

OCR Report to Centres

June 2012

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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.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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Overview

Examiners were for the most part impressed with the performance of candidates in this year's GCSE French examination. Standards were certainly maintained from last year and levels of achievement in the Listening and Reading components were higher.

Centres are to be commended for their hard work in preparing candidates for the controlled assessment tasks in Speaking and Writing. The reports on these components below give evidence of this commitment and the consequent success of candidates.

Centres need to remind their candidates of the importance of presenting written work neatly. In all components concerned (Listening, Reading and Writing) examiners reported instances of poor, at times virtually illegible, writing. In the objective questions on the Listening and Reading components, where a letter of the alphabet has to be written, candidates sometimes made it difficult for the examiner to decide which answer to mark. Changes had been made and it was not clear which was the candidate's favoured answer. In such cases of ambiguity, examiners are instructed to mark in favour of the candidate but, if the preferred answer is not sufficiently clear, the mark cannot be awarded.

A701 Listening

General comments

This year's French Listening comprehension examination proved to be well done. Examiners reported generally good standards amongst the candidates. It was pleasing to note that very low marks on either tier of the examination were rare and that very respectable numbers achieved marks of 30 and above out of 40. In the vast majority of cases candidates had been entered for the appropriate tier and it was clear that they had been well prepared for the examination. They made good use of the five minutes' preparation time and rubrics were well understood. Few candidates missed any questions and they generally made intelligent guesses in cases where they did not fully understand the French. At the same time, they should be reminded of the importance of listening carefully to both playings and, if necessary, of amending initial answers if they change their mind on hearing the piece for a second time. If they do change their answers they must delete their first answer clearly so that the examiner can be sure which answer the candidate wants to have marked.

Foundation Tier

Exercise 1: This opening exercise was, as expected, generally very well answered. The correct time on Question 1 was virtually always selected, but on Question 2 not all knew *un pantalon*, the visual of the skirt sometimes being picked. On Question 3 *un livre* was generally known but on Question 4 *la gare* was not as commonly selected as one might have expected; perhaps some candidates did not think the station was a likely location for a café. The two food items on Question 5 and Question 6 (*un sandwich au jambon* and *un jus de raisin*) were well known. On Question 7 *bibliothèque* was well understood and on the final question the correct visual for *grand-mère* was chosen by virtually all, despite the potentially confusing inclusion of the phrase *j'arrose son jardin*. Centres are reminded that it is a national requirement that each exercise should contain certain unfamiliar items of vocabulary.

Exercise 2: In this exercise, candidates were required to give brief answers in English. Examiners commented that candidates' English spelling was sometimes rather poor. This was not penalised provided the meaning was clear. Question 9 was well answered – it should be noted that both singular and plural renderings of *copains* were accepted. As expected, *l'autobus* (Question 10) caused few problems, though some offered "car". Question 11, the time, proved to be the most demanding question on the exercise; *huit heures moins le quart* is a fairly complex time, but candidates will usually learn the time at an early stage in their French studies. The most common answer here was either "8" or "8.15". It is important that teachers preparing pupils for this examination instruct them to listen to the whole of the utterance and not immediately to write "8 o'clock" before hearing and understanding the addition of *moins le quart*. Question 12 was a simple question, merely testing understanding of *je joue au football*. The subjects mentioned in Question 13 and 14 (*les maths* and *le dessin*) were well understood. For the latter subject it should be noted that "drawing", "art", "art and design" and "painting" were all acceptable renderings but that "design" on its own was rejected. On Question 15, both *la cantine* and *le gymnase* were generally understood. A broad range of renderings of the words in English was acceptable.

Exercise 3: Although the pace and density of the language in this exercise was a little more pronounced and the number of unfamiliar items of vocabulary (such as *cor*, *hérissons*, *randonnées* and *rédiger*) was higher, candidates fared quite well on this exercise which tested gist comprehension of young persons' free time interests. Answers to Questions 16 and 17 were usually correct but Question 18 proved to be a little more difficult as the verb *dormir* was not always known. Questions 19 to 21 were well answered though the final two items (Questions 22 and 23 – *je vais à la pêche* and *écrire des histoires*) presented more problems.

