

Oral component

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students acquitted themselves well in the conversation section, but some performances deteriorated markedly in the discussion and this was a matter for concern.

Certain areas require improvement. Students should:

- be familiar with the criteria and be well prepared
- realise that a conversation is an exchange and not simply a matter of question and answer
- know that there are various ways of asking the same question
- be willing to go beyond a simple response and build on comments made by the assessor/s
- be able to self-correct and seek clarification
- be able to express ideas/opinions and justify them
- be able to use language spontaneously in unrehearsed situations and not rely on pre-learned material
- know strategies for gap-filling
- know how to make reference to texts studied and be able to link opinions to those.

Whilst the Conversation and Discussion criteria are the same they assess two very different tasks; one is on familiar matters, the other focuses on the Detailed Study which requires a more objective approach, so that the language is less predictable. The criteria assess:

- the student's capacity to maintain the exchange appropriately and effectively
- the relevance, breadth and depth of information
- accuracy, range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar
- clarity of expression.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – General conversation

This task involves a conversation about the student's personal world, for example school and home life, family and friends, interests and aspirations.

The revised format of seven minutes often resulted in a more natural exchange as assessors could pursue one topic in depth and were not obliged to cover three of the five prescribed areas as previously in CAT 2.

Good performance reflected sound preparation. The best students displayed the ability to elaborate on their answers and move the conversation forward. It was evident that these students had practised gap-filling techniques and strategies for linking with assessors. Hesitations were rare and a consistent pace was maintained throughout the assessment. Less successful students, however, made frequent false starts, responded at the most basic level, relying heavily on memorised passages. There was a paucity of content and the range and accuracy of vocabulary were poor.

Section 2 – Discussion

The choice of sub-topic for the Detailed Study is crucial. A good choice would reflect the interests of the student, suit their language capacity and promote discussion of the resources studied. Descriptive topics, such as the regions of France, do not generally promote discussion, the voicing of opinions or generate new ideas. Thus a poor choice of sub-topic may inhibit the student's chances of meeting the criterion which assesses 'relevance, breadth and depth of information'.

Good students outlined the sub-topic within the one-minute time limit, stating whether the topic was Text or VET, the title of the sub-topic, giving a brief elaboration of the sub-topic and letting the assessors know whether any support material had been brought.

During the Discussion the more capable students drew upon three or more varied resources in different text types, displaying a thorough knowledge of both the topic and the resources studied. They experienced little or no difficulty in expressing ideas and opinions and substantiating them with pertinent evidence. At this level, students demonstrated an extensive range of vocabulary and consistently used complex structures and accurate language.

By contrast, some students were not sufficiently well prepared and were unable to speak of different aspects or provide opinions about their topic. The range of resources was often inadequate, with a number of students quoting no written resource, or citing only the Internet. Some students were unable to demonstrate an adequate knowledge of

texts they had allegedly studied, whilst many were unable to show links between topics and texts. The least successful students were reluctant to express opinions or enter into discussion and fell back on pre-learned material.

A small percentage of students were unaware of the revised format of this section and attempted to respond with a two-minute report as in the former CAT 3 examination. In some instances the topics selected were beyond the capacity of the student, being either too complex, too narrow or too broad.

Written component

GENERAL COMMENTS

The tasks were designed to assess students' capacity to understand general and specific aspects of texts and to respond accurately and appropriately in French. Most students achieved creditable results and they coped well with the themes and topics prescribed.

Section 1 – Listening and responding

Part A

Students were able to demonstrate understanding of the texts and in most cases selected at least some of the points required for each response. Questions on Molière (Question 7) and on the perfumed candles (Question 8) proved to be the most challenging. Most students gained at least 1 mark for Question 7, but many were unable to pick up the fact that Molière was absentminded. Some students thought that Text 4 related to perfume not to scented candles.

