

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/02
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

Most candidates responded very positively to the themes of the children and highly competitive sports, as well as the *redoublement* in schools. Most candidates could relate to these topics and showed some degree of enthusiasm in their replies for **Question 2**. The third text presented no difficulty either, as the problem of repeating a school year either affected the candidates directly because they were in a French school system themselves, or they already had a very good understanding of the system. It was very encouraging to see that the overall understanding of the three texts was generally high for almost all of the candidates.

It was particularly pleasing to see that almost all candidates completed the paper: only one candidate did not have time to finish the letter (**Question 2**). Many candidates had time to write a plan or a rough draft, and it was a positive indication that they had been well prepared in the techniques and requirements of the examination.

The quality and accuracy of the language used in the answers overall varied greatly from a mistake-free paper to scripts containing an abundance of basic errors such as the repeated confusion between *se* and *ce*, *ces/ses/c'est*, *on/ont*, *peul/peut* and a lack of distinction between *leur vie/mort* and *leurs vies/morts* for example. Generally speaking, however, the accuracy of the language used has improved in comparison with last year's paper, a factor also helped by the fact that most of the vocabulary and phrasing the candidates had to use was contained in the source documents.

Most candidates, except for those from a few Centres, still wrote very lengthy replies for all questions and did not respect the word count recommendation. Although they have not been penalised for this, it is important that they understand that for **Question 1** the word limit is particularly important since they should be writing a summary, not paraphrasing the whole article again. Furthermore, unless they are very able candidates, they will accumulate language errors and penalise themselves.

Candidates must take the time to read the questions more carefully and make sure that they answer in the format required by the question. This year there was a listing of advantages and inconveniences from the point of view of the children and the parents where the family contains a child involved in highly competitive sport training, the script of an interview and a letter to the school principal. As will be seen later, some candidates "re-defined" the first question before answering it and consequently lost some content marks. Such misunderstanding can be avoided if candidates first take the utmost care in reading the question headings, then allow a few minutes of thought before jotting some ideas down, and finally begin their answer.

Standards of presentation in the scripts were quite high, and it was pleasing to see that many candidates had taken pride in their work during the examination.

Comments on Specific Questions

Part 1

Question 1

Content:

Generally, candidates found it easy to spot the two parts of the answer: the advantages and the disadvantages of highly competitive sport training for young children. The majority had a clear understanding of the texts and most candidates organised their answers along these lines. Some candidates preferred to compare children and families and see the pluses and minuses within these two categories. Both types of answer were perfectly acceptable. Ten different points had to be identified in order to gain full marks for content. Candidates should be reminded of the need to include different points and to avoid commenting on one or two points at length. Some candidates completely misunderstood the request to write a comparative summary and described the two texts one after the other, in which case they still gained content marks as long as they included the requested points. However, they lost on the Focus mark because they showed no ability to establish a comparison. A handful of candidates misread or misunderstood the question title and discussed their own ideas, which happened to be different from the source texts.

Most candidates knew how to write a short introduction phrase, then divide their summary in the two above-mentioned paragraphs and end with a short phrase of conclusion. The Examiner was also looking for expressions indicating the candidates' knowledge of comparative techniques, such as *par contre, en revanche, /... différent par le fait que/bien que/alors que...* etc. It was also very important that candidates wrote their answers using their own words and phrases even though the Examiner was aware that total creativity was limited because of the more specialist vocabulary connected to the subject matter of the texts.

Language

There was much evidence of the candidates' better use of French in this question, as good candidates were often successful in re-wording the ideas from the texts. There were many opportunities to build in relative clauses (*Il me semble que...*), subjunctives (*bien que les familles puissent comprendre la passion de leurs enfants...*), and show the use of the passive voice (*les enfants sont affectés par la séparation de leur famille...*). However, the main source of language mistakes remains the fact that some candidates cannot copy accurately the words they use from in the text.

Question 2

Content

It was most encouraging to see that the great majority of candidates started and ended their interview in a suitable manner, explaining the reason for the interview, giving the names of two young people, most often using the name of a real sports person. The question asked the candidates to script an interview with two viewpoints: sport as a mere pastime and sport with competition in mind. The most successful candidates had read the question very carefully and addressed all its points in their answers with great enthusiasm and convincing arguments: they used some ideas from the source texts, as instructed, but also brought in some arguments of their own. Content marks were awarded for the reference to some text ideas and for some particularly original suggestions, such as *si tu quittes l'école jeune et que ton ambition sportive ne réussit pas, comment vas-tu travailler sans éducation?* for example.

Candidates who received poor content marks either based the entire interview on one single point, which they re-phrased in several ways, or they just lifted all their ideas from the texts without even rephrasing the sentences.

Here again, the Examiner's advice would be for candidates to read the question carefully, to enter the role and to organise their arguments in a dialogue form.

Language

The nature of this question provided an excellent opportunity to show the use of various tenses (particularly the conditional tense for the ideas of what would happen if...) and question words (for the part of the interviewer). Most candidates managed very well. Poor candidates repeated the same language mistakes they had made in the first question.

Part 2

Question 3

Content

With regard to the content, this question was completed with success by most candidates. Many candidates could really identify with the problem of *redoublement*. Candidates often used a concrete example of themselves or a friend in their class to express their view on the whole concept of repeating the year or not. The most successful answers were in debate form and considered pros and cons before stating personal viewpoints. They presented the arguments and drew some examples from the text and/or from personal experience. For the maximum content mark, a good balance of arguments with a selection of examples/illustrations was required. Many candidates ended their essay with a small conclusion, which encouraged the Principal to act upon the letter, sometimes giving a precise action plan such as *discutez avec vos professeurs...* or *contactez l'académie pour considérer l'abolition du redoublement...* It was also very pleasing to see the candidates' ability to begin and end an official letter with a fairly high level of accuracy. Only a few candidates referred solely to the article and did not state an opinion, or gave both sides of the debate without their final standpoint.

Language

Most candidates found it easy to write the letter using the words from the source text, but only the better candidates used suitable vocabulary and appropriate sentences to enter a debate about pros and cons. Generally, the lexical knowledge of school was well used by the candidates. From the language point of view, candidates coped better with this question and still had a lot to write, and the language was more accurate than usually found in this last question.

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/03
Continuous Writing

General comments

As in previous years, the overall performance was very varied.

In the better scripts the language was accurate apart from very occasional slips. Candidates used a good range of vocabulary and structures, and paragraphs showed a clear structure. The interest of the reader was sustained throughout.

In average scripts grammatical and spelling errors were more frequent, and vocabulary and structures were usually simple. The structure of the essay was sometimes less clear. As for content, candidates provided a relevant response to the chosen question and aroused some interest in the reader.

In weaker script, the frequency of serious errors – even in simple structures – was so high that the reader was often distracted from the merits of the content.

Comments on specific questions

All candidates seemed to find a topic they liked. Topics 1, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9 were all popular.

Since the curriculum will change from 2007, in future, candidates should be made aware that they will be required to write **two** essays, one from Section 1 (Discussion and Argument) **and** one from Section 2 (Description and Narration). There will be a choice of four topics for each section, and candidates should write between 350 and 500 words for each essay.