Foundation and Higher Tier

Exercise 4 (Foundation Tier) / 1 (Higher Tier): This exercise was answered very well by Higher Tier candidates but provided quite a challenge for those at Foundation Tier. Short answers in English were required and candidates respected this. On Question 24/1 *ma sœur* was easily understood but at both tiers, predictably, the word *neveu* was not well known and guesswork with answers such as “uncle”, “friend”, “aunt” and “on his own” was common. The periods of time on Question 25/2 – *une quinzaine de jours* and *un mois* – were quite often misunderstood, typically with “5 days” for the former and “a week” for the latter. The forms of transport tested on Question 26/3 (*le train* and *l’avion*) were well known for the most part and candidates did well to see that *la voiture* was a distractor. On Question 27/4, *une auberge de jeunesse* was not generally known by Foundation Tier candidates, who tended to be misled by the inclusion of *un bel hôtel*, failing to hear the continuation with *mais non!...c’est trop cher*. The second part of the question, simply testing *une maison de vacances*, was better understood.

Exercise 5 (Foundation Tier) / 2 (Higher Tier): This gist comprehension exercise, designed to test Grade C, was found difficult by a number of Foundation Tier candidates but was generally well answered by those at Higher Tier. Examiners sensed that many candidates at Foundation Tier guessed their answers but reported that there were good numbers of Higher Tier candidates scoring full marks. The exercise included tenses other than the present and it was necessary, for each question, to listen carefully to the whole comment rather than expecting to be able to base answers on the comprehension of individual isolated words. For Foundation Tier candidates, the most commonly correct answers were for Questions 28, 34 and 35. For Question 28, however, option D (“put on something warmer”) was often selected wrongly instead of option H (“go to the doctor’s”).

Higher Tier

Exercise 3: There were high numbers of excellent answers here, for which candidates demonstrated good powers of gist comprehension. Question 13 (*je répare les voitures* and *j’adore conduire ...j’aimerais transporter des marchandises à l’étranger*) was the best answered. On Question 14, *je cueille le raisin* and *j’adore les animaux...* were well understood. Good numbers showed understanding of *avocat* on Question 15. On the final question, “teacher” was often wrongly selected instead of “journalist”. It should be noted that if candidates reversed the two responses in each question (i.e. mixing “job now” with “preferred job”) they were not awarded the marks, though in fact relatively few made such an error.

Exercise 4: This was quite a demanding exercise, designed to test Grade A, and few candidates scored the full 8 marks, though all managed some correct answers. Some guessed likely answers (such as “shed” instead of “cupboard” on Question 18 and “week” instead of “year” on Question 23). Although candidates should not be dissuaded from making intelligent guesses, they must realise that it is their comprehension of the French heard which is being tested. On Question 17 *célibataire* was, not surprisingly, poorly known. Questions 18 and 19 were generally answered correctly. On Question 21, not all managed to equate *plusieurs bouteilles d’eau* with “drink”. Question 22 tested the ability to draw conclusions and proved quite demanding. On Question 23 some had problems picking out *environ un an* and, as mentioned above, answers here were commonly guessed. On Question 24, reasonably good numbers showed comprehension of *quartier* to give the correct answer of “neighbourhood”.

Exercise 5: This final A* exercise was demanding but generally more accessible than the equivalent exercise on last year’s paper. Although few scored full marks, all managed to give a reasonable number of correct answers. Most gave a correct answer for Question 25 which tested comprehension of *à la fois le nom du pays et le nom de la capitale* and on Question 26 most successfully picked “England” from the phrase *la présence anglaise*, though some offered “Switzerland” through mis-hearing *l’ouverture du canal de Suez*. On Question 27 the majority correctly gave the answer “Arabic”. (“Arab” “Arabian” and even “Arabica” were also accepted.)

Question 28 was more demanding, testing the concept of *bâtiments...délabrés...tombent en ruines*. Many offered “splendid” inappropriately, not appreciating the time-frame implications of *autrefois splendide*. On Question 29 candidates found it difficult to pick out *du vent très fort* but the majority gave a correct rendering of *les pluies* on Question 30. Question 31 was the most difficult of the exercise, testing comprehension of *élever quelques chèvres*, though the scheme allowed for fairly general answers such as “keep animals”. The final question was a little more accessible. Good numbers managed to perceive the concept of tourism from the phrase *les milliers de vacanciers qui viennent*, though a number lost the mark by offering “money” on hearing the final phrase *y dépenser leur argent*.

