

Japanese (continuers)

2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

# Japanese (continuers)

# 2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Interaction

Common topics included school life, future plans, hobbies, and family. Some schools discussed more difficult topics, such as social and political issues; however, some students found it difficult to answer questions on these topics accurately.

In some interaction tasks, students responded to a set of questions on one or more topics. Where schools had given students a set of questions and teachers asked each question from the list, this resulted in memorised responses. Where lists of questions were used as a guide or starting point, and students were asked a variety of questions on the topics, students were able to demonstrate an A level in Expression (E3), as responses were more spontaneous and conversation was initiated.

For some students, although responses were relevant, the conversation lacked depth. Students are encouraged to go beyond a one sentence response. This gives students the potential to achieve a better grade in the depth of Ideas.

Teachers are also encouraged to use open-ended questions to give students the opportunity to discuss areas of interest and to provide opinions.

In some cases it was noted that the teacher was doing more talking than the student, which may limit the student’s opportunity to demonstrate their ability.

Most schools adhered to the time limit of 5–7 minutes for interaction tasks; however, a few schools exceeded this limit. Schools are reminded that work beyond 7 minutes is not assessed.

Text Production

Common topics included travel to Japan, homestay experiences, and job applications.

Common text types included letters and speech scripts. Some schools used a stimulus text for students to respond to, but the majority of schools required students to write a creative text on a given topic. If students are responding to a stimulus text, it is helpful for the school to include the text as part of the task sheet in the package. The design of tasks should specify context, purpose, and audience.

Most tasks enabled students to achieve high levels in the Ideas and Expression assessment design criteria. Students must demonstrate an extensive range of complex linguistic features, with few errors, to achieve an A level in Expression*.*

Text productions varied in length, and although there is no word-limit in Assessment Type 1: Folio, most schools set character counts of approximately 600 characters. In some cases, text productions that were less than 400 characters did not enable students to demonstrate Ideas (I2) *Depth of Treatment of Ideas, Information, or Opinions.*

Drafts are not required to be submitted for moderation.

Text Analysis

A range of topics was covered, and materials from previous clarifying forums were also used by some schools. Reading and responding tasks were predominant, with few schools choosing to use listening tasks.

Teachers are advised to not just use a percentage to calculate a grade, results must be referenced to the performance standards. Past examination comprehension and listening tasks generally focus on assessing IR1, so teachers are advised to consider the suitability of these tasks, and amend as appropriate.

Many schools did not assess analysis of the language in texts (IR2). Text analysis is the most appropriate place in which to assess IR2. The design of the task can include questions related to linguistic features, to permit the assessment of IR2.

Assessment Type 2: In-depth Study

In-depth Study Topics

Common topics this year included anime, sumo, Harajuku fashion, Japanese schools, and Japanese sports.

Students should be encouraged to choose topics that enable them to use relatively familiar Japanese rather than topics that require vocabulary and structures that are significantly beyond this.

Students are not required to submit a vocabulary list for moderation; however, this may provide supporting evidence of preparation.

In some cases, students were overly reliant on online translation software to produce texts for their in-depth study, which is not appropriate.

Oral Presentation in Japanese

Most schools adhered to the time length of 3–5 minutes, with only a few schools under or over the prescribed time limit. Most students chose to present a speech for the oral presentation in Japanese.

In some cases, students read out their speech and it was apparent that they had little understanding of the content. These students were not able to achieve high grades in Expression (E2), as intonation, fluency, and pronunciation were affected by limited understanding of the content.

Written Response in Japanese

The majority of responses adhered to the limit of 600 characters. Responses that were substantially under this limit were not always able to demonstrate sufficient depth.

In some cases, students used identical content in their oral presentation in Japanese and their written response in Japanese. Students are required to submit three different pieces. It is important, then, that the text type, audience, context, and purpose of the tasks are different for these pieces.

Generally the oral presentation was an informative speech and the written response was a personal piece, which allowed students to use some of the content that they had researched in two different text contexts and for different purposes. A diary is a possible task design for the written response in Japanese, as it allows for personal writing and therefore differs from a more informative presentation in terms of language and structure.

