

MANDARIN CHINESE (Principal Subject)

Paper 9778/01

Speaking

Key messages

- There were some excellent performances on this Speaking component
- For the Topic Presentation, candidates should choose a topic that is of interest to them and which they are able to talk about with the language they have at their disposal.
- Candidates should prepare for the Topic Conversation by anticipating the kinds of questions an interested layman might ask about their chosen topic.
- In the conversation sections, candidates need to be prepared for straightforward questions but also ones which will stretch them.
- Candidates should be encouraged to get into the habit of developing their answers, even to straightforward questions.

General comments

There are two parts to this examination – **Section 1** is a Prepared Topic and Topic Conversation and **Section 2** is a General Conversation. The Prepared Topic is marked out of 15 with 10 marks for Content/Presentation and 5 marks for Language. The Topic Discussion and the General Conversation are each marked out of 15 with 5 marks for Comprehension and Responsiveness and 10 marks for Accuracy and Range of Language. In addition, 15 marks are awarded globally for Pronunciation/Intonation (5 marks) and Feel for Language (10 marks). This gives a total of 60 marks.

The Speaking examination is scheduled to last between 12-15 minutes. The Prepared Topic and Conversation should last 5-7 minutes and the General Conversation should last 6-8 minutes.

The Speaking examination is the opportunity for the candidate to show the Examiner what he/she can do; the practice and preparation before the examination with the candidate's own teacher should focus on this. The topic for the topic presentation should be carefully chosen; the topic should be of interest to the candidate, and, equally importantly, should be something that it is well within the candidate's reach to talk about with the language at his/her disposal. Where this is not the case, the presentation can sound somewhat stilted, and a candidate can be left rather exposed if he/she is then unable to engage in the Topic Conversation. The candidate should not necessarily cover all aspects of the topic in the presentation, but might choose to leave out one or two obvious things which can be picked up by the Examiner in the Topic Conversation.

The Examiner will try to make it clear to the candidate when they are moving from the Topic Conversation to the General Conversation and, wherever possible, will also signal the transition between topic areas within the General Conversation. For candidates taking Mandarin Chinese as a Principal Subject, the Speaking examination is conducted by an external Examiner with whom the candidate will not have spoken previously at any length. This makes the listening element of the examination significantly more testing and so clear indication of movement between topics is intended to help to avoid any confusion in the conversation. Teachers should practise this with candidates before the examination. Examples of the sentences used by the Examiner are 你今天讲什么题目? and 现在我们讲一讲其他的题目, 好不好?

Candidates have time during the year to work on their Prepared Topic and should be able with practice to present fairly fluently. This initial presentation should last a maximum of two minutes, but thereafter will be interrupted by the Examiner if necessary so that the conversation can take place. Whilst tones and pronunciation are not expected to be perfect, the presentation should be easily understood by a sympathetic native speaker; candidates should have a good feel for the rhythms and cadences of the language within the sentences.

Teachers get used to understanding their own candidates and making allowances for their errors, but the candidates need to present their topic in such a way that they can be understood by the visiting Examiner. Candidates will score highly on the Prepared Topic when they also demonstrate they have prepared well both in terms of the content of what they say and the vocabulary and the structures used – e.g. good use of conjunctions, correct word order and time frames, etc.

In all cases, the best conversations ensue when the Examiner asks good, open-ended questions to which the candidate can respond on a variety of levels, depending on ability. Teachers can prepare candidates for this; the Examiner will play the part of the intelligent layman in the Topic Conversation and will be genuinely interested to talk with the candidate about the Prepared Topic. Candidates need to prepare for the Topic Conversation by anticipating and making sure they are ready to answer the kinds of general questions which could be asked by an interested layman. For the General Conversation, although sample questions are suggested in the syllabus, these are for guidance only. In the examination, it is likely that a majority of questions asked by the Examiner will **not** be taken directly from this list, though they will be of a similar standard. Rather than asking a series of pre-prepared questions, the Examiner will seek to follow up what the candidate says so that a spontaneous and natural conversation develops. During their course of study, candidates should be encouraged to develop the vocabulary and linguistic skills to answer a range of questions both on their Topic Presentation and during the General Conversation.