A702 Speaking

Teacher/Examiners have again responded extremely well to the challenge of this new specification. It has been very encouraging to see how well prepared the students have been for the introduction of controlled assessment and also to see the range of tasks submitted by Centres.

It is vital that internal moderation takes place within a Centre as, if there is an inconsistency in the marking between Teacher/Examiners in a Centre, it is possible that all the candidates in that Centre would need re-moderating. The Moderators were encouraged to see that Centres followed the guidelines from OCR and there was usually clear evidence of internal moderation among the Teacher/Examiners who had conducted the controlled assessments.

Administration

Unfortunately, in some Centres the marks for Task 2 were entered on the Task 1 mark sheet and vice versa. While the total for the candidate remained the same, it is essential that the mark for both tasks is accurate, as Task 1 is the moderated piece of work. This is clearly more difficult in a Centre with several Teacher/Examiners and great care must be taken in the transfer of marks onto the correct MS1 sheets and when passing MS1 sheets on to colleagues. It is also important to ensure that the addition of the marks is correct; the online version of the mark sheets could be used to avoid mathematical errors.

Most Centres were able to submit all the required work and documentation to the Moderator in one mailing. This meant that the Centre need not submit the work of all the candidates, but just those selected for sampling. This can be summarised as:

- Recording of Task 1 for each candidate in the sample requested (either on CD or via the Repository)
- Candidates' Notes Forms for both Task 1 and Task 2 for the candidates in the sample requested
- Cover sheet for each candidate in the sample requested
- CCS160 – Centre Authentication Form
- Moderator's copy of the MS1 (mark sheets)

In the majority of cases, candidates were encouraged to use familiar vehicles for the controlled assessment and the most common were:

Presentation on a theme followed by a discussion

An interview (usually with the candidate playing the part of somebody famous and enabling the candidate to draw on different topic areas of the specification)

A general conversation with the candidate

A role play – either an extended role play, for example buying clothes or requesting tourist information about an area; or

A narrative role play similar to the legacy specification, using the visual cues and adapted for the new specification

In the vast majority of Centres, the working mark sheets had been correctly filled in with the marks for both the recording submitted to OCR and for the second recording (where the recording was not required). The Speaking Notes Forms for the candidates were also correctly submitted and showed that the candidates had only used the correct number of prompts. Some candidates had made no notes to work from. While each candidate is an individual and may choose to do that, it is good practice for the candidates to have some notes to refer to in case they “freeze” in the assessment situation.

Where the mark sheets were incorrect or not provided by the Centre, the problem was quickly resolved by contact between the Moderator and the Exams Officer at the Centre.

Style of tasks and timing

The most successful of the Presentation and Discussion style tasks allowed the candidates to speak for no longer than three minutes (the majority spoke for between two and two and a half minutes), which allowed ample time for the Teacher/Examiner to draw the candidates out and give them access to the higher marks in the assessment criteria. The candidates were then able to demonstrate their ability to understand unexpected questions and respond to them.

There were some excellent Interviews which included job interviews and / or interviews with famous people. This gave lots of scope for using tenses and enabled candidates to use a variety of structures and vocabulary. Good sequences of language were heard in response to unexpected questions and the candidates expressed themselves well and showed their ability to link and develop ideas. Language was accurate, well pronounced and showed good control of relevant tenses.

Where an extended role play is used as an Assessment, it is important that the candidate is given every opportunity to access the higher end of the mark range. In a minority of cases this year, candidates completed the task but had not been extended in either the Communication or Quality of Language aspects.

It was pleasing to see that the vast majority of Teacher/Examiners adhered to the recommended timing of the controlled assessment (4-6 minutes). Where assessments were considerably longer than the six minute maximum, Moderators noted that candidates could not sustain the level of input and the quality of their work began to deteriorate as time elapsed.