Some students inappropriately used online translation software, particularly where they researched topics that required language beyond that taught at Stage 2. This was often highlighted by teacher comments that indicated the reliance on such software.

Reflective Response in English

The limit of 600 words was generally adhered to for written responses.

A few schools chose the video option and students were able to reflect on their chosen topic for 5–7 minutes. This gave students the opportunity to develop ideas (I2). It was noted, however, that in some cases the students who chose this option tended to use a content approach, rather than reflection.

Some students misinterpreted ‘reflection’ and instead provided a recount. This meant that, in some cases, no evidence of IR2 and IR3 was provided.

Many students were able to reflect on their own learning journey IR(3).

In most cases there needed to be deeper reflection on *own values, beliefs, practices, and ideas in relation to those represented in texts*.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination

## Oral Examination

One hundred and seventy-seven students took the Japanese (continuers) oral examination in 2014. For the conversation, approximately 25% of the students achieved in the A grade band, 27% received a B grade, and 18% received D+ or lower. In the discussion section, 18% of the students achieved in the A grade band, 26% received a B grade, and 25% received D+ or lower. Unlike previous years, a larger number of students performed unsuccessfully in both conversation and discussion sections this year. Significant lack of preparation was seen as a common phenomenon among those who performed unsuccessfully.

**Section 1: Conversation**

The majority of strong students comprehended all or most of the examiners’ questions, and many provided appropriate answers with a good degree of confidence and fluency. Capable students were able to move comfortably beyond prepared answers, and spontaneously elaborated on their initial responses by giving reasons, opinions, and impressions. However, overprepared answers were again common this year. Preparation is essential of course, but it is vitally important to know that effective preparation allows the student to have more natural communication with the examiners rather than merely present prepared answers.

A number of less capable students struggled to understand even basic questions and were unable to provide any relevant responses. It is imperative that in working towards the oral examination, students ensure that they have a good understanding of prescribed themes and topics and become familiar with predictable basic questions.

Ideas (Relevance)

Stronger students provided responses that were mostly relevant, but many weaker students gave incorrect or irrelevant answers because they did not understand the questions.

Examiners commented that this year, again, some students persisted with prepared sentences, adding things which were not necessarily relevant to the question asked. Some students interrupted the examiner and directed the conversation by presenting rehearsed information before questions were asked. Again, it was also evident that some students responded only to a familiar keyword in the question and jumped into a prepared but irrelevant answer. Learning detailed information by heart and presenting it as ‘speech’ is strongly discouraged.

Students should be taught and encouraged to develop good interaction skills, to make their responses relevant to the questions. Some suggestions include:

* listen carefully right to the end of a question, paying particular attention to tense, aspect, and mode (remember that the meaning of a Japanese utterance is typically determined in the end of the sentence)
* avoid presenting a long speech and instead wait for follow-up questions
* know but do not rely on predictable questions
* develop strategies to deal with unexpected or more difficult questions.

It is strongly recommended that students start to practise the above as early as possible. It takes time to develop these skills. Observing and analysing Japanese speakers’ conversation is a good way to understand how a natural flow of conversation is constructed in the language.

Ideas (Depth of treatment of ideas, information or opinions)

Depth of ideas should be observed in the interaction (conversation) between a student and examiners. However, it seemed difficult for most students to be able to give an appropriately extended answer. Some students took over the conversation by presenting a rehearsed speech without waiting for follow-up questions. Others, especially the weaker students, were underprepared and lacked confidence, and were unable to go beyond minimal answers.

For a conversation to develop to a certain depth, it is helpful when students give the examiners something to continue the conversation with. For example, when asked about their hobbies, students might include a brief reference to a recent event or experience or a future plan regarding his/her hobbies (e.g. reading a best seller, competition participation, cooking for some special occasion). The examiners may ask questions about the event/experience or plan saying for instance, ‘Oh, how did you like the book?’, ‘How did you go in the competition?’, ‘What are you going to cook?’, and so on. Again, it is not about presenting well-rehearsed extended answers that matters — rather, this is discouraged. It is about how deeply students can get into and develop their interaction with the examiners.

