

FIRST LANGUAGE PORTUGUESE

Paper 0504/01

Reading

General comments

Most candidates showed a good knowledge of the Portuguese language, although analytical and compositional abilities varied.

Presentation was fair. Good presentation generally went hand in hand with a good performance. Some candidates produced very messy scripts with crossings out and unfinished sentences. It is important for the candidates to realise the value of forward planning before starting to write their answers. As a rule of thumb, one correct statement is worth one mark. Candidates need to be aware that every sentence or clause should provide new information in order to score marks. Care should be taken to avoid repetition, for example, which can limit the marks available for organisation and accuracy of language. If a question is worth say 5 marks, then candidates' answers should contain around five sentences (or subordinate clauses) in order to achieve full marks.

Both vocabulary and structures used were generally sufficient to complete the task in hand. Weaker candidates relied too much on the vocabulary and structure of the texts set, which at times marred the concision and accuracy of their answers.

Question 1 was well answered on the whole, though some candidates (and not necessarily the weaker ones) gave very long answers for questions worth just two marks. It must be stressed to candidates that the length of their answers should fit the number of marks available for successfully answering the question.

Question 2 really separated the strong candidates from the weaker ones. Strong candidates produced accurate summaries that were thoughtfully structured in order to compare and contrast the two musical forms described in the two texts. These summaries often started with a useful introductory sentence that set the tone for the comparison to come and closed with a sentence about the importance of samba and fado to their respective nations, or a reference to the speculation contained in the texts concerning the future of these two traditions. The weaker candidates just reproduced the facts contained in the original texts (often verbatim and sometimes repeatedly) without any attempt being made to draw comparisons or point out differences.

Vocabulary was seldom a problem. Some candidates showed uncertainty as to where to use accents. Some candidates confused *-am* with *-ão* in the third person plural of the preterite. Others confused the reflexive form of the third person present with the imperfect subjunctive (e.g. 'fala-se' for 'falasse').

Candidates should be reminded to read the instructions and the whole paper before tackling the questions. Especially in **Question 1**, information was repeated needlessly, a waste of time that could have been avoided by closer attention to the individual questions.

Question One

- (a) Some candidates wrote mini-essays rather than just drawing on the information available in the text in response to this factual question.
- (b) Generally fine.
- (c)/(d) Some candidates did not seem to understand what was meant by *século vinte*, or that 1919 was not in the second half of the twentieth century. This basic misconception detracted from a few otherwise sound answers, leading a few candidates, for instance, to put information that belonged in response to (c) in answer to (d).

Some candidates quoted excessively. There is little need to quote – whilst the occasional quotation is acceptable, this exercise is about how candidates transform the language given into their own words.

It was not uncommon for candidates to disregard the marks awarded for different questions and, for example, to write at length on a question worth just two marks and too little for a five mark question. As mentioned above, it needs to be impressed on candidates that the amount of marks available for a particular question should influence the length of their answers, and that one mark corresponds to one correct element. Some candidates divided their answers up into mini paragraphs. This would seem to be an effective way of separating out the component parts of an answer making up the overall mark.

- (f) Many candidates misinterpreted the final question as asking for their own personal opinion, whereas they were in fact being asked to refer to the relevant section of the article. It is important that candidates read the questions carefully, and that they should be aware of the difference in emphasis in the various parts of the examination on personal opinion. The reading component has little to do with personal opinion, the first half of this paper in particular.

Question Two

There is no real need for an introduction re-stating the rubric along the lines: *O samba e o fado têm semelhanças mas também têm diferenças* and no marks can be awarded for this. An introduction and a conclusion to this exercise are nonetheless important and candidates that provided these generally achieved high marks for style and organisation, at times showing considerable flair and insight.

The importance of organisation and development in this exercise cannot be overstated: summaries need to be planned to cover as much as possible without repeating points. No marks can be gained for repeating information already given. Indeed, under the new mark scheme where five out of 25 marks are awarded for style and organisation, excessive repetition can limit the marks that may be awarded.

The strongest candidates almost always adopted a strategy of identifying a general contrast/comparison and then giving details to illustrate it from each text. This would seem to be the most efficient way of proceeding. Weaker candidates tended merely to list details with little evidence of awareness of how they related to each other.

FIRST LANGUAGE PORTUGUESE

Paper 0504/02

Writing

General comments

Candidates at this session wrote two essays in line with the revised syllabus (instead of one as previously), one more factual one, the other more creative. On the revised syllabus candidates need to demonstrate their ability in both of these styles of writing. The overall mark for the component is 50. Candidates were awarded two marks for each of the compositions they had chosen to write. The first mark, out of a possible total of 12 for each composition was for style and accuracy. The second, out of a possible total of 13, was for content and structure.

It was encouraging to see that candidates generally had taken care to study the titles and to plan their work, leading to better organised and structured work. This was particularly noticeable in responses in the Discussion and Argument category, where many candidates decided on a point of view, defended their ideas and where possible reached clear conclusions. It is important for candidates to take sufficient time to study all the titles in both categories to ensure they choose those that best match their skills and knowledge.

A number of candidates were able to demonstrate a 'sense of audience', creating a feeling of expectation and holding the reader's attention. It was encouraging to see examples of the use of personal experiences and background, including quotations and references to celebrities and personalities from candidates' own context.

Some candidates demonstrated a poor knowledge of world news and current affairs. For example, many of those who wrote about the developing world's debts failed to mention the G8 countries or the Live 8 movement. Some showed a lack of awareness of contemporary aspects of the difficulties faced by heavily indebted countries.

On the language side, a number of candidates needed to exercise more care in spelling, punctuation and accentuation. There were examples of whole compositions which did not contain commas where these would have been appropriate. The same occurred with accents. Examples of repeated spelling mistakes include:

nessessidade; atravez; atraz; ezuberante; attitude.

Many candidates attempted to use Portuguese words as if they were the same as similar sounding words in English:

parentes; suporte; realisar.

As last year, there were examples of inappropriate language considering the fact that this is a First Language Examination.

Some candidates were confused about the endings of verbs in the plural:

estam; tam; falao.

In addition there was evidence of errors which have figured in previous years, notably in the use of pronouns. Some candidates had great difficulty in the use of pronouns with a direct or indirect complement, and with the position of the pronoun in relation to the verb. Sometimes they began a paragraph or sentence with a pronoun. There were problems with the use and position of hyphens:

me falou; lhe vi; me sinto; passar-las; comer-mos;

Other recurring errors included:

a, há and á; mas and mais; viagem and viajar; mau and mal; tudo and todo.

Incorrect use of ç: *conheçer; começei; precisar; ofereçer.*

Errors in the use of verbs in the subjunctive resulted in sentences which read awkwardly:

As pessoas acham que é melhor ...

Se eu conseguia viver...

This year the standard of presentation was generally better. Stressing the importance of keeping their answers to the stipulated length had clearly borne fruit with candidates, as well as the emphasis on the need for order and tidiness of presentation. These points have been raised in previous reports and it was pleasing to see the result of guidance given.