Recording quality

The recording quality was usually superb and there were no problems with CDs sent in the post as they were adequately wrapped to prevent damage. It is still worth pointing out that the position of the candidate is important. If he/she is too far away from the recording equipment, the recording, no matter how excellent the equipment, will still be faint. The recordings on the Repository were clearly identifiable and were also of excellent quality. Once recordings have been uploaded to the Repository, Centres checked that the recording had saved correctly – a worthwhile precaution, saving much time and effort later.

Most Centres made recordings in MP3 format but, whatever the chosen format, Moderators were able to access the recordings. Where a technical problem occurred with a recording, it was swiftly resolved as a result of a conversation between the Moderator and the Centre. A few Centres tried a video format this year which worked extremely well and posed no viewing problems for the Moderators concerned.

It was encouraging to see in many Centres that each recording was labelled with either the candidate's name and candidate number or the Centre and candidate numbers, making clear identification quick and easy. Where this was not the case, Moderators spent some time identifying the correct recording as some were only labelled as "Track 1" or "Track 2" and it would be helpful if Centres could label the recordings with at least the candidate name and/or number.

In a few Centres, the Teacher/Examiners had included the title of the controlled assessment in the file name, which was extremely useful for the Moderator to see on screen as well as in the paperwork.

The majority of Centres provided OCR with their marks before the deadline. In a minority of cases, the marks were not made available to OCR by the May 15th deadline which can cause problems for OCR, the Moderator and the Centre. It is extremely important, if candidates' results are not to be delayed, that the deadline of May 15th is respected for the submission of marks to OCR.

A703 Reading

General comments

Candidates generally coped well with the reading examination, and for the most part had been entered for the correct tier.

Most candidates supplied an answer to all questions, often showing a sensible use of context when attempting to convey unknown language. In a few cases responses to multiple choice and relatively simple written answers were left blank, even by able candidates, possibly suggesting a lack of checking at the end of the test.

Foundation Tier

Exercise 1: Questions 1–8

The majority of candidates scored well on this task, although for Question 6 *stationner* was not well known by many. This led to some guessing and responses including such items as rulers and pens, presumably linking this to “stationery”.

Candidates should be encouraged to read the words rather than concentrate on images, as some appeared to misinterpret the image of ice cream in Question 2. In question 5 *à partir de* led some to respond with “party”, while in Question 7(b) *jour* also caused problems: “ride”, “trip” and “journey”, as well as “hour”, were sometimes guessed.

Exercise 2: Questions 8–15

In this multiple choice exercise many candidates performed well. *Je suis fils unique* and *des animaux bizarres* were commonly known, and *en banlieue* was usually identified with “in the suburbs”. Questions 9 and 15 provided the largest number of incorrect answers in this section, candidates often opting for “pilot” in Question 9, possibly linking *avocat* to “aviation” or similar words. *Tout de suite* was not always understood. The remaining items were usually very well answered.

Exercise 3: Questions 16–23

A high degree of success was seen with this task, which required selecting correct words and phrases from a list. The task showed the ability to ignore unknown vocabulary in order to concentrate on the essential of the task. Question 21, however, was rarely correctly answered, most candidates supplying the response “cousin” and there was some evidence that *coeur* was not universally recognised, being replaced by “muscles”.

Foundation/Higher Tier

Exercise 4: Questions 24–29 / Exercise 1: Questions 1–6

A wide range of marks was seen on this exercise, which discriminated well. All questions in this task had a proportion of blank responses, including, somewhat surprisingly, Question 24/1. This also saw a variety of answers including, as expected, “car”, but also a significant proportion of candidates supplied “8 o'clock”, suggesting a lack of attention to the detail of the question. Question 25/2 allowed many to gain one mark, but some were drawn to *parce que c'est calme* for the second part. Similarly, Question 26/3 often afforded one mark for “practical” but *je sais toujours quoi porter* led to many incorrect guesses. Questions 27/4 and 28/5 were answered well by higher level candidates, foundation level candidates often confusing *rappports* with “reports” in 28/5. However in Question 29/6 *patinoire* was not well known at either tier.

Exercise 5: Questions 30–37 / Exercise 2: Questions 7–14

This task proved to be very accessible to candidates at all levels and many scored full marks. The most frequently incorrect answer was “Fatima” for Question 14 but even this was relatively rare.

