

French (continuers)

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Languages Learning Area

FRENCH (CONTINUERS)

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: ORAL EXAMINATION

General Comments

The performance of the majority of students was more than satisfactory. Fewer than 20% of students scored half marks or less for both the conversation and discussion sections of the oral examination. Approximately half achieved scores of between 11 and 16 out of 20 for the conversation, and between 6 and 8 out of 10 for the discussion. A third of students scored more than 17 out of 20 for the conversation and 9 or more out of 10 for the discussion.

Overall, students understood and answered the questions, but there was little evidence of depth of thought or reflection, and few students were able to give more than superficial opinions or answer 'why' questions for which they had not prepared.

Despite the good scores achieved by most students, some examiners commented that students were not as well-prepared as in previous years, especially in the conversation section of the oral examination. More students asked for assistance with vocabulary during the examination.

Students should listen carefully to the whole question asked by the examiner and reply to what is asked rather than delivering a prepared answer to a keyword in the question. In order to enable a natural flow to the conversation, students should elaborate on their responses and justify their opinions.

Section 1: Conversation

Most students managed to maintain a conversation, sometimes with significant support from the examiner. A number of students had learned answers directly from the guideline questions provided by the SACE Board, and so were unable to respond appropriately if a question was phrased differently. Students performed best when they engaged in natural and interesting conversation, and this approach was more successful than a memorised approach, which often resulted in conversations that were grammatically correct but stilted.

Most students answered the questions satisfactorily, although many provided considerable general information but were not able to expand on original ideas presented. In more successful conversations students elaborated on responses rather than only stating facts. Some students relied heavily on examiners' questions, rather than offering opinions and comment, which would have achieved a more natural conversation.

Pronunciation was accurate overall, despite a tendency to pronounce final consonants and some trouble differentiating 'u' and 'ou' sounds. The most successful candidates were able to speak using natural speech rhythms and appropriate intonation to demonstrate their reactions.

Possessive adjectives continue to cause some problems ('mon mère', 'ma père'), and the use of object and emphatic pronouns needs to be more frequently rehearsed. Often, students used Anglicisms or even spoke in English when they did not know the appropriate word in French.

Students used good structures when asking for clarification and repetition, but few students showed real sophistication in sentence structure. Sometimes subjunctives or 'si' clauses were used effectively, but more often inappropriately or out of context. Management of past and future tenses was a problem for some students, and others answered questions relating to future plans in the past tense. Responses ranged from basic sentences missing their verbs, to fine and complex sentence structures which demonstrated an excellent command of tenses. There were evident gaps in vocabulary, and few colloquialisms or idiomatic expressions were used. Students should learn and practise using the vocabulary and structures relevant to all aspects of the theme 'The Individual' to perform well in the conversation.

Most students seemed well-prepared for this examination and knew what to expect, although many had memorised answers to standard questions, which reduced their ability to engage spontaneously. These conversations lacked additional information relevant to the question, or included irrelevant information that was drawn from the rehearsed material.

Very few students brought support materials to use in the conversation section of the oral examination. Those who did spoke well about topics directly related to their photographs but were less able to talk about other topics raised by the examiners. Students are reminded that the conversation is not restricted to photographs or other support materials when students have brought them.

Students should be given ample opportunities to speak French in the classroom, and encouraged to engage in French conversation with others outside of lessons. This practice should supplement other resources for students, such as vocabulary lists and lists of useful expressions.

Section 2: Discussion

Most students maintained the discussion of their In-Depth Study better than the conversation section. The discussion was generally more assured and accurate than the conversation, although some students mispronounced key words for their topic, often pronouncing them 'à l'anglaise'. Students were able to draw on prepared materials, but even so, many students did not know essential vocabulary for discussing their topic, left phrases or sentences incomplete, or said they did not know the answer. Students who experience difficulty in this area should remember that it is best to start again and rephrase their answer. In many instances students waited to be asked the next question when they had offered their answer, rather than trying to elaborate on the topic or guide the examiners into a genuine exchange of information.

