

## **Examiners' Reports**

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**June 2011**

**J736/J036/J136/R/11**

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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**Portuguese (J736)**

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## EXAMINERS' REPORTS

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## **Chief Examiner's Report**

The specification has now been available for two summer series and there are now some clear indications of how the candidates are performing and what the teachers may be able to do to help their candidates reach their highest potential. Use of the 2010 and 2011 papers, along with the specimen material, now provides more than adequate practice material for the 2012 candidates.

Candidates should be made aware of common and typical question rubrics, as these are now all written in English. Examiners this year reported many examples of candidates who struggled to understand what the task in the examinations required, due to issues with their command of English. This was particularly evident in the responses to Listening and Reading papers.

As in the previous specification, candidates should also be prepared and able to understand both Brazilian and European Portuguese speech in the Listening paper. This is reflected in all of the specimen materials and past papers.

A new specification always brings changes in the administration. This year the major changes in the Speaking test were that the recordings must be made in mp3 format and the tests should be submitted on a compact disc. It is to be regretted that many teacher/examiners did not carry out the task in this way.

There was evidence that many candidates did not take advantage in the Writing paper of the fact that they may now take a dictionary into the examination and use it to help them write their two responses. Obviously, the dictionary can also be used to help them understand the tasks, if they are not native English-speakers.

## A831 – Listening

### General Comments

This was the second year of the specification and the number of candidates entered for the examination was much larger than last year.

Generally, candidates coped well with the paper, which consisted of eight exercises with questions in English. Three exercises required candidates to provide their own answers in English. Some could not express themselves well enough in English to answer these questions correctly. Candidates should be aware that answers in Portuguese to questions in English cannot be awarded marks. In addition, some candidates did not attempt some of the questions.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Exercise 1: Questions 1 – 5

This matching exercise about the preparation of a lunch box was generally well answered by the majority of candidates.

#### Exercise 2: Questions 6 – 12

Equally, this matching exercise was also generally well answered by candidates. In question 12, a small number of candidates incorrectly chose A as their answer.

#### Exercise 3: Questions 13 – 18

This sentence completion exercise in English was generally well answered. Some candidates did not always ensure their answers were clearly expressed. A few wrote one or more of their answers in Portuguese.

In question 14, a few candidates listed all of the subjects that they heard 'history, geography, drama'. The correct answer was 'drama'. The First Answer rule meant that only the first subject could be marked as the candidate's answer. Candidates should be made aware of this rule and remember to give precise answers, as the question required only one answer.

In question 16, some candidates misinterpreted what they had heard and incorrectly answered that Marcelino 'is responsible for' the articles that students write, when the answer should have been 'chooses'. Some candidates also incorrectly answered 'I choose'. Answers written in the first person were not accepted as they did not answer the question.

#### Exercise 4: Questions 19 – 24

Candidates coped well with this sentence completion exercise in English. Some did not attempt one or more of the questions and some wrote their answers in Portuguese. There were also those who found it hard to express themselves in English and the meaning of their answers was not always clear. Please refer to the mark scheme for specific details of which answers were and were not accepted.

**Exercise 5: Questions 25 – 31**

This exercise about the environment required candidates to give their own answers in English. Some struggled with understanding the exercise and answered some or all of the questions in Portuguese; others did not attempt one or even all the questions. Some candidates were not able to express themselves clearly in English, particularly in response to questions 29, 30 and 31. Please refer to the mark scheme for specific details of which answers were and were not accepted.

**Exercise 6: Questions 32 – 37**

Most candidates coped well with all the questions and most answered them correctly. At this point in the paper candidates are challenged more and careful listening is required. In Question 37, some candidates were unsure of the correct answer and many, having been distracted by the word 'radio', opted for letter C ('listened to the radio'). The statement that they heard meant 'I took part in a radio quiz'. The question differentiated well among the candidates.

**Exercise 7: Questions 38 – 41**

On the whole candidates coped well with this exercise, where they were required to select answers from two lists. Candidates need to read the instructions carefully and copy the words accurately in order to achieve the best marks. Some candidates did not follow the written instructions and wrote their answers in the wrong column. Sometimes answers were written in Portuguese and sometimes candidates wrote their own answers in English, not selecting those from the list.

**Exercise 8: Questions 42 – 47**

Most candidates coped well with this multiple-choice exercise in English.

## A832 – Speaking

### General Comments

Most tests were conducted well by teacher/examiners who had familiarised themselves with the Teacher Instructions booklet. Well-prepared candidates understood what was expected of them and many confidently produced high quality language and developed their ideas.