Higher Tier

Exercise 3: Questions 15–22

There was a mixed profile to answers on this exercise, as the longer text meant that candidates had to read carefully. Questions 17, 20 and 21 proved to be the most difficult, while incorrect answers to Question 22 were seldom seen, despite the fact that the question appeared on a separate page, a feature which did not appear to cause problems to candidates.

Exercise 4: Questions 23–29

This task, in which candidates had to write in English, gave able candidates the opportunity to show what they knew while allowing most candidates to feel that they could supply a sensible response, even if they failed to give sufficient detail to earn the marks.

Close reading is important at this level and single word answers are very unlikely to score. Question 23 needed the concept of **more** recycling; Question 26 of a **reduction** and Question 28 of a change in the level of respect. Candidates should also be wary of concentrating on one word and constructing a reply based on it. *Ordre* was used in such a way for a variety of responses. Question 27 was particularly testing, as *champs* was not a well known item of vocabulary. In Question 29 marks were sometimes lost due to incoherence and ambiguity in the use of English.

Exercise 5: Questions 30–37

At this level, candidates should be able to read a text for gist and detail and interpret longer sequences of complex language. More able candidates displayed the ability to do this and gained a pleasing number of marks. Questions 36 and 37 were especially well answered, again, despite being on a separate page, and no candidates omitted to answer these.

A704 Writing

General comments

Examiners reported that the full ability range was represented in this year's examination. It would seem that in the middle and upper ranges, the work presented, when set against the criteria, was a little better than that seen in 2011.

Administration

Centres are to be congratulated for the care and attention given to the correct presentation and submission of their candidates' work. There are some issues which were noted last year which still pertain.

Centres are reminded of the importance of the form CCS 160 which confirms that the work submitted is genuinely that of the candidates and that it has been completed according to the guidelines. Examiners reported a significant proportion of missing forms. It should be remembered that results may be withheld if the form is not available.

Work was promptly submitted by the deadline of May 15 by the vast majority of Centres.

It was reassuring to note that Centres responded in greater numbers to the request that candidates' work be attached with treasury tags. Those who continue to use plastic folders are urged to follow this practice, as are those who submit a bundle of loose sheets.

All work should be submitted in candidate number order according to the MS1 and not in teaching groups.

As Centres are free to choose the format of paper on which candidates write their answers, it would be helpful to remember that examiners need to annotate scripts; this is a vital part of the assessment process. A healthy margin both left and right would assist examiners in their work and also help in assuring that the assessment is appropriate.

There were rather more candidates who submitted word-processed work this year. It would be helpful if teachers advised their candidates to leave margins and use double spacing.

A small number of Centres did not present work with the relevant Controlled Assessment coversheet; these are available through the OCR website.

As was reported last year, some teachers are marking and recording their assessments of candidates' work. Centres are reminded that all work for this component is sent to be marked by OCR examiners.

Centres are reminded that the Teacher's Information sheet is not required by the examiner; copies should be retained at Centres.

The message given last year about the recommended length of individual pieces of work was largely heeded. Some Centres, however, are still encouraging over-long pieces in excess of 400 words: these often fail to reach the top bands for marks. It is challenging in one hour to write at length and maintain control and coherence.

Centres are reminded that candidates should be allowed one session, maximum one hour, for the production of each piece. There was clear evidence that a small number of candidates had revisited work in progress.

Examiners reported some deterioration in the handwriting of candidates. It would be helpful if teachers reminded their candidates that if what they write is not legible they may lose marks.

Choice of topic

Examiners reported that Centres used a range of topics to test. However, it would seem that already some topic areas are beginning to dominate e.g. school, holidays.

The choice is a free choice and it must be recognized that, in the busy schedule imposed by the new specification, teachers need to plan very carefully the timing of their assessments. It would be a pity, however, if Centres were not able to give as wide a range of opportunities as possible to their candidates. This is especially so given the requirements to express and justify opinions; with a topic such as school, it becomes quite a challenge for candidates to produce something personal. Making comparisons between the French and British school systems equally led to identical responses, as everyone focused on the issue of uniform, re-sitting a year, longer days, longer/shorter holidays, religious education, the wearing of religious symbols, the issue of Wednesday/Saturday school. The preferences expressed were highly predictable. Regarding holidays, many demonstrated their thorough knowledge of various problems encountered in hotels and campsites, as reflected in the pages of some well used course books, but seemed bound by those and unable to write on a more personal level.

