

FRENCH

Paper 1342/01 Speaking

General comments

The candidature continues to display impressive levels of linguistic competence which come from sound learning and enthusiastic individual research. Generally, candidates were able to engage in a mature conversation on an extremely wide range of fascinating topics. Candidates had researched their topics well and they were usually able to go beyond the factual and communicate their ideas and opinions on their chosen topic.

Most candidates were well able to talk articulately and in an enthusiastic way and were able to communicate effectively with the Examiner. The need for the Examiner to rephrase and reformulate questions was rare and communication was only rarely impeded by grammatical errors and errors of pronunciation. Candidates were usually able to respond well to the Examiner's questions.

The briefing sessions served the useful purpose of enabling candidates to ask any questions and for seeing and hearing the Examiner. Candidates are always reminded during this briefing that it is the candidate who is expected to be the expert on their topic and not the examiner and that the examiner is not there to catch them out but to draw them out. Centres had arranged these briefing sessions well and usually, all candidates arrived on time. Very occasionally, candidates arrived late for their examination. Please do stress how important it is for punctuality to be observed as it can be very off-putting for later candidates if timings have to be rearranged. It is very useful to have the final order of candidates displayed in a central area so that the examiner can remind candidates to check this before they appear again for the actual examination. This year, all candidates had been reminded to arrive with their topic title sheets (though few made use of these once they were underway). Some candidates, especially those presenting topics on artists, made good use of visuals to support their material. All Centres are thanked for providing good quiet examination rooms and, especially this year, for managing to timetable candidates in a very busy and demanding period of the school year, given several external factors over which they had no control. Centres are also thanked for making candidate topic titles available in good time before the examinations took place and for ensuring that all mark sheets were ready for the examiner at Centres.

It continues to be a strength of this examination that candidates are free to pursue their own area of interest and have chosen their own topics. It is clear that many find it to be a stimulating and challenging learning experience. Candidates frequently expressed very valid reasons for their choice of topic and many said they had found it to be an interesting and worthwhile experience. Many had decided to choose a topic which complemented their other Pre-U studies – i.e. chose an artist from their Music or Art studies for example. Some chose to talk about a famous French person, but it is worth emphasising to candidates at an early point that unless they can go beyond the factual/narrative approach and discuss ideas and opinions, it will be hard to satisfy the marking criteria which feature in the upper bands of the mark scheme. Topics on some historical figures, sports stars or film stars should be treated with caution as they are sometimes difficult to exploit fully in the following discussion. Certain figures are however an excellent choice as they present an area of debate or controversy which can be followed up and which give the opportunity to express relevant opinion. The topics on food and drink can also pose the problem of being limiting as they may give few opportunities to go beyond the factual/narrative approach.

All topics chosen fell within the requirements of the specification to be able to relate them to francophone culture. Among the literary topics chosen were Maupassant, Ronsard, Baudelaire, Pagnol and Anouilh. Films and directors proved more popular this year than last and again, historical figures such as Jean Moulin, Marie-Antoinette, and Napoleon were popular choices. It was also pleasing to see that some candidates turned to social/political issues such as the recent demonstrations, the economic crisis and proposed social reforms as there was plenty of interest to discuss. Topics on sport and fashion also featured as did the work of several painters and musicians. Le Corbusier was also chosen by several candidates this year. Please do remind candidates that their topic titles will be broad areas of discussion but that the Examiner will always

follow up areas of interest and aim to make candidates express their ideas. This should be taken into account when they make an initial choice of topic.

Factual knowledge and Opinions

Presentation technique again varied amongst candidates. Some well organised candidates used their initial presentation minute to give a broad overview of what they intended to cover whereas some candidates plunged straight into their first topic title – an approach which was usually less successful. Many, this year, had clearly practised the pace and timing of their initial presentation and this made the transition from presentation to discussion smoother. Most were successful in shifting register between the presentation and discussion without too much difficulty but candidates should be reminded that if they choose to present initially in the Past Historic (which is not an examination requirement) they should be prepared to answer questions in the Perfect tense.

