

FRENCH

Paper 1342/01 Speaking

Key messages

In order to do well in this examination, candidates should:

- choose a topic which gives them plenty of scope for discussing ideas and opinions
- use the 1-minute presentation to introduce the topic that they wish to discuss
- make use of a range of grammatical structures.

General comments

Centres are again to be thanked for the efficiency with which they dealt with the administrative arrangements for the examination, and for ensuring that arrangements ran smoothly.

In a few instances, the receipt of candidates' topic forms was slightly delayed: Centres are reminded that receipt of the topic forms is required at least two weeks before the Examiner's visit and in hard copy by first class post. It is also helpful wherever possible to receive the timetable in advance.

For the one-minute presentation, most candidates made good use of the opportunity to introduce the topic that they wished to discuss. Centres are reminded to emphasize to candidates that their introduction should not exceed the one minute specified in the syllabus. If it does, the Examiner will interrupt them in order to move to the discussion.

Factual knowledge and opinions

The majority of the candidates' performances fell into the good and very good bands. Only a small number of candidates seemed to be insufficiently prepared for the examination. As in previous years, a very wide range of topics were chosen. Perhaps the most important point to be stressed in this regard is the need to choose a topic which gives sufficient scope for the expression of ideas, opinions and reactions. In the discussion, the Examiner will seek to go beyond the factual in order to assess the depth of the candidate's understanding of the field which he/she has investigated and submitted to a certain degree of analysis. It is harder to do this if the chosen topic is too factual in nature, and this can make it difficult for candidates to access the highest marking bands for the content of the discussion. This year, examples of topics which proved especially successful include: an author or a particular literary work; a film director or a particular film; a composer; an artistic movement or a particular artist; socio-political aspects of a target-language country. Examples of subjects which tended to present fewer opportunities for discussing ideas and opinions include: food and drink; specific geographical areas; famous buildings; famous sporting figures.

In a small number of presentations this year, candidates seemed to rely on text which they had learned in advance, and at times this was delivered in such a way that it was not clear that the candidates fully understood all the points made.

Although most candidates seemed to be very well prepared to participate in a genuine discussion based on the topic they had researched, a minority found it more difficult to answer questions for which they had not already prepared answers in advance.

Language

As far as language was concerned, in terms of both range and accuracy, a wide range of ability was in evidence. At the higher end, candidates made confident and effective use of a wide range of structures. In weaker performances, candidates sometimes used anglicized vocabulary and sentence structures. The use of verb forms and tenses was another area for improvement in weaker performances.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation and intonation was generally very sound, although anglicized pronunciation and intonation occasionally featured in weaker performances. Almost all candidates this year demonstrated a level of pronunciation and intonation that was satisfactory or better.

FRENCH

Paper 1342/02 Reading, Listening and Writing

Key messages:

- In the Listening exercises, it is usually a good strategy for candidates to try and link the sounds they hear to words which they know and which make sense in the context, rather than relying on phonetic transcription.
- To perform well in the Reading exercises, it is important to provide answers which are based specifically on what the text says, rather than writing down an answer which seems plausible in the context but is not backed up by information in the text.
- For the Writing element of the paper, the practice of tackling the five bullet points in five separate paragraphs is strongly recommended. It is also advisable to keep to the suggested word limit in order to sustain quality of language and argument. Candidates are advised to avoid over-reliance on stock 'essay phrases' and to consider whether the expressions used are appropriate to the context.

General comments

As in previous years, the proportion of able and very able candidates taking this examination was high. A small number had more difficulty with questions which tested productive skills, but the overall standard of performance in this paper was very commendable.

Candidates seem to have coped well with completing the various tasks in the paper in the time available. In general, candidates answered questions concisely and without unnecessary preamble or addition. Most took advantage of the instruction that they did not need to write in full sentences in the Comprehension exercises. The Reading Comprehension questions with answers in French are designed to discourage wholesale copying/lifting word-for-word from the text (as indicated in the instructions). Most candidates avoided the temptation, but at the lower end, a few candidates gave longer chunks of text in their answers.

All candidates answered the comprehension questions in the language specified at the start of the individual exercises.

Listening

Questions 1-5

Performance on the first listening test was generally good. Candidates found **Question 2** the most difficult in this exercise: some candidates misunderstood *retirer*, and this misunderstanding led them to the choice of *permettra à la personne de prendre sa retraite*. Similarly, a few candidates were led by *la veille* in **Question 3** to choose *par une dame âgée*. In general, however, candidates got off to a confident start.

Questions 6-12

Most candidates tackled the exercise with a fair degree of success, although attempts to transcribe phonetically did not always lead to successful answers. Examples include: *limitez s'avitesse* (**Question 6**); *les feux soient des gagés* (**Question 11**); *le jeste de brusque* (*brisque* was also common) / *se faire un douceur* or *éviter des églises* (**Question 7**). Although the answer 'Changer de route' was plausible for **Question 10**, there was no evidence for this in the text. The idea of clearing snow off the headlights proved elusive for some (**Question 11**), but the ideas of over-confidence and healthy fear were usually well understood (**Question 12** and **Question 13**), and sometimes rendered with creativity: *des champions au/du volant*.