Expression (Capacity to convey information accurately and appropriately)

Although minor errors (particularly in pronunciation) are often ignorable when a conversation flows naturally, more serious grammatical errors can confuse the conversation significantly. Typical examples observed include the confusion of tense of verbs, adjectives, and です/ます and the case particles such as が、は、を、の.

Many students did not sufficiently cope with questions that contained more complicated structures (e.g. relative clauses). Some also showed a lack of confidence with interrogatives such as どう、どんな and どうして. Some students did not finish sentences, limiting their answers to one or two words. The most successful students, on the other hand, showed a mastery of complicated sentence structures, including a range of subordinating conjunctions (e.g. ～から/ので、～たら、～時、～ても).

Pronunciation was generally good, and yet common errors which appear year after year did so again. Some examples include:

* confusion between similar vowels, as in えいが/えいご;　あに/あね;　おにいさん/おにさん; まだ/まで; かわいい/こわい
* confusion between similar consonants, as in かもく/かぞく/かがく.

Other linguistic features that were often not known or were confused included:

* the conjunction から/ので mistakenly preceded the ‘reason clause’ (like ‘because’ in English)
* numbers and counter suffixes, especially in　年、年生、かい (number of times)
* tense and time words (e.g. 来年…しました。きのう…行きます。)
* ほか as in, for example, ほかの日に… and ほかに何か言いたいことがありますか.

‘Foreign accent’ or phonetic interference from one’s background language was often evident in students’ pronunciation and intonation, but it was very rare that foreign accent by itself seriously impeded clarity of utterances.

With regard to appropriateness of expressions, it came to examiners’ attention that some students did not differentiate between formal and informal ways of speaking. In the context of an oral examination, students should be able to keep to formal/polite expressions such as すみません rather than ごめん, and もういちどおねがいします instead of もういちど？

Students are encouraged to learn to use あいづち and fillers (e.g. ええと、そうですね) effectively in order to comfortably stay in the natural flow of conversation.

Expression (Coherence in structure and sequence)

Weaker answers were typically short — usually one sentence with a single piece of information — hence there was minimal room for organising information and ideas logically and coherently, other than arranging words in the correct grammatical order (even so, this was not always done successfully). Strong students effectively added extra information and opinions to support their statements without overtalking and overtaking the conversation.

When used appropriately, あいづち can be a very useful linguistic device to construct a coherent conversation interaction. It can show that a student understands the examiner’s questions and is genuinely engaged in the conversation. For better communication, students are encouraged to learn to use a wide range of あいづちexpressions rather than repeat the simplest ones such as はい、ああ。Some useful examples include ああ、そうですね、そうですか、～ですか (confirming the question, seeking clarification)、わかりました、ええ　and so on.

Expression (Capacity to interact and maintain a conversation)

Examiners commented that a significant number of students this year were unable to comprehend questions and therefore unable to interact sufficiently. Most students knew at least one expression to seek help but many could not keep the conversation going by using it effectively when needed, resulting in long uncomfortable pauses. Not much interaction happened with weaker students, as they tended to stick to their minimal responses and were reluctant to go beyond their prepared answers.

For stronger students, maintaining the conversation was not a particular issue. However, it is still important that all students are aware that there are many techniques and linguistic devices, such as those stated above, that can improve their conversation skills and outcomes.

Section 2: Discussion

Although there was a range in students’ ability to cope with discussion about their in-depth study topics, regrettably, a strong trend towards lower grades in the discussion section was more evident this year. Examiners commented that a significant minority of students’ linguistic and academic readiness/maturity was far below the required standard to sufficiently cope with the Stage 2 oral examinations. There was no single apparent reason for this other than perhaps a shortage of adequate preparation.

Despite this overall trend, the stronger students performed very well. The most capable students were able to confidently engage in the discussion, and effectively presented what they studied with great enthusiasm and interest. In addition to thorough linguistic preparation, the strongest students demonstrated their sensitivity and maturity in understanding different cultures and people, which added much depth to their study and discussion.