Some of the best work in terms of an individual approach came from more open ended tasks which allowed candidates some choice of focus. One Centre invited candidates to write about a cultural event which they had attended: as a result candidates wrote variously of their visits to the cinema, the ballet, the theatre, music festivals, museums.

Examiners reported that at some Centres the whole cohort submitted the same two pieces. There seemed to be no attempt at differentiation which meant that the abler candidates were not fully stretched and the weaker candidates were excessively challenged.

It was encouraging to see that many candidates were given the chance to compare and contrast different experiences. The advantage of such a focus is that it allows candidates to demonstrate the important skill of expressing and justifying opinions but also it provides opportunities for the use of more complex language: comparative adjectives/adverbs, conjunctions such as *tandis que*, *alors que* etc.

As ever, a topic which invited a mere descriptive response such as *Ma ville / Mon village* had a limiting effect on the candidates' output and left them with a stern task to develop opportunities for expressing more complex ideas and using more varied structures. One of the consequences of such a focus is that candidates did not know how to develop their responses and often introduced irrelevant information.

Writing Notes Form (Candidates)

The use of this form is an integral part of the production of the piece of writing; examiners reported that these were being well used by a significant proportion of candidates.

Candidates would be well advised to make full use of the opportunities to support themselves with appropriate use of the form. It was clear that some candidates become reliant on the dictionary when writing under test conditions. This often produced nonsensical language. A candidate who does not know "am" in French, should write *je suis* on their form; it was disappointing to read *je be content* This revealed a lack of security both in the use of language and in the use of a dictionary. Other examples of where the Notes Form can support the candidates: the gender, number and spelling of *vacances* and, as was seen from a Centre which invited a comparison of educational systems, crucial vocabulary such as *uniforme*, *système*, *mercredi*, *histoire*, all of which were repeatedly misspelt.

Candidates who wrote on health issues often confused the noun *santé* and the adjective *sain*; here again, carefully made notes would have been useful. Some other commonly misspelt words which could have been noted were: *malheureusement*, *meilleur*, *aventure*, *avantage*. It was a little frustrating to see the significant vocabulary correctly recorded on the Notes Form only to see it used incorrectly in the piece itself, almost as if the Notes Form, once completed, had no further use.

Examiners reported a number of contraventions of the guidelines: use of more than 40 words, attempts to disguise continuous prose, pictures, crossings out which left the vocabulary sufficiently legible as to be useful. Teachers should be vigilant, as signing the CCS 160 covers all aspects of the production of Controlled Assessment.

It was noted this year that there was a high proportion of blank forms. Whilst individual candidates may decide that it is unnecessary for them to have these legitimate prompts, the situation is rather different when whole teaching groups leave them blank for one or even both pieces. This could suggest that the required procedures have not been respected.

It was also evident that some candidates completed the Notes Form retrospectively.

Quality of work

Coherence and accuracy are the hallmarks of work awarded marks at the top of the range. Many able candidates demonstrated that they could fulfil those criteria. Work of this order often emerged from careful planning and from imaginative responses to the declared focus. Such candidates could use a variety of tenses and structures, as identified in the grammar summary of the specification. Sentences were carefully crafted, often introduced by a connecting word / adverbial time phrase and containing some subordinate structure. The ideas flowed and the piece as a whole was interesting to read. Some candidates, aware that justifications can appear repetitive if constantly expressed with *parce que ...*, *car ...*, chose to turn the ideas around e.g. *pendant les vacances je préfère voir quelque chose de différent, c'est pour cela que je suis allé en Italie* Such candidates could demonstrate control of sequence of tense in sentences using *si*; many candidates were encouraged to use this pattern as it makes for a neat concluding paragraph and allows for the expression of an opinion and a justification.