Possible answers

Text 1

Question 1

(push) button number 2

Question 2

public parks or gardens

Question 3

arrive early

Question 4

bring warm clothes or rugs

Text 2

Question 5

Cost – \$25000

Room features – bathroom, (refrigerated) minibar, cable TV

Other facilities – gym and heated pool

Booking, if wife agrees

Text 3

Question 6

generosity and absentmindedness

Question 7

the beggar told Molière that he had made a mistake in giving him a gold coin and offered to give it back

Text 4

Question 8

(decorative) candles

perfumed

Grasse is the traditional centre of perfumery

Question 9

finished by hand or moulded by hand

Question 10

2–3 days

Part B

In this part of the task students were required to demonstrate the capacity to understand general and specific aspects of texts and convey information accurately and appropriately. Many students found this to be challenging. Whilst many responses required phrases or short answers, some required a complete sentence. Where indicated on the paper, the more successful students provided complete sentences in excellent French, grammar and spelling almost free of error, and with correct content. A high proportion of students answered in phrases or isolated words where a sentence was required. A significant number misspelled common words like siècle and Seine, whilst many could not distinguish between the sounds *race/russe*, *treizième/troisième*, *description/inscription*.

Although complete sentences were required in certain answers, students were credited with some marks if an element of the answer was correct. The standard of language of the least successful students was often poor and spelling was inaccurate, the perfect tense not known and, in some instances, it was difficult to decipher what the student was trying to say.

Possible answers

Text 5 (sentences required)

Question 11

On peut entendre les informations sur les grands travaux historiques.

Question 12

Le roi Philippe Auguste (II) a fondé l'université de Paris au treizième siècle.

Question 13

On a choisi le bateau-mouche parce que l'histoire de Paris est liée à son fleuve. (liée à la Seine)

Text 6

Question 14

deux de ces conditions:

(a) un chien de race

(b) trois photocopies du certificat de vaccination contre la rage/vaccination contre la rage

(c) une feuille d'inscription

Question 15

trois des choses suivantes:

(a) marcher parfaitement en laisse

(b) aller à pas rapides et lents

(c) se tenir immobile/droit sur les pattes

(d) se laisser toucher et examiner par une personne qu'il ne connaît pas

Question 16

(sentence required)

Il ne doit pas réagir aux bruits (et aux mouvements) de la foule or Il ne doit pas bouger.

In order to better manage listening and responding tasks, students should:

- practise sound-discrimination exercises, e.g. distinguish between the sounds of words such as troisième/treizième
- practise picking out key points in French listening texts
- respond in complete sentences or phrases as required
- spend their ten minutes' reading time looking at the questions in Section 1 of the examination as this is what they will tackle first
- listen intently from the outset and practise the necessary skills by listening, for example, to spoken French in films or the news on SBS
- make notes in the margin of the examination paper while the examination is in progress
- consult their dictionary for unknown words during the pauses between the first and second readings of texts
- know their tenses and a range of vocabulary from the Themes and Topics table.

Section 2 – Reading And Responding

Part A

This section is designed to assess the students' capacity to understand and convey general and specific aspects of texts. A high proportion of students obtained good scores in this section, with some receiving full marks for Text 8. Some answered this section in French, thus throwing away a significant proportion of marks since they did not read and follow the instructions.

Possible answers

Text 7

Question 17

(TV) presenter/newsreader

Question 18

one of these points – perfectly proportioned/elegant, always well-groomed

one of these points – reads the news in several languages, has a confident, well-modulated voice

Question 19

will not grow old

will not get sick

can be modified to keep up with fashion

can be on several shows at the same time

Question 20

- People may grow tired of seeing the same person on all channels or standardisation of personalities

Text 8

Question 21

Two of: poverty of the population/rapid deterioration of the economy/AIDS epidemic has depleted the population

Question 22

Sophia ran away from her father's second wife and her employer, on both occasions because of mistreatment

Question 23

physical instability

mental instability

Question 24

BIT allows them to go school while working

It places them in integration centres

Question 25

Sophia does voluntary work in a girls' refuge

Question 26

one of government/welfare agencies

Question 27

the abolition of child labour

To perform well in this section students should:

- read extensively in French
- select a wide range of texts in different text types
- try to determine the gist of the passage without looking up every word
- check the meaning of key words which appear frequently.

Part B

In this section of the examination, students are required to demonstrate their capacity to understand general and specific aspects of a text and their ability to convey information accurately and appropriately.