This year, again, the choice of in-depth study topic was a crucial factor to determine students’ performance in the discussion. Appropriate topics are those that are manageable, interesting, and sufficiently challenging to discuss at the final examination. It is recommended that each student choose a topic of his/her own interest after good consultation with their teacher. It was quite noticeable when students had not chosen the topic themselves because they tended to lack the interest and ability to give independent comment with opinion. Students should choose a topic that they can comfortably discuss in Japanese, going beyond simply reciting memorised answers.

Presentation of main points on the In-depth Study Outline form was again problematic this year. The ‘dot points’ should provide information to enable examiners to instantly understand the focus of the study and facilitate the discussion effectively. Also, the dot points should sufficiently cover/match the overall topic of the student’s in-depth study. Some students’ topics were very broad (e.g. Japanese festivals, Japanese food) but the actual research was done only on one example of the whole topic. Some students’ dot points consisted solely of lengthy research questions, not all of which were suitable or relevant for the oral examination purposes. Students are encouraged to complete the form legibly. Teachers are encouraged to supervise students and give them guidance on presenting their dot points on the outline form well before the oral examination.

Some students brought in support objects such as photographs from the Internet, fluffy toys, or plastic figures of anime characters. To be used effectively, students should be able to provide more than just an explanation of what the object is.

Ideas (Relevance)

Research topics presented this year were generally relevant to the purpose of the in-depth study, but students’ performance in the discussion did not consistently deliver the appropriate amount of relevant information and ideas. Many struggled to go beyond the prepared answers and could not genuinely engage in the in-situ discussion with the examiners.

Students often did not recognise when questions about dot points were asked slightly differently from what they had expected. They should know and be prepared to answer questions that are asked in various ways. For example, if the word ‘History (of a festival)’ appears as one of the dot points, the question may be heard as:

そのまつりのれきしについておしえて（話して）ください。

そのまつりにはどんなれきしがありますか。

どのくらい長いれきしがありますか。

そのまつりはいつ始まりましたか。

それはむかしからあるまつりですか。

and so on.

It is expected, of course, that students change and restructure their answer according to the question asked. Reciting one prepared answer is not suitable for all of the question forms above.

Again, it should be emphasised that that the 1-minute introduction speech is not assessed. It is a shared impression among examiners over years that presenting a one-minute speech does not help. It does not count. Therefore the better examination strategy is to maximise the time for engaging in the actual discussion, which does count, and use relevant information and expressions in response to examiners’ questions.

Another technique to know is that students should not give a long ‘speech’ when asked to explain what they have learnt about a dot point. They should say a few relevant things and then wait to take part in a more natural discussion.

Ideas (Depth of ideas, information, or opinions)

Many students had researched their topic in some detail but not in sufficient depth. Only the most successful students showed evidence of good research and were able to give thoughtful and convincing comments and opinions in response to various questions. Other students could have pursued their research much further.

It is important that students study and discuss their chosen topics in connection with Japanese cultures and cultural values and include reflective thoughts on their own cultures and values. This year, the many students’ work was superficial, lacking the appropriate depth in content and interpretation. Depth of research and discussion is not achievable by solely presenting gathered information. To add depth, gathered information has to be interpreted and analysed by the researcher. To make one’s work relevant to the purposes of the in-depth study, discussion of cultural values is essential. Students may find comparative, cross-cultural approaches to be helpful when reflecting on their study and their own values. In preparation, students and teachers must ensure that appropriate and reputable resources in the topic area are accessed. They should not rely on sources and materials of dubious quality.

Also of note here is that students and teachers should be well aware of limitations of knowledge and experience that can be gained from the in-depth study tasks. The in-depth study is a very minor research task, and it does not aim to allow students to incorrectly believe they have learnt enough to be able to ‘judge’ their own culture or those of other people. Overgeneralisation of particular cultures and peoples, and/or providing suggestions and advice to change or ‘improve’ other people’s cultures and ways of thinking, are inappropriate and immature behaviour, which must be avoided through careful supervision and guidance by the teachers at the earliest opportunity.