There were many candidates who aspired to marks in the top bands. However, their work was so over-prepared, so heavily influenced by templates, that the resulting pieces were often stilted or even incoherent or contradictory in places. The driving force seemed to come from the need to demonstrate complex language features rather than to use the language to convey the narrative line and to communicate the opinions and justifications. In such instances, it was common to see *d'habitude*, *normalement*, *généralement ...* followed appropriately by a present tense only for the rest of the paragraph to be in the perfect tense. Object pronouns were used with no antecedents; the perfect infinitive was correctly formed but was left hanging as the main verb had a different subject, as in: *après être arrivé, il a commencé à pleuvoir* It was not uncommon to see the subjunctive used; often it was unnecessary; often it was produced from memory rather than emerging naturally; such uses are rendered pointless when candidates cannot manipulate correctly the tenses which carry the thrust of the narrative or the arguments they wish to express. A greater attention to the correct use of the various tenses required for a narrative or discursive piece of writing would be more helpful to candidates.

Many Centres seem to be still under the impression that idioms, as identified in the criteria, are clichéd statements such as demonstrated here:

Quand nous sommes arrivés à Paris, j'avais une faim de loup car puisqu'il pleuvait à verse, nous n'avons pas acheté de la nourriture.

Pour revenir à nous moutons, je suis tombée sur un mec ... J'étais au septième ciel quand il m'a embrassée. Qui vivra, verra ...

Sadly, it was common to find pieces written in such a style; such work does not impress, as it demonstrates a good memory rather than an ability to manipulate language. Idioms refer to the idiomatic use of grammatical structures: using *avoir* correctly: *mon frère a sept ans*; using *faire* to comment on the weather: *d'habitude il ne fait pas beau ... , heureusement il faisait chaud tous les jours ...* ; using *venir de*: *je viens de faire un stage en entreprise ...* ; using *depuis* correctly: *dans la famille on recycle depuis quelques années ...* ; knowing that *il y a* is also a time phrase: *on a déménagé il y a cinq ans, mais je n'aime toujours pas la ville ...* ; knowing that *il s'agit de* is an impersonal structure which is useful in a critique of a book, film: *il s'agit d'une famille qui habite au Canada ...* ; there are other impersonal structures which fulfil this criterion which fall within the GCSE range: *il faut ... , il reste ... , il manque ...* These are genuinely useful structures which will enhance candidates' understanding of language and prepare them well for future study.

Lists are one way for candidates to achieve longer pieces. Lists of school subjects, items of school uniform, rooms in the house, public buildings in town, cannot in themselves gain much credit. There was evidence of more elaborate lists using verb forms e.g. referring to the place of residence: *on peut jouer au tennis, on peut visiter un musée, on peut aller à la piscine ...* or in mentioning school rules: *il faut porter un uniforme, il faut arriver à l'heure, il ne faut pas mâcher du chewing gum ...* The sources of these are readily recognizable; it would be better to give one or two examples and maybe explain why these are good or bad. A slightly more sophisticated list was noted with the expressions *les avantages / les inconvénients sont* These were rather more credit worthy as they were used to support opinions and justifications. However, candidates need to use these correctly in order to gain full advantage: many could not complete the clause appropriately e.g. *l'avantage c'est il fait beau tous les jours ... l'inconvénient c'est je dois me lever de bonne heure*

It is disappointing to report that some candidates had memorized their drafts in full only to fail to reproduce them accurately enough to score well; the succession of phonetic errors revealed what they had done. Sadly, some had even learnt verbatim easily traceable paragraphs copied from websites. Teachers are reminded that they must be able to authenticate work as the candidate's own and insist on acknowledgement and referencing of any sources used.

Controlled Assessment remains a challenge for all. It can be a liberating experience for candidates to produce a piece of writing on a familiar theme or topic that has been studied in depth in class. It is particularly challenging for candidates in the lower ranges. For them, differentiation is crucial, as is also the idea that quantity is not the sole arbiter of success. A short piece which conveys simple messages will gain more than a long rambling piece of writing which is repetitive, irrelevant and full of error. Perhaps it would be appropriate to shorten the time available for the production of the final piece for such candidates.

Fortunately, many teachers and candidates are rising to the challenge and demonstrating, in the process, good practice and strong language.

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