Questions 14-25

Questions 14 to 17 were successfully negotiated by the majority, although expression in English was sometimes awkward (*a formidable work team*), but the idea of gliding/switching off the engine escaped a fair number in Question 18. In Question 21(i), the comparative length of the planes was often given instead of the wingspan. Questions 22(i) and (ii) were answered correctly by virtually all candidates, but several had problems in identifying future plans in Questions 23-25, some of which at least were caused by a misunderstanding of *actuel*.

Reading

Questions 26-30

Questions 26 and 28 proved to be accessible to most candidates. In Question 27, some had difficulty finding a comprehensible form of *s'enfuir* or *courir*. A number thought that the passenger had spent the night in the comfort of the hotel or somewhat less comfortably on its roof rather than in custody (Question 29). Others did not understand the missed flight connection as the reason to spend the night in the hotel stay (Question 30), seeing it as part of a compensation package *pour dommages et intérêts*.

Questions 31-37

Most candidates managed to explain recent changes in the law regarding the sale of cigarettes and their impact (Question 31 and Question 32), although a few candidates wrote that it was a question of teenagers selling cigarettes rather than buying them, and also that Mme Beaumont was penalised by the fact that *le tabagisme* and *le fumage* had been banned. The difficulties involved in checking customers' ages were explained well (Question 33), but some candidates had difficulty in finding an appropriate verb to accompany *maquillage* (*prendre* or *donner* being offered). Some thought that a refusal to sell cigarettes would result in tension (or even violence) between young people (Question 34). Candidates found several ways of expressing the idea of *scepticisme* (*ne sont pas convaincues/persuadées/expriment des doutes ...*) but *scepticales* could not receive credit (Question 35). There were also some creative ways of expressing the idea of *une adaptation à la française*: (*les Français savent très bien fermer les yeux sur/ignorer les lois qu'ils n'aiment pas*). A significant number of candidates gave *les Françaises* rather than *les Français* (Question 37).

Questions 38-45

Importante and *permis* were clumsily expressed in English by some candidates in Question 38, and there was some difficulty in Question 39 with expressing the sense of *Ce n'est pas qu'avec les mains que l'on conduit* – 'you don't drive with your hands' was given by a number of candidates. In Question 40, the answer 'Most French people result in accidents' was given in some scripts. There was also evidence of misunderstanding of *appuyer sur la bonne touche* in Question 41(ii). In response to Question 42(iv), some candidates suggested that drivers spend time examining the sides of their cars, or gave too vague an answer, such as *looking at things nearby*. It was the idea of crossing the central white line that earned the mark in Question 44(i) rather than simply switching lanes. *Ralentir légèrement* caused problems for a number of candidates in Question 44(ii) (*slow down abruptly or brake lightly*). *On the motorway* and *in town* were too imprecise to score for Questions 45(i) and (ii), and some were unable to find acceptable English renderings of *sur la bande d'arrêt d'urgence*: for example, 'at the emergency stop stations' could not receive credit here.

Writing

Questions 46(a) and 46(b)

Content

The two topics (alcohol and young people in Question 46(a), and sport in Schools every afternoon in Question 46(b)) both captured candidates' imagination and provoked lively and thoughtful responses. The issue of alcohol and other forms of addiction generated the greater number of 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 strongest responses included direct reference to the texts to provide evidence for the arguments made (whilst avoiding the temptation simply to regurgitate the given material). In such answers, candidates supported their views with relevant evidence from their own experience. In other words, they used the texts as a prompt and a spring-board. 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 showed less confidence in moving away from the vocabulary, structures and ideas provided by the text.

Candidates almost invariably organized their essays into the five paragraphs suggested by the questions/prompts, which is strongly recommended. 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 organize 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-long essays which tend to become less accurate linguistically as they go on and are therefore self-penalizing.

Language

As in previous years, the overall standard was very encouraging and nearly all candidates could write in sufficiently accurate French to convey most of the intended messages. At the top end, candidates displayed a most impressive range of vocabulary and idiom and wrote in an appropriate register for the task.

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. Many candidates showed impressive confidence in their handling of the subjunctive and incorporated it in their essays naturally for the most part.

At the lower end of the ability range, candidates' work tended to contain a number of basic errors of agreement and pronoun usage, a somewhat phonetic approach to spelling and a reliance on anglicized vocabulary and structures. An encouraging proportion of candidates demonstrated security in their handling of the language, and an ability to add variety through the confident use of adverbs/adverbial phrases and adjectives.

In some scripts, there was a tendency to include pre-learned stock 'essay phrases' even if these were sometimes repetitive and of questionable relevance in the context. This could result in rather contrived and stilted phrasing. On the other hand, many candidates wrote with a spontaneous flair and fluency which made their essays a pleasure to read.

Whilst this report inevitably focuses on areas for improvement, it should be reiterated that the overall performance of candidates was of a high standard.