Most students were able to provide essential information, although some did not go into depth or provide opinion or comment beyond the superficial 'J'aime la nourriture française' or 'C'était intéressant'. The most successful were well-informed, shared what they knew in detail and with enthusiasm, and were able to comment on a personal level to demonstrate that they had engaged with and thought about their topic.

For most students the vocabulary used was accurate and appropriate although Anglicisms were sometimes used when vocabulary was forgotten or lacking. Sentence structures tended to be rather basic, and students repeated errors made earlier in the conversation section.

More successful discussions featured greater range and sophistication than in the conversation section, although few students managed to use the passive voice correctly, dates were an issue for some, and expressions of possession tended to follow the English pattern.

Very few students brought support materials with them and most of these used them effectively. The use of images of paintings was common and assisted the students to explain artistic styles and techniques. Students taking up the option to bring support materials should be very clear about why they have chosen them and how they will contribute to discussion of the topic.

The vast majority of students completed enough research to be able to talk about their topic, and the best-prepared used a variety of resources to acquire information. A few students relied on personal experience, which did not provide enough knowledge or understanding for an in-depth discussion.

Students chose a broad range of topics, but most relied on straightforward, easy-to-research subjects rather than looking for something that would provide insight into the francophone world and cultures. Simple topics tended to result in an average performance; simply recounting biographical details or describing favourite French foods did not allow enough depth of treatment, and often did not contain enough information to keep the discussion going for five minutes.

Some topics were more difficult to research, but were more successfully discussed as they provided both intellectual and personal engagement. Students are reminded that resources which allow deeper engagement with their topic are vital for success in the In-depth Study.

Most students were able to talk about the dot points written on their In-depth Study outline, although sometimes points effectively closed down discussion rather than introducing areas to explore. It is recommended that students aim to write dot points that progress logically from one to the next to foster a more natural discussion.

Some students were not aware that they needed to prepare an outline to bring to the examination. Others had written only the titles of the three tasks they had completed, and had prepared to talk about these tasks rather than about the topic as a whole. It is important for students to show that they have thought about the topic they have researched and that they have some opinions about what they have learnt. The In-Depth Study requires some reflection and analysis rather than just recount, and the choice of topic is key to success. Students should select a topic that genuinely interests them, and make sure that the scope of the topic is manageable.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 4: WRITTEN EXAMINATION

General Comments

Section 1: Listening and Responding

On the whole, students performed as well in this section as in the rest of the examination. Very few students scored full marks but several scored 18 or 19 out of 20 and the average mark was 13 out of 20. Those who understood question 2 did quite well overall. This was the question students found most difficult to answer, and it produced some interesting answers.

To respond successfully, students should be able to interpret what each question is asking, and clearly understand which information is relevant to which question.

Text 1

Most candidates scored full marks for this text. The most common misunderstanding was that Bill and his family ('femme' being understood as 'famille') were looking for a house. Some students located the house in Australia.

For question 1 (b) students needed to state in which ways it measured up to his requirements.

Text 2

The average score for this text was 44%, and almost half the candidates scored 0 or 1 out of 4. A large number of students misheard the word 'potable' as 'portable', and so completely misunderstood the question. Twenty-four candidates scored full marks as they successfully differentiated the purpose of the advertisement from the issues it raised. Many candidates gave the same answer for both questions 2 (a) and 2 (b), and students are reminded that questions will require different responses and repetition within or across questions should be avoided.

In question 2 (b) the most common error was thinking that 'plus d'un million et demi' meant two-and-a-half million. Some understood the numbers and some did not. Many did not mention specific numbers, but understood the gist of the message very well.

Text 3

Very few candidates scored full marks for this text and the average score was 62%. A number of students thought that tractors, boats, and caravans were commonly seen in cities.

In question 3 (a), most did not specify that this was a weekly program. The other difficulty students had was the inability to say 'debate', instead of which there were many convoluted responses to explain the nature of the programme.