Most fluent Portuguese speakers still needed guidance and appropriate questioning to encourage them to develop their ideas fully and to use a variety of tenses and structures. Some teacher/examiners made excellent use of the time and provided candidates with many opportunities to gain marks for content and for quality and range of language. Part 1 is timed from when the candidate starts their presentation and Part 2 from the start of the first question in that Part.

Effective planning by many teacher/examiners ensured that their candidates were offered differentiated questions. Some candidates needed very sympathetic examining, with many closed questions to give them confidence and found it difficult to deal with more open questions. Other candidates thrived on fewer, more open questions. Succinct questions enabled the candidates to focus on their responses. Generally, the less said by the teacher/examiner, the more time the candidate had to produce both the content and quality of language to gain marks.

The administration was generally satisfactory.

Centres are reminded that they should:

- supply a mark sheet for each candidate, with the topics written down
- ensure that the candidate chooses the General Conversation topic from the Random Order Sheet
- record the candidate choosing the General Conversation topic after Part 1.

Recordings should be:

- on cd, not cassette
- in MP3 format
- checked to ensure that the CD has been finalised so files can be read on other computers
- checked to ensure they can be heard clearly
- carefully packaged.

### Part 1 Presentation and Discussion

The most successful presentations tended to be those where the candidate had chosen a topic that they found particularly interesting. As a result, they conveyed genuine enthusiasm and considerable knowledge.

Teacher/examiners should reassure candidates that they do not need to rush through the presentation, as the discussion also gives them the opportunity to say more.

Teacher/examiners sometimes do not meet the candidates before the day of the test. They should speak to each candidate before the test to explain what is expected. This would ensure that preparation time can be used productively.

Candidates should be allowed to give their presentation for one minute without interruption. Then the discussion should begin. Some presentations were mainly in the present tense and used only simple structures. Teacher/examiners could help their candidates achieve better

marks by asking discussion questions that require the use of a variety of tenses and structures in their answers. When a presentation was mainly a narrative, some teacher/examiners chose questions to ensure opinions and ideas were expressed.

## **Part 2      General Conversation**

Closed questions that require just *sim* or *não* as an answer did not help candidates to demonstrate their language skills. Asking open questions provides candidates with the best opportunity to express opinions and use a greater variety and range of language. Candidates who achieve this will score the best marks.

Many teacher/examiners managed to make this part of the test sound natural and encouraged the candidates to respond fully and to use a variety of tenses and structures.

## A833 – Reading

### General Comments

The examination seemed to be well received by the majority of candidates. The teachers who prepared candidates should be congratulated, as candidates performed well. This should encourage future students to achieve even better results.

The new specification requires most of the answers to be given in English. In order to achieve the best marks, more training will be needed to ensure that answers are clear and easily understood. Inference and interpretation play an important part in the examination and candidates should be prepared for that. Some candidates did not attempt all of the questions.

As preparation for the examination it would be advisable for candidates to practise reading a variety of texts. When answering questions they should read the texts carefully and extract only the relevant information.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Exercise 1: Questions 1 – 5

This task was done well by the majority of candidates. In question 1 there was a misunderstanding by a few candidates who saw the icon as a pair of shoes and linked it with the words *um par de botas* instead of *sapatos grandes*. Many candidates achieved full marks for questions 2 – 4.

#### Exercise 2: Questions 6 – 12

Most candidates coped very well and answered these questions correctly.

#### Exercise 3: Questions 13 – 18

The majority of candidates responded well to this exercise. In order to achieve a mark for question 14, candidates had to know the meaning of *Cabelo comprido*.

The answers to question 16 were not always consistent. There were few interpretations for *normalmente*.

#### Exercise 4: Questions 19 – 24

This task was very well done by candidates. The majority achieved full marks for this exercise.

#### Exercise 5: Questions 25 – 31

This sentence completion exercise produced a wide range of answers. For question 30 some candidates gave the answer 'the weekend' rather than the correct answer, which was 'Saturday'. The quality of language was not always consistent in responses to question 31. Some candidates could not express in English the idea of 'during the week'.

#### Exercise 6: Questions 32 – 37

From this multiple-choice exercise onwards, the paper differentiated candidate ability. Candidates answered most of the questions well, particularly questions 35 to 37. Some candidates did not answer question 34 correctly.

### Exercise 7: Questions 38 – 44

There were examples of creativity among the responses to this exercise. This proved to be the most difficult exercise in the examination.

- Question 38      This question produced a wide range of answers.  
Question 39      The candidates found most difficulty in answering this question.  
Question 40      Candidates answered this question well.  
Question 41      Some candidates confused *milhão* with thousands.  
Question 42      Candidates did not always get the correct information from the text and repeated a word already within the question.  
Question 44      This question was well answered.