In the discussion, most students were able to answer only the simple introductory questions that asked them to explain each dot point. There was limited depth when deeper questions were asked (e.g. justify one’s opinion, provide reasons). Genuine discussion is challenging, but students should at least predict what they might be asked, based on their dot points and practise. Examiners commented that many students used the expression ‘それについては勉強しませんでした (I did not study that)’ as an excuse, when they probably just did not understand the question. Stronger students at least tried to guess or gave some sort of reply rather than evade the question.

Expression (Capacity to convey information accurately and appropriately) and Expression (Coherence in structure and sequence)

Grammatical accuracy and range of expressions were generally very good in the rehearsed parts of answers, but there was limited flexibility when less predictable questions were asked and students had to change the sentences they had memorised. In fact, the majority of students could hardly ‘discuss’ appropriately — they only tried to answer the questions using a prepared text.

Refer to the Relevance section above for types of possible questions on one dot point. These questions were predictable within the range of grammar for Stage 2, but were rarely actually prepared or practised by many students.

This year, again, many students showed a lack of language skills to deal with questions relating to Interpretation (IR1) and Reflection (IR3). Suggestions and guidance are provided below (Interpretation and Reflection).

Expression (Capacity to interact and maintain a discussion)

As mentioned above, many students struggled to discuss. Even the clearly strong students often gave long, prepared responses to the examiners’ initial questions. Students should be encouraged to keep an initial response short (approximately two or three sentences) and then wait for the examiners to ask follow-up questions.

It is to be repeated here that the 1-minute introduction speech is not assessed. Examiners agree that those students who do not give the speech tend to do better in the discussion.

Interpretation and Reflection (Interpretation of meaning in texts)

The majority of students, including many of the stronger ones, were able to provide only simple information about texts that they used (e.g. book titles, website names). Most could not describe the content of the texts in depth and/or add their interpretation to it. For better planning and preparation, the following information may be helpful.

 Interpretation (IR1) questions for IDS discussion are mainly to examine:

* how insightfully and clearly a student interprets and explains the content and context of the texts he/she used for IDS
* how effectively a student gives evidence or example/s from the texts to support his/her interpretation.

Questions may be heard as:

* どんな本を読みましたか。それについて少し教えてください。
* その本にはどんなことが書いてありましたか。
* それはどんな本ですか。

In answering these questions, students should present their interpretation of meaning in the text(s) by identify and explaining:

* the content of the text(s) (general and specific information)
* the context, purpose, and targeted reader or audience
* the concepts, perspectives, and ideas represented in the text(s).

Interpretation and Reflection (Reflection)

Overall, there was a lack of preparedness and confidence in dealing with reflection questions. Most students could only say, ‘I learnt a lot’ or ‘It was interesting’ and could not give a reasonable answer that appropriately reflected their own study experience and cultural views. To be able to reflect on one’s experience and values, students had to have conducted a reasonably solid research with some insights and depth, but most students’ research appeared to be shallow and superficial and did not go beyond a mere gathering of factual information. Only a handful of the strongest students successfully handled reflection questions. For better preparation, students may refer to the following detail.

Reflection (IR3) questions for the discussion are mainly to examine to what extent a student has learned:

* about culture, values, beliefs, practices, and ideas of Japanese people from the texts used and his/her own values, beliefs, practices, and ideas in relation to those expressed in the texts
* from his/her experience of doing an in-depth study.

Some related questions may include:

* In-depth study の勉強をして、日本の (人々、文化、社会、、　など)　について何を学びましたか。
* In-depth study のの前と後であなたの（かんがえ方、いけん）はどう

ですか。かわりましたか。

* 日本の・・・と、あなたの文化の・・・をくらべて、どうですか。ちがいますか。
* In-depth study の勉強（）はどうでしたか。
* どのくらいしましたか。はうまくいきましたか。
* このトピックについてもっと知りたいことがありますか。

Students should then present their reflection on:

* how Japanese cultures, values beliefs, practices, and ideas are represented or expressed in the text(s)
* their own values, beliefs, practices, and ideas in relation to those in the texts studied
* their own learning.