Responses to 3 (b) often featured poor English expression and a lack of coherent structure in the answer. A number of answers began by saying that Charles answered Patricia's points very well, but contradicted this later in the answer. Some expressed strong personal opinions about 4x4s. To respond successfully, students needed to state clearly which of Patricia's points Charles answered and how well he did this, as well as identifying the points he did not address.

Text 4

This text was handled much better than texts 2 and 3: thirty-six students scored full marks and the average score was 73%. More successful responses featured clear expression in English as well as good understanding of the text.. Answers to 4 (b) and 4 (c) often included overlapping information. A common misunderstanding was that Paul was going to bring back souvenirs for the class, which indicates that students did not pick up on the fact that he had completed Year 12 and was about to take a year off. Often, students misinterpreted the text to enable them to use a familiar word, rather than thinking of a different word that was more appropriate.

Section 2: Reading and Responding, Part A

Although the texts were quite challenging, this section of the examination was answered better overall than the other sections. To do well, the students needed to:

- ensure that they had read each question correctly
- provide relevant information in answer the question
- relate their response specifically to the stimulus text.

More successful candidates understood the need to avoid repeating the same information both within and across questions. Students should focus on developing skills to distinguish exactly what points are relevant to which question, in both listening and reading comprehensions.

Text 5

The vast majority of students scored between 3 and 5 out of 6 for this question. To answer fully, it was necessary to locate information spread throughout the text.

In answering 5 (a) many candidates referred to history and culture more than to language. Students are reminded to answer precisely what the question is asking.

Most students were able to work out that the Québécois were 'tout petits' because there are not many of them compared to the number of Anglophones in North America, although some students took the 'tout petits' of question 5 (b) out of context and misunderstood what the question was asking. For reading and responding activities, students should remember to consider the whole context.

Many interesting words were used to describe the tone of the text in question 5 (c), for example, 'patriotic', 'natural', and 'strong'. Questions about tone are regularly included in the examination but students continue to have difficulty in describing tone and justifying their interpretation. It was also essential to justify the description with direct reference to the text.

Text 6

Approximately one-quarter of students scored 4 or less out of 9 for this section, and only fifteen students scored full marks.

Most students scored well for question 6 (a) as there were many aims which could be correctly cited. Students performed less well either because they wrote very little or repeated themselves.

Responses to question 6 (b) were generally good, the best ones directly answering the 'how effectively' question and then quoting relevant words used by the speaker.

Few students scored full marks for question 6 (c). Although the question starts with 'compare', a number of students focused on how the texts were different. The word 'feel' was mostly ignored and most students wrote in general terms instead of quoting from the many emotive words used in both texts.

Students are encouraged to gain more practice in making a generalisation and supporting it with specific examples from the text.

Section 2: Reading and Responding, Part B

General Comments

In this section one-third of students scored 6 or less out of 15, one third scored 13 and above, and the rest achieved between 7 and 12 out of 15.

Few candidates managed to write a response which was convincing on all fronts. Often, the language used left something to be desired, but many did not demonstrate a full understanding of the stimulus text, or wrote answers that were limited in depth and relevance. A number of responses were significantly below the minimum word-count of 200.

Most candidates produced a response which fitted the requirements of the text type, but there were a number of 'formal letter' responses which provided a date and place, and signed off formally. The use of 'Hello' or «Allo» with 'mon amie' was not appropriate and many candidates paid little attention to 'M' or 'C. Dupont' and signed off as Lola, Natasha, Paul, Alex, or Phoebe. There was less mixing of 'tu' and 'vous' than in past years.

In very few responses the expression was authentic and personal. Successful responses would adopt a conversational tone, but in fact many responses were stilted and stiff, without the personal touch that might be expected in an email.

Many candidates misread this text to some extent. The apartment discussion was often inaccurately handled, because many candidates did not clearly understand that this was a shared apartment for two students going to university.

The way in which the apartment was described was important to responding successfully. The clear implication in the text was that the students would be living in Paris or another French university city. To talk about a large three-bedroom flat with two bathrooms, in the centre of town, and close to the beach, or with a swimming pool on the property, was culturally inappropriate. A number of students spoke about buying the apartment, showing that students did not really think through the situation of the correspondents.