In both conversation sections, the Examiner will keep the flow of conversation going in as relaxed a manner as possible. Candidates need to be prepared for straightforward questions, but also ones which will stretch them. As well as having a conversation, they need to regard the examination as an opportunity to show the Examiner what they can do, thus maximising their chances of good marks, which are obtainable with a natural, responsive conversation showing good use of vocabulary, structures and idiom. At this level, candidates should be encouraged to develop their answers, even if they are asked a very straightforward question. Candidates should not worry if they do not understand a question; they should ask for it to be repeated or rephrased (this request should be made in Chinese); if they still do not understand it, the Examiner will do their best to move swiftly on to another question.

The Speaking examination is led by the Examiner, but it is the candidate who should be doing most of the talking and the Examiner will be flexible enough to adapt questioning to a candidate's line of thought, so that a proper conversation can take place. If a candidate has areas of a topic where he/she feels particularly confident, it is up to the candidate to try to respond to questions in such a way as to demonstrate this to the Examiner. Candidates should not worry that their answer to a question is factually untrue or does not really reflect what they think; the Examiner is only interested in the level of their Chinese and will not judge them on their opinions.

Cambridge Pre-U Mandarin Chinese is an examination for foreign language learners. Therefore, native speakers of Mandarin who have a well-prepared topic may, in all likelihood, score maximum marks. However, it is the standard required for the foreign language learner which will be borne in mind by the Examiner as the testing and marking of candidates takes place.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Principal Subject)

Paper 9778/02

Listening, Reading and Translation

Key messages

- Most candidates had been well prepared by Centres and their performance was generally very strong to outstanding.
- Centres are advised to familiarise candidates with the layout and the structure of the examination. Specimen papers and past papers (2010-2012) will be very helpful in this respect.
- Listening is a skill which requires thorough preparation and candidates will benefit from extra practice listening to authentic recordings, especially in terms of differentiating between the 2nd and 3rd tones. Candidates continue to find the recognition of tones in the *Listening* section a demanding task.
- In preparation for the *Reading* section, Centres must introduce and develop the necessary dictionary skills. They should provide candidates with sufficient practice in using a dictionary to enable them to become familiar with the various features, so that they can find information quickly and efficiently. When candidates tackle the open ended questions, they should be encouraged to provide full answers.
- Centres should remind candidates that thorough preparation combined with careful checking of their work in the examination will guarantee a high score in **Section 3** (*Chengyu*).
- In the *Translation* section, candidates should not be over-literal. Instead, their objective should be to use their common sense in order to produce translations which read naturally. They should avoid word-for-word renderings of the original as these are unlikely to convey meaning.

General comments

The content of the examination clearly reflected the prescribed themes and topics for Pre-U Mandarin Chinese as expressed in the teaching syllabus, and was of an appropriate level of difficulty. Most of the candidates had been adequately prepared for the examination and were presented at the level in the National Qualifications Framework appropriate to their ability.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Listening

In general, candidates delivered commendable performances in the *Listening* section, especially as listening in an exam situation is a daunting prospect for some. Listening comprehension has been shown to be the most demanding component of language examinations, and this was the section which produced the greatest divergence in terms of candidate outcomes. Once again, candidates are to be congratulated on the quality of their summaries for **Exercise 4**.

The identification of *Pinyin* with tones (**Exercise 1**) sometimes proved challenging, as follows:

- Initial – differentiating between x and z.
- Tones – differentiating between 2nd and 3rd tone continues to cause difficulties.

There seemed to be evidence of a substantial amount of guesswork from candidates who could not identify the subject matter of the *Listening* texts accurately. Although an educated guess is better than to leave a blank, extra time spent practising this skill in the classroom should mean candidates are less likely to encounter difficulties in the examination.

Section 2 – Reading

There were very strong performances in the *Reading* section of the paper, especially on answers to objective questions.