Most seemed clearly aware that their views and justifications and explanations of these views were required but there was again a marked tendency with weaker candidates to want to spend too much time on outlining biographical factual details which did not always have huge relevance to the later life or works of the chosen person. All candidates should think carefully about an angle for discussion which goes beyond the purely factual and narrative when considering the topic titles. A chronological approach to a famous person's life is not necessarily the best one! Luckily most candidates managed to avoid this trap and were able to discuss their points of view freely.

Language

Nearly all candidates were able to show that they had progressed well beyond the linguistic requirements of GCSE level. Many made confident use of the subjunctive and passive and could manipulate compound tenses well. Weaker candidates often managed to use such structures in their presentation but found it difficult to maintain such usage in the discussion. Some candidates were less secure of verb endings when discussing in the third person singular. An area which still poses problems to some is the use of adjectival agreement, particularly when used in comparisons. Candidates still experience some difficulty in manipulating numerals, particularly when expressing dates and statistics.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation was generally very sound and in some cases very impressive in spite of some cases of anglicised pronunciation and intonation which occasionally impeded communication. Vowel sounds were good but there were many instances of poor pronunciation of the *r* and *é* sounds.



FRENCH

Paper 1342/02 Reading, Listening and Writing

General comments

This was the third year of this examination. As in the first two years, there was a high proportion of able and very able candidates who were well equipped and well prepared to handle the various exercises, and who appeared to enjoy the challenges. Although a small number of candidates struggled with some elements, the overall standard of the answers produced was highly commendable again.

Although the paper is made up of several different exercises, candidates did not appear to have been under undue pressure of time. This was helped at least in part by a refreshing willingness to make the necessary point(s) in the comprehension exercises succinctly and without unnecessary preamble or addition, and to proceed to the next question. Although a few of the weaker candidates tended to try to include as much material from the text as possible in their answers to the Reading Comprehension section in the hope of including some of the required information in the process, this was not true of the majority. The Reading Comprehension questions in French are designed to discourage wholesale copying/lifting word-for-word from the text (as indicated in the instructions) and candidates generally avoided the temptation, but see specific comments in **Questions 25-30** below.

Candidates need to be sure to answer the comprehension questions in the language specified at the start of the individual exercises.

Listening

Questions 1–5

This first listening test was generally well handled. Occasional candidates misheard *en semaine comme le weekend* and chose *seulement samedi et dimanche* in answer to **Question 1**, and problems with understanding *à moitié prix* and *à domicile* accounted for some incorrect guesses in **Questions 2** and **5**, but generally candidates got off to a confident start.

Questions 6–12

Gilous and *coiffures bizarres* made occasional appearances in **Question 6**, whilst *accessoires* gave rise to *excessoires* or even *accès soir* in **Question 7**. **Question 8** curiously generated *arbillier* for *habiller* and *monde* for *mode*, and there was some confusion over who was buying or selling what. Some candidates appeared to guess at *une honte* (*hante/haunte*) but the majority were able to transmit the meaning in other ways. *Les droits* was needed for the mark in **Question 10**, which ruled out *les doigts* amongst other spellings. *Poursuivis en justice* caused understandable difficulties in **Question 11** (*injustice; pour suivre*), but less understandable was *dans l'arrus* for *dans la rue* in **Question 12**.

Questions 13–19

Ten times a month was an improbable estimate of how often people change mobile phones in **Question 13** (*dix* was not uncommon for *dix-huit* here). *Tiroir* was not always understood in **Question 14i**, and *un proche* was sometimes misunderstood as *a neighbour*. **Question 15i** produced *tried* for *triés*, whilst *controlled* was not acceptable for *contrôlé* in **Question 15ii**. **Questions 16–18** were well handled, although some thought that people without phones were being given money and others took things too far in saying that phones were recycled to cure global warming.

Reading

Questions 20–24

This exercise held few fears for most candidates, although some couldn't identify television as the most frequent source of news in **Question 20**. *Un quotidien gratuit* was generally understood (**Question 21**), although some were too vague in simply saying that *l'âge a changé* (**Question 22**) or *la presse populaire est plus simple* (**Question 23**).

