates were asked to state clearly whether they agreed or disagreed with the idea of the *free-ter* lifestyle as a career choice, giving reasons and personal opinions, or suggesting solutions if they perceived the increasing number of *free-ter*s to be a problematic social phenomenon. Needless to say, opinions should be stated clearly giving real examples to support the argument. This year's candidates generally responded to the question with a sense of immediacy and involvement. They tended to express their opinions in a straightforward, sincere, and convincing manner. For example, candidates chose the stance of either Passage A or B, and explained why, giving candid opinions that were supported by their personal experiences. Many candidates wrote that the phenomenon of increasing *free-ter*s is very relevant to their own lives because they knew someone in their circle of family or friends who had become one.

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/03
Continuous Writing

General comments

This year's candidates produced competent and original compositions. Successful candidates chose a topic that suited their linguistic ability and personal style of writing.

Many weaker candidates opted for story-writing and free composition in a simple style. Stronger candidates tended to choose a topic that required an analytical and argumentative approach. Typically, they demonstrated a wide range of vocabulary, employed complex sentence structures, and wrote coherently using a clear three-part (Introduction-Content-Conclusion) frame of discourse structure.

Some of the stronger candidates skilfully employed a traditional Japanese four-part discourse structure to maintain coherence in an authentic Japanese style. This discourse structure consists of the following four parts: KI (introduction of a topic), SHÔ (development on the topic), TEN (surprise turn – a literary device unique to Japanese composition), and KETSU (conclusion).

Following on from last year, some further improvements have been observed in the following areas: relevance of content to the chosen topic, clarity of arguments, coherence, grammatical accuracy, and paragraph links. Some improvements have been seen also in the areas of originality, *Kanji*, adequacy and appropriateness of lexical choices, although these tended to be amongst the stronger candidates only.

Examiners were pleased to see that, compared to a few years ago, there were far fewer compositions with negative undertones, expressions of hatred, depression and violence. However, the linguistic content of weaker candidates' compositions often showed (in variety and density) close resemblance to the linguistic contents of *manga* and popular games. An example of the influence of *manga* is textual inconsistency. For example, vocabulary fluctuated between colloquial and extremely archaic. Typically, sentences were short and haphazardly put together. Use of *manga* or popular magazine articles may interest learners, but their content and register are not necessarily adequate for candidates at this level.

Stronger candidates' compositions suggested that they have been amply exposed to a selection of good prose, which can be found in classical and contemporary literature and educational magazines.

Comments on specific questions

Nine titles were provided calling for candidates' imaginative, descriptive or argumentative responses in an appropriate style.

The marking criteria were as follows:

- Material (interest, relevance, exemplification, explanation, detail, and maturity);
- Structure (paragraphing, paragraph links, balance and cohesiveness in the overall structure, sentence sequence, structural effects, and clear beginning and end of the essay);
- Style (word range, sentence structure, sense of audience, varied style in the choice of vocabulary and structure, and stylistic effects); and
- Accuracy (grammar, punctuation, dialogue, word usage, spelling including *Kanji* use, and usage of *Genkô Yôshi*).

Linguistic accuracy, clarity of argument and originality of the content are essential for good writing. Furthermore, an appropriate style and discourse structure must be chosen according to the genre in which the candidate is writing, and they should be consistent throughout. For example, a creative piece of writing requires original content, appealing storyline, and an effective story-telling method, while a socio-cultural, scientific, or politically-oriented essay requires analytical and logical argument, convincing reasoning, and adequate examples to support the arguments.

This year's questions were as follows:

- 1 "We've been writing to each other for the past three years. We've written about our hobbies, families, and all sorts of things, so we know each other well by now, I mean, we should, should we not? ...but, we're meeting face-to-face for the first time today, and I'm getting nervous. Is it really going to happen? I'm not sure. Ah, that person over there, could that be the one...? No..., I guess not. Do I look OK? I do not know..." Continue from here and complete this story.
- 2 Discuss the topic, "spreading the use of biofuel", convincingly. Give reasons and/or facts to support your argument.
- 3 What a "relationship based on mutual trust" means to you? Explain your ideas using concrete examples to clarify your thoughts.
- 4 "Juvenile crimes are committed by an increasingly younger generation." Describe this phenomenon succinctly, and suggest possible solutions.
- 5 What can be done to promote recycling in homes and schools? Give your opinion clearly and make suggestions using concrete examples.
- 6 Write a composition using the expression "*shin-no-tomo* (a true friendship)".
- 7 What does the popular Japanese motto "*Shitsu-jitsu-gou-ken* (simplicity and fortitude)" make you think about? Write freely.
- 8 "Space development programs are a waste of time and money". Discuss whether you agree or disagree with this statement, and give reasons why. Supply concrete examples to support your argument and discuss logically.
- 9 Write a composition based on your impression of the picture below.
[Photo of a little girl feeding a newborn lamb with a milk bottle.]

Question 1 was a creative writing question and therefore, coherence, creativity, and effective story-telling were essential. The story needed to follow naturally from the lead-in provided using the same style and register. **Question 9** was also a creative writing question, but with a visual stimulus. Candidates were expected to describe vividly what they saw in the picture, and to develop the material by supplying an original story or by discussing issues expressed in the photo. For **Questions 2, 4, 5** and **8** candidates were expected to indicate their standpoint first, and then to develop analytical and logical arguments in a consistent manner. This required an appropriate three-part discourse structure consisting of Introduction, Content and Conclusion. **Question 3** was a free-essay on a given topic. Candidates' creativity and effective use of language to express personal opinions were tested. For **Questions 6** and **7** a clear and succinct explanation of an idiom/proverb was required. For example, fixed expressions may be paraphrased in more ordinary language, and a proverb can be explained by taking an example from everyday life. This should be followed by a discussion about the idiom/proverb in a coherent manner. Needless to say, the content of the essay should be relevant to the chosen topic in all cases. Candidates are encouraged to plan the content and overall structure before they start writing.