## Written Examination

Although students’ marks were spread over a wide range, this year’s trend towards lower marks was also evident in the written examination. A significant minority of students failed to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding of Japanese language at continuers level.

Overall, Section 3: Writing questions were best answered. Section 2: Reading and Responding Part A was also well handled by the majority of students. Some of the Section 1: Listening questions (e.g. Question 1, Question 2, and Question 5) proved the most challenging for less capable students, while students in the top two deciles of the performance distribution handled these questions very well.

Section 1: Listening and Responding

Question 1

Surprisingly, this simple conversation text proved to be one of the most difficult questions.

Only 21% of students achieved full marks. Many students only partially understood the text and gave broad and/or incorrect answers based on their guess. Many incorrectly answered Question 1 (a), stating that the purpose of the phone call was for Kimiko to ask her grandfather to pick her up. Question 1 (b) was generally well handled.

Question 2

This was another basic question that was treated poorly by many students. Despite the simplicity in words and content of the text, numerous students did not understand that the text was about taking care of a dog. Many students identified only two or three duties. Some just wrote ‘water’ or ‘walk’ but did not give all relevant information. Finer details were often missed out or misunderstood. Some common mistakes included:

* the word ‘ごはん’ was taken as ‘rice’ instead of meal
* to feed the dog ‘bread’ (where there was no reference to bread in the text)
* ‘don’t give the dog any biscuits’ instead of ‘too many biscuits’.

Question 3

This was the best handled question in Section 1. This was again a basic information-extraction type question, with the particular focus placed on numbers and Japanese counter suffixes (e.g. days, times, price, number of people, and telephone number).

3(a) Most students correctly understood the telephone number, although there were numerous errors with day/date and money. Some students forgot to add the time.

3(b) Many students only mentioned the number of family members as reason for a bigger vehicle. りょこうのかばん (travel bags or luggage) was often missed out.

 3(c) Most students accurately identified that the man did not like white cars. However, a few students gave inaccurate extra information stating, for example, that this was because white vehicles get dirty easily, rather than because the man deems it to be an unlucky colour.

Question 4

For the majority of stronger students this was another comfortable question in Section 1.

4(a) Stronger responses included all relevant details. Some did not catch that Rick will be going to Japan next year, but thought that he wanted to host just to improve his Japanese.

4(b) This question was generally well done. Many strong responses gave all four examples. There were, however, a number of students who incorrectly mentioned that Rick’s parents were supportive and/or that Rick would be in Year 10/11 of studies.

Question 5

5(a) Generally very well handled by stronger students.

5(b) Many students found it challenging to explain the change of Cherie’s emotions before and after talking with Lee. Overall, students seemed to experience a certain degree of difficulty in coming to terms with this type of question which requires them to understand a given text as a whole and to provide a sustained response (e.g. compare, discuss, explain). Many weaker students seemed totally unprepared for this question. Their poor responding technique often resulted in short, insufficient, and unsubstantiated responses or alternatively, long-winded rambling answers containing few, if any, relevant points.

As similar questions have appeared in the recent examinations, it is strongly recommended that students are given opportunities for practising answering this type of question so that they can build up the ability to compose a successful answer.

Section 2: Reading and Responding Part A

Overall, students handled this section well. Not a large number of students achieved full marks, but most students were able to gain reasonable scores in this section. Sixty-six per cent of students obtained more than half of the 15 available marks.

There were a good number of quality answers that demonstrated students’ comprehensive understanding of the texts and advanced text analysis and responding skills. However, it was also evident that some students did not fully understand the questions, and gave irrelevant answers. It is important that students fully understand the scope and the expectation of the question before attempting a response.