The task was to reply to a French penfriend's letter in which she expressed her concern about the plight of the Pyrenean bear. Students were required to respond to the following questions raised in the letter:

1. *T'intéresses-tu à l'environnement?*
2. *Y a-t-il des espèces menacées en Australie?*
3. *Fais-tu partie d'un mouvement écologique?*
4. *Quelles mesures de protection sont utilisées dans ton pays?*
5. *Connais-tu des moyens d'action efficaces pour sauver les espèces en danger?*
6. *A qui faut-il faire appel?*
7. *Fais-moi part de ton expérience.*
8. *Ecris-moi tes suggestions sur ce problème.*

There were some excellent responses in this section. Most students observed the conventions of letter-writing by including a correct date (after receiving the letter), an address and an appropriate salutation at the beginning, and closure. More successful students answered all questions appropriately, producing pieces of quality writing in appropriate style, register and text type, and within the prescribed word limit. Information was well sequenced and structured with a beginning, a body and a conclusion.

Less successful students, however, did not satisfy the requirements of the task, presenting pieces which were often not paragraphed, too short or too long. This resulted in certain questions remaining unanswered or extraneous material being included. Some students ignored the questions altogether and wrote on other aspects of the environment. The least successful letters lacked fluency and cohesion and were frequently characterised by inaccurate transcription or faulty language (e.g. *c'est une vraie tragédie, ce autres, je vais aider dans la bagarre pour l'environnement mais je suis paresseuse*).

Students should:

- make a plan so that the writing is well-structured and flows
- avoid irrelevant details
- use paragraphs, topic sentences and ensure that sentences lead on logically from one to the other
- use appropriate connectives
- write in the appropriate text type, style and register
- observe the word limit
- allow time for proofreading.

Section 3 – Writing in French

This section of the examination is designed to assess the students' ability to express ideas through the creation of original text in French. Students were required to write 200–250 words on one of four topics. The choice by the students was fairly evenly spread over Questions 29, 30 and 32. Generally, they presented pieces containing interesting content, although there were a number who failed to explore ideas in any depth. The level of language ranged from outstanding to simplistic or poor. The most successful pieces showed evidence of a planned response, starting with an introduction, proceeding with relevant facts, logical sequence of ideas, leading from point to point with appropriate illustrations and ending with a considered conclusion. The quality of language was excellent, demonstrating sophisticated structures and some idiomatic expressions. The writing of less able students suffered in content, form and grammatical and lexical adequacy. A small proportion of students ran out of time and were unable to finish this section, indicating the need for more careful planning and time management.

Question 29 provided reviews on films such as *Moulin Rouge*, *La Haine*, plays such as *Antigone* or musicals such as *Les Misérables*. More successful students presented a well-balanced evaluation of a film/show/play, mentioning not only the aspects they enjoyed but also those aspects which were less appealing. These students had obviously familiarised themselves with the main characteristics of different kinds of writing and common text types (French Study design pp.48–50). Their writing used an objective style and created an impression of balance and impartiality. The writing was consistently accurate with a good range of complex structures and vocabulary. Less able students failed to discuss aspects which were not to their liking. Frequent spelling mistakes and grammatical errors also marred their writing.

In **Question 30** almost all students were aware of the conventions of journal-entry writing. This topic allowed a number of highly talented students to express themselves creatively. The pieces produced by these students were engrossing from start to finish. Many described life on another planet, and how technology had revolutionised their

lives. Those who made a poor choice in selecting this topic, however, put themselves at a real disadvantage, as they often had no interesting insights to offer. Some students merely described their present daily routine, but added a date in the future. Many were unable even to conjugate common verbs in the future tense.

For Question 31 many students took the opportunity to insert the sub-topic of their Detailed Study, with varying degrees of success. Some were skilful enough to adapt the content to the required text type but a number simply wrote a description, rather than a report. The most popular topic was *La Révolution Française*.

In **Question 32** most students were familiar with the conventions of writing a scripted speech and made impassioned pleas for tolerance towards their classmates and members of their family. A common line of argument was, that if people were not tolerant, how could there be peace in the world? Many students used appropriate techniques and language to prove their point. There were, however, some students who were unable to use the subjunctive or the imperative mood which was necessary in this type of text.

Students should:

- practise writing regularly in French on a variety of themes and topics
- be aware of time and word constraints
- read pieces written by their classmates, exchanging pieces to correct errors and provide reader feedback
- plan their response before attempting to write
- be familiar with the common text types and styles of writing
- know key elements of the grammatical concepts listed in the French Study design (pp.14–16).