Students did not read the stimulus text closely enough, so that some hoped that the holidays were going well (this information had already been given in the postcard), and some misread 'île déserte', locating M in the Sahara. Very few tried to allay M's worries by responding to the idea of 'm'inquiéter', which might be expected in a normal response to such a text, and most students missed the fact that, in France, students start university in October.

There was significant confusion toward the end of the responses, for example, on the subject of when M might get the response or meet up with C. Dupont again. The allusion to reading emails once back in the airport was lost on many, so many endings were less successful here. Some students wrote that M's photos had already arrived, although this is clearly not the case according to the postcard.

It is important for students to read what the text says and respond to it in detail. Selecting only one or two points to elaborate on, or changing the subject so that the response moves away from the stimulus, will produce a less successful response.

It is recommended that students try and think themselves into the situation described in stimulus texts rather than drawing on their own experiences in formulating their response. They should demonstrate awareness of the cultural and social context described, or implied, in the stimulus text.

Students should practise writing using different 'voices' (formal, informal, serious, humorous, persuasive, indignant, and so on) so that responses read authentically. It would be good to practice describing the same situation in several different ways or using different tones.

Most students were able to convey information in a logical fashion and structure a reasonable response, but few had complete control over verb and tense usage. The more successful responses used sophisticated structures and natural expressions effectively.

Section 3: Writing in French

General Comments

The average score for this section of the examination was 13 out of 20, with eleven candidates scoring full marks. Fewer students scored at the lower end of the spectrum than in previous years.

Most students wrote at least the minimum number of words, and generally they interpreted the questions well and fulfilled the requirements of the task.

Almost equal numbers of students chose questions 8 and 10; a small minority chose question 9.

Students should plan their response before beginning to write it to ensure that they will have enough to say on the topic. If possible, they should choose a topic and approach that will allow them to demonstrate some depth in thinking and a good range of vocabulary and structures. They should avoid topics for which they need to look up almost every word in the dictionary.

Teachers should ensure that students are exposed to a variety of text types and that they understand the essential features of each of the text types required in the

curriculum statement. Ideally, students should learn that the style of each text type is quite distinctive and have opportunities to practise writing varying tone and style.

Very few students digressed from the set topic, but only the most successful students treated their topic in enough depth.

Question 8

In question 8 the most successful responses were thoughtfully handled, although some students did not justify opinions based on their own experience. Not all students who chose question 8 remembered that an article requires a title; some wrote in far too personal a fashion for an article which requires a more objective point of view than a diary.

Question 9

Question 9 was not very successfully treated and some students wrote an account that was too personal. Very few candidates were able to manage the report text type appropriately in question 9. The layout was rarely correct and most students wrote in far too familiar a tone. A report is a formal piece of writing which requires statistical and other information presented in such a way as to lead to a conclusion and make a recommendation.

Question 10

In responding to question 10, most students wrote about a disagreement over a boyfriend or girlfriend, and such responses were limited.

Students used a reasonably wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures. There were some accurate pieces of writing but, in many cases, the use of negatives and tenses was less successful. Students were unable to form the passé composé and did not demonstrate that they knew when to use the imperfect. Subjunctives were not generally used systematically or to good effect.

The distinction between direct and indirect object pronouns was not clear at all, and pronouns were often positioned incorrectly. Responses often lacked adjective agreements, and only the most successful students understood agreement with the preceding direct object.

A number of students ignored the wording of the question in French and so did not use 'se disputer' or 'faire du sport' correctly or failed to register that they were presenting 'pour une station de radio française'.

Students are encouraged to develop and practise their skills in using a dictionary.

Nearly all responses were logically structured and more successful responses avoided repetition.

There were some excellent examples of a diary entry in question 10, but some students did nothing more than recount their experience which is not sufficient for a diary entry where reflection and speculation are required.

Chief Assessor
French (continuers)