Question 6

6(a) Students’ answers were generally good and relevant, but numerous students missed full marks by not accurately understanding the question. The question asked ‘What is the *purpose* of each text? Justify your answers with evidence from the texts’, to which many students insufficiently responded, stating ‘resume’, ‘letter’, ‘speech’, and so on. These are *types* of text and not *purposes* of text. An appropriate response should include what each text is meant to do. For example, the purpose of Text 6 is to provide details about the exhibition and the artist’s profile, while the purpose of Text 7 is to welcome guests to the exhibition and provide them with the artist’s life journey and current inspiration. Answers must be justified with evidence from each text to achieve full marks.

6(b) Most students answered this question correctly.

6(c) Many students understood the question well and were able to give relevant and appropriate comparisons between Shizue’s parents and her teacher. Stronger students displayed a comprehensive understanding of how Shizue’s parents supported her art, with relevant details from the texts. Less successful answers were partially correct or rather too simple, and lacked necessary details.

6(d) This question was generally answered well. Most students understood that Shizue became famous after appearing on the TV news. In weaker responses, the rest of the detail was often missed or misunderstood.

6(e) Most answers contained some relevant information from the texts. Most students displayed a substantial understanding of what has been the inspiration behind Shizue’s current exhibition. The most successful answers displayed a deeper understanding of Shizue’s background, including her childhood and current life back in her hometown.

Section 2: Reading and Responding Part B

Question 7

While there were a good number of quality answers, it was evident that a significant number of students were unprepared for the question in this section. The score distribution was significantly polarised. Although on the stronger end 17% of students achieved an A grade and 19% achieved a B grade, a significant number achieved in the D and E grade, or did not attempt the question. Markers commented that despite the stimulus text being fair and of a comparative degree of difficulty to previous years, many students failed to understand the context and the purpose of the text accurately. Unpreparedness in linguistic expression was also pointed out by the markers.

Ideas (Relevance)

The careful reading of the stimulus text is vital to attaining high marks. Capable students identified, analysed, and responded to all relevant information in the stimulus text within the appropriate length. Some students showed good reading comprehension skills and grammatical skills, but needed to be more careful about the word limit and about including irrelevantly creative ideas and hence wasting the space to write more relevant and necessary content. The less capable students hardly understood the stimulus text and Minami’s questions, and ended up writing irrelevant and incomplete responses.

Successful responses included:

* thanking to Minami for replying
* past job experience (or lack of it) in a restaurant or in the similar industry
* response to the offered working conditions (low wage as assistant if no experience, hard work, night shift, always work on weekend)
* future plan (‘you said you’d like to work only one year’)
* whether or not to come to the scheduled interview.

Ideas (Depth of treatment of ideas, information, or opinions)

Successful students demonstrated a thorough understanding of the stimulus text and gave clear and relevant responses, which were often well elaborated and supported with reasons. Stronger students were able to ‘rework’ the stimulus text effectively, combining information and expressions to create their own ideas and sentences. They did not just copy and paste ideas and expressions from the original text.

As many of the weaker answers were only partially relevant to the topic and purpose, they did not include many appropriate elements to add depth to their responses.

Expression (Capability to convey information accurately and appropriately)

Students’ linguistic skills varied very widely this year. On one hand, a number of strong students demonstrated very good accuracy and manipulation of a wide range of relevant grammatical structures. They were able to relate effectively what they wanted/needed to convey. On the other hand, a large number of students showed insufficient linguistic skills to convey even basic information and ideas. In weak responses, expressions were often fragmental, and/or structured based on English word order. There were also frequent errors in the most basic spelling, grammar, and kanji use.

 Examples include:

* confusion of tense
* use of wrong particles
* confusion of 行くand 来る
* no use of kanji in the syllabus
* illegible writing.

Expression (Coherence in structure and sequence)

Most responses were reasonably well structured and sequenced. However, use of linguistic cohesive devices such as conjunctions and deictic words was often absent or problematic. Students are encouraged to incorporate these expressions so that they can use the writing space more efficiently.

There were many untidy pieces of work with frequent crossing out and insertions, and poor writing of scripts. Students should plan well before they start writing and should present their responses as neatly as possible. Some suggestions are below:

* plan your response (use provided space to take notes)
* take into account paragraphing
* do not rush, and be careful to avoid errors in simple things
* write legibly and neatly across the page
* avoid crossing out and inserting text
* read your answer and check carefully for small errors.