Some marks were lost due to a lack of precision, possibly resulting from guesswork. For example, in **Question 13** candidates parsed the sentence incorrectly, assuming that the mention of the left hand related to not eating with the left hand, rather than the correct answer which was not to pass food with the left hand. Candidates should be encouraged to practise close reading of both the question and the text.

Section 3 – Chinese sayings (Chengyu)

Most candidates dealt with this task with great confidence. Candidates should be reminded that even their literal translation of the saying must still convey meaning. For example, a translation such as ‘point deer to be horse’ did not score as it conveyed nothing to the Examiner.

Section 4 – Translation

In general, the *Translation* section produced very strong performances. Some candidates were able to translate the entire passage completely accurately. Candidates should be encouraged to make good use of the dictionary, but not to allow the dictionary to over-rule their own judgement. They need to be reminded that a literal, ‘dictionary’ rendition of the words of the original can result in a poor quality or distorted translation. Candidates must cultivate the habit of re-reading their translation to ensure that it **(a)** reads like correct English and **(b)** conveys the meaning of the original text.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Principal Subject)

Paper 9778/03
Writing and Usage

Key messages

- As in previous years, there were some excellent performances on this Writing and Usage component.
- In order for future candidates to improve their performance, they should be encouraged to focus on working at their character strokes, consolidating their knowledge of basic Chinese grammar, expanding their use of more complex sentence structures, and enlarging their vocabulary beyond GCSE Level.
- When writing the letter, candidates should take care to start and finish it properly.
- For the opinion essay, it is important that candidates develop a series of coherent arguments supported by detailed examples. They should include a brief and clear-cut introduction and a strong conclusion. Candidates will also find it helpful to draft a simple essay plan before they begin writing the essay itself.

General comments

There are three sections to this component. **Section 1** tests candidates' knowledge of the radicals and strokes of Chinese characters, as well as Chinese grammar in terms of grammar markers and measure words. **Section 2** tests candidates' ability to write a letter according to a series of specific bullet points. **Section 3** requires candidates to write an opinion essay on one of the six pre-determined topics. The total marks for the paper are 60. **Section 1** is marked out of 10 with 6 marks for the character exercises and 4 marks for the grammar ones. **Section 2** is marked out of 20 with 5 marks for Communication and 15 marks for Language (5 for Accuracy of Characters and 10 for Accuracy of Grammar and Structures). In **Section 3**, the Opinion Essay is marked out of a total of 30 with 20 marks for Accuracy and Linguistic Range and 10 marks for Development and Organisation of Ideas.

This year's candidates did extremely well on Exercise 1, **Questions 1(a), 1(b)(ii) and 1(b)(iii)**; Exercise 2, **Question 2(b)**; the coverage of the bullet points in Exercise 3, **Section 2**; and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures as well as the structure and argument of the essay in Exercise 4, **Section 3**. Exercise 1, **Question 1(b)(i)**, Exercise 2, **Questions 2(a), 2(c) and 2(d)** proved the most challenging in **Section 1**. In **Section 2**, the areas where there was room for improvement were in candidates' use of a wider range of vocabulary and their handling of more complex sentence structures. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of checking their work in order to avoid making careless mistakes which will be reflected in their marks. In the opinion essay, those candidates who showed they could manipulate a wider range of vocabulary, make proper use of more complicated sentence structures, and develop a well structured argument scored highly. Successful candidates often draft a brief essay plan before they start writing the essay itself.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Radicals, strokes and grammar markers

Candidates performed well on Exercise 1 which required them to work with characters. The stroke order of character **(i)** (拙) proved challenging. It is worth paying attention to such seemingly simple characters. To be more successful on Exercise 2, the grammar exercise, candidates ought to revise the tense indicators and grammar markers which form unusual word order in Chinese, e.g. 把, 所, etc. Candidates also should pay more attention to the three different *de* particles in attributive (的), adverbial (地) and complementary (得) structures. Candidates should be advised to attempt all questions.