Questions 25–30

Both parts of **Question 25** needed the replacement of the present participles of the text by *pour augmenter...*; *parce qu'ils veulent séduire ...* or similar. Correct answers to **26 i** and **ii** depended on identifying *image* and *nom* as the essential elements. Indiscriminate copying from the text (*il y a une association inconsciente et spontanée ...*) cost some candidates the mark in **Question 27**. **Question 28** produced quite a few candidates who thought that the point of companies opening their purses or wallets was to collect money rather than to spend it. Candidates needed to make a minimum of simple manipulations of the text in **Question 29** (*elles peuvent accélérer/garantir leur notoriété* etc.) and to avoid the 'lift' of *à condition que* in **Question 30**.

Questions 31–40

The text was generally well understood by the majority of candidates. **Question 32** required both elements of *larger families giving rise to less time* (to worry). Presumably a mis-reading of *savon* for *soin* laying behind the curious *buying soap for brothers and sisters*, whilst *frères et soeurs cadets* also gave rise to *siblings in the army* in **Question 33**. The improbable *their children will be given a chess piece* (*vivent des échecs*) appeared as top of one list of parental fears in **Question 34i**. *Se débrouiller* caused more predictable difficulties in **Question 36**, but a large number expressed this idea commendably well. The occasional candidate thought that *getting soaked* (*se tromper*) was an essential part of a child's development in **Question 37**. *Crainte* and *s'ennuient* (get annoyed) were not always understood in **Questions 38** and **39**. The more improbable consequences of parents not allowing their children to walk to school (**Question 40**) ranged from *blisters*, to *the soles of their feet not being stopped from getting soft*, to *the surface of pavements constantly needing to be repaired*.

Writing

Questions 41 (a) and 41 (b)

Content

Both topics (mobile phones in Schools in **Question 42(a)**, and cosmetic surgery in **Question 42(b)**) appeared to be of interest to candidates and provoked lively and thoughtful responses. The issue of mobile phones was clearly close to the heart of many and generated more responses, but whichever topic they chose, most candidates had ideas and opinions which they were able to express in a coherent and convincing manner.

The better candidates both made direct reference to the texts to provide evidence for their arguments (whilst resisting the temptation simply to regurgitate the given material) and supported their views with relevant evidence from their own experience. They were also generally willing to use the opportunity offered in the final task to broaden the range of the issue under discussion. Weaker candidates were less confident in moving away from the vocabulary and structures provided by the text.

It is strongly recommended that candidates organise their essays into the five paragraphs suggested by the questions/prompts. Commendably, nearly all candidates covered at least to some extent all the five tasks, and helped themselves considerably by working through them sequentially and systematically. There was evidence of an ability to organise an answer and to use paragraphs appropriately. They also helped themselves considerably by observing the 220–250 word requirement and organizing their material succinctly within it rather than producing over-wordy and rambling essays which tend to degenerate linguistically as they go on.

Language

As in previous years, the overall standard was very encouraging and nearly all candidates could use the language sufficiently accurately to convey most of the intended messages. The stronger candidates displayed a most impressive range of vocabulary and idiom and a sensitivity to appropriate register.

There were predictable errors in verb forms among the weaker candidates, but tenses and modal verbs were generally manipulated with a good degree of confidence and competence. Impressive too was the confidence with which many candidates handled the subjunctive and incorporated it (usually naturally enough) into their essays.

Some candidates' work was marred by basic errors of agreement and pronoun usage, a somewhat phonetic approach to spelling and a reliance on anglicized vocabulary and structures. Elsewhere though, an encouraging proportion of candidates demonstrated a refreshing level of security in their handling of the language, and an ability to add variety through the confident use of adverbs/adverbial phrases and adjectives.

Some candidates were perhaps a little over-anxious to press into service as many pre-learned stock 'essay phrases' as possible, even if they were sometimes somewhat repetitive and of questionable relevance in the context, but many candidates wrote with a spontaneous flair and fluency which made their essays a real pleasure to read.

The report inevitably focuses on areas in which candidates lost marks, but this should not obscure an overall high level of performance from a generally very able cohort of candidates.