It is also suggested that students think flexibly when they want to express certain things and cannot come up with appropriate words and grammatical structures. Do not struggle too much with uncertainty but instead try to think of a different way of responding.

Section 3: Writing in Japanese

Overall this section was handled well compared with other sections. Question 9 was by far the most popular, chosen by 61% of students, followed by Question 8 (23%), then Question 9 (16%). Commonly, the students who provided weaker responses were linguistically unprepared and appeared to have failed to read the question requirement fully and accurately, which resulted in them writing an irrelevant answer.

Ideas (Relevance and depth of treatment)

Question 8

Most of the capable students who received an A grade presented creative and interesting stories with appropriate detail. Some students’ answers in this question were particularly well developed and very enjoyable to read. Less capable students who attempted this question struggled a lot. There were many students who did not sufficiently describe ‘the happiest dream’ and instead simply wrote about some happy ‘experience’. Lack of preparedness for this kind of question/text type was pointed out by the markers.

Question 9

This seemed to be the most familiar topic option. Most responses were sufficiently relevant to the question. The more successful students fully understood the question and included relevant details in their letter to the host family. Many of the less successful students seemed to misunderstand the question, and their answers were only partially relevant to the context given. For example, some weak answers consisted almost solely of holiday plan suggestions, and some wrote as if the host family was intending to come and stay with them, which was not stated in the question. Some did not write a ‘reply’ to the letter received from the host family, but simply wrote a letter to the host family.

Question 10

Numerous students who chose this question did not fully understand the required task and failed to write about a ‘life-changing experience’. In many instances the ‘experience’ was limited to a ‘trip to Japan’ or ‘studying Japanese’ with no sufficient elaboration to make it sound as special as ‘life-changing’. Many also missed or ignored the point that ‘it has been a year since you graduated from high school’ and lost marks by including some irrelevant details. Students with higher scores on this question provided detailed and varied information. Writer’s experiences and feelings were well described in strong answers.

Expression (Capability to convey information accurately and appropriately)

Questions 8, 9, and 10

The most capable students demonstrated an excellent knowledge of grammatical structures and correct tenses, and a wide range of vocabulary and kanji. These students used a number of connectives to join phrases and clauses. Some strong students who attempted Question 8 successfully used the appropriate tense and aspect (e.g. Vています/した) to create an effective narrative perspective (writing as someone observing the event as opposed to someone simply recounting the experience that has happened to him/her).

Many other students tended to rely heavily on familiar structures that had probably been mastered in the earlier years of their language study and did not include the full range of expressions and structures available to students from language study at senior secondary level.

Common issues arising in students’ answers included:

* weakness in writing emotions and feelings, typically limited to the simplest adjectives (e.g. いい、すごい、たのしい、つまらない)
* direct and inappropriate translation from English (or their first language)
* 行か/来 なければなりません as a suggestion or invitation expression
* confusion of tense in common verbs and copula (-です/-でした)
* inappropriate use of particles
* basic, but probably habitual, spelling errors (e.g. みんなさん、いしょうに)
* connecting expressions (use of conjunctions, verb/adjective conjugation).

Expression (Coherence in structure and sequence, and observation of text-type conventions)

Some students misunderstood which text type they were to produce, or were simply unable to create a required text type because of their linguistic limitations. Numerous students who attempted Question 8 were unprepared to write an imaginative narrative ‘story’, resulting in them writing a diary entry or a letter-like text. Some students who answered Question 9 presented a simple letter to the host family instead of a ‘reply’ to the received letter. There were also some basic errors in use of *genkoyoshi*.

Other than the above, most students were able to organise their response well, using paragraphs appropriately and attempting an introduction and a conclusion. There is, however, a continuous need to encourage the use of lexical devices such as conjunctions and deixis to create a text of better and more coherent structure and sequence.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

Japanese (continuers)

Chief Assessor