### Exercise 8: Questions 45 – 50

This exercise required candidates to complete the sentences briefly in Portuguese. Responses were mixed.

- Question 45      Some candidates did not answer this question correctly.  
Question 46      The quality of language was not always consistent.  
Question 47      This question produced a wide variety of answers.  
Question 48      Candidates answered this question well.  
Question 49      The idea of being 'special, like a star' was required to gain full marks.  
Question 50      This question produced a wide range of answers.

## A834 – Writing

### General Comments

The new specification requires more expression of ideas than the previous one. The best work was done by those candidates who kept to the task, expressing ideas rather than narrative events, and developed these ideas fully. The mark scheme rewards the expression of ideas which are more than straightforward. More than straightforward ideas are those which the candidate develops and expresses fully and in more detail. This means that answers such as *eu adorei porque foi muito divertido* cannot receive more than 6 marks for Communication.

A large number of candidates answered more than two questions, and inevitably their work suffered because they had to rush in order to write five pieces in one hour. Candidates can reach higher grades by recognising the importance of keeping to the task set and using their allocation of 150 words to express and develop ideas.

Candidates who choose to follow the bulleted suggestions should bear in mind that the last two bulleted suggestions that accompany each question are designed to encourage candidates to explain ideas and develop responses fully. By 'more complex' and 'ambitious' language, examiners are looking for: a range of tenses, a variety of clause types, manipulation of verb structures (for example personal infinitives and passives) as well as interesting and appropriate vocabulary. Some candidates did not do themselves justice because they wrote too many words giving a full response to these first three bulleted suggestions. This left them little space to develop their ideas fully. Those candidates who are aiming for one of the highest grades should treat the first two bullet points very briefly. A high mark is more likely to be achieved where candidates begin straight away to express ideas fully and give reasons for them.

Some candidates fell short of the highest grades because of poor spelling and punctuation. Sometimes the language became unclear and incoherent for these reasons. Some candidates did not remember to use a wide variety of tenses. There is a reminder to do this on each question page. Examiners reported that many candidates did not use more than the present tense throughout each response.

Candidates are instructed to write each of the two pieces in a different format or for a different purpose. Candidates should bear in mind that the format they choose to write in must allow them to express ideas and develop them. Writing both pieces in exactly the same style saying that one is a letter and the other an email goes against the spirit of the examination. Several candidates wrote an email and a letter, or even two letters, but managed to write in different styles, one more personal than the other.

Several candidates wrote interviews in which many of their 150 words were used writing down the questions which the interviewee then answered. It often meant that the interviewee's response included many of the same words. A similar but better approach in terms of the mark scheme would be for the candidates to write a dialogue in which the two participants develop the argument between them. Expressions of emotion or disagreement would enhance both the quality of language and expression of ideas.

## Comments on Individual Questions

### Question 1

A typical point of view expressed was *O transporte público é importante porque as pessoas que não têm carro podem usar os autocarros e comboios*. The ideas need to be developed further if the candidate is to achieve one of the highest marks. Many of the best responses were when the candidates discussed the effect of greater use of public transport on the environment and the quality of life.

### Question 2

A typical opinion expressed was *gosto muito de comer no Nando's, a comida ali é muito deliciosa*. It is an opinion followed by a justification, but they are of a basic level and better marks can be achieved by a fuller treatment of the idea.

Half of many candidates' responses consisted of factual information on their food and meal times. They were clearly following the bulleted suggested points, but the more ambitious candidates should bear in mind the importance of developing ideas and opinions in this new specification. Their time would have been better spent moving on to thoughts and speculations. The mark for quality of language suffered too because lists of food and meal times do not demonstrate complex language.

### Question 3

Some questions encourage a certain style of response. In this question candidates wrote to a friend on the topic of leisure and entertainment. This is not compulsory. For example, one candidate changed this into a dialogue and the mark was not adversely affected.

Some candidates struggled to express 'improve' in Portuguese and used *improver* or *improvisar*, for example. Candidates are allowed to use dictionaries in the examination to help with such instances of unknown vocabulary.

### Question 4

Many candidates wrote about a holiday rather than an exchange. This meant that they did not reach the top marks due to the failure to comply with the definition 'fully relevant' set out in the mark scheme.

The best responses to this question were firmly based on the idea of exchanges and many displayed a very good understanding of what an exchange can do for students.

### Question 5

Some candidates dwelt too long on listing the subjects they take and giving descriptions of the school buildings. They should have moved on to explain why they enjoyed or disliked their school and to expressing ideas about how and why the school should change.

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