Section 2 – Letter writing

Candidates wrote very good letters to make enquiries about the summer camp in Qingdao. All were careful to cover all four bullet points. However, the start and finish of the letter could be improved. Generally, characters were well drawn and a reasonable range of vocabulary was employed. In terms of Accuracy of Grammar and Structures, candidates were more successful when writing simple sentences. More complicated structures were also attempted with varying degrees of success. To access the highest marks in this section, candidates should be encouraged to make use of words and characters clearly beyond the level of GCSE. They should also be encouraged to use compound and complex sentences, as well as comparatives and negatives where appropriate. It should be noted that the colon is used after the addressee of the letter. In closing a letter, the term 'hereby' (此致) is placed on an imaginary vertical centre line, and the term 'salute' (敬礼) is generally followed by an exclamation mark.

Section 3 – Opinion essay

Candidates chose to respond to four out of the six essay titles provided on the question paper. They produced excellent essays that were both interesting and convincing. The essays began with a clear, to-the-point introduction, which led into an organised and well-developed argument; and also the more successful essays finished with a strong, pithy and logical conclusion. Candidates made use of a very good range of vocabulary and both simple and complex sentence structures. In order to achieve even higher marks in this section, candidates could be encouraged to draw upon more detailed examples to illustrate the points they are making. In terms of Accuracy and Linguistic Range, candidates need to pay attention to the meaning of words in a specific context (not just the primary definition in the dictionary), to their control of conjunctions, prepositions and punctuation, as well as focusing on the confident and proper use of more complex sentence structures. The best pieces of writing flowed fluently and naturally from beginning to end in a coherent and logical manner.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Principal Subject)

Paper 9778/04
Chinese Culture

Key messages

- Questions are open to interpretation and it is important that candidates start by considering the wording of the question and outlining the approach they will take.
- There is often no right or wrong way to answer a question: it is up to the candidate to develop an argument and produce evidence to support it.
- As well as facts, answers should include discussion (backed up by examples), analysis and evaluation.
- To score highly, candidates must write a well-argued essay which is clear and focused.

General comments

Candidates are required to answer two questions for this paper, one from the *Topics in Chinese Culture* section and one from the *Chinese Literature and Film* section. Each answer is marked out of 30 with a mark out of 25 for content and a mark out of 5 for structure. In all cases, questions are open to interpretation; it is up to the candidate to develop an analytical response to the question with clear, specific examples/evidence (not generalized statements) to back up his/her argument. The Mark Scheme gives some indicative content for each question on the paper. However, there is often no right or wrong way to answer a question; it is up to the candidate to develop an argument and find evidence to support it. There were some very successful essays which demonstrated in-depth analysis backed up by specific reference. In general, candidates seemed to find **Section One** – *Topics in Chinese Culture* – slightly more challenging.

Candidates should make sure they read the question very carefully before they start, making a careful assessment of what is asked for; they should have a plan before beginning to write.

Each essay should start with an introduction which should outline how the question is going to be tackled; candidates should avoid giving away the conclusion to the essay in their introduction. Subsequent paragraphs should develop a clear argument/line of thinking with specific, relevant examples/evidence to illustrate the argument, which should always link to the question, and essays should finish with a strong conclusion.

Essays should not be a list of facts or the story of what happened in a period of history, a novel or a film. Candidates obviously need to have a lot of facts at their fingertips, but then need to be in a position to manipulate those facts to demonstrate their deeper understanding and analytical capability in response to the question. Evaluation is the key. Organisation of material is vital and an appropriate style should be used. In the case of *Yellow Earth*, candidates need to have a good grasp of the Chinese history of the period in which the film is set and also of the context in which it was made and released. The two sections of the syllabus can be mutually supportive in this respect – for instance if candidates choose to study the founding of the PRC and *Yellow Earth*, or Chinese Economic Trends since 1978 and *Red Dust* (to a lesser extent).

In order to be able to respond to these essay questions appropriately, candidates need to be exposed during their studies to a range of commentaries/view points about a particular topic and to have had the opportunity to discuss ideas with their teachers and other candidates to inform their interpretation of events or their interpretation of a book or film. It is only this exposure to a variety of views that will give candidates the ability to handle these essay questions with sufficient analysis.