



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

French

FREN3

(Specification 2650)

Unit 3: Listening, Reading and Writing

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

The examination proved accessible to the vast majority of students with some questions on which virtually all were able to score high marks while others proved challenging even to the best. There were very few cases of questions being left completely blank or of the Cultural Topic essay being clearly unfinished, which suggests that most students had sufficient time to complete the examination.

Section A

Comments on specific questions

The four Listening items were generally tackled successfully. Question 1 enabled most to get off to a confident start, the only difficulty being that some students transposed the answers to parts (a) and (b). Question 2 was answered more successfully than the corresponding question last year with almost three-quarters of students scoring at least 6 out of 7. In Question 3 part (c) caused the most difficulty with a significant number of students failing to notice that paid employment also referred to Paul as well as to Marion. In Question 4, part (c) caused difficulties for some, but it was part (d) that was only answered correctly by the most able students, the double negative in *...on ne me fera pas croire que la France n'ait pas la possibilité de les intégrer* clearly proving challenging.

Students also generally coped well with the three Reading comprehension items. Question 5 was very well answered, with just part (f) proving difficult for some, while most students also scored well on Question 6, the main problems being in parts (a), (g) and (j), where the word *échec* and the negative *il n'y a que...* were the elements which were probably misinterpreted. As was the case last year there were a number of instances of rubric infringement where students instead of writing V/F/ND used ticks, crosses and question marks or wrote 'T' for 'V' and 'N' or 'PM' for 'ND'. As the aim of this exercise is to test comprehension all these answers were accepted as it was felt that students should be rewarded for the comprehension despite the rubric infringement. The cloze test exercise of Question 7 was the most challenging of the three items and proved to be an effective discriminator. Most students were able to place correctly *conseil*, *tort* and *majorité* into the text but only the better ones achieved full marks on the question as a whole.

Answers to Question 8, the translation into English, covered the whole range from the very good, where the passage was fully understood and rendered in fluent English, to the less where students seemed to have little idea even of the general gist of the passage. There were some vocabulary items, such as *littoral*, *navfrage* and *s'échoue*, which were intended to challenge even the better students, many of whom were able to infer the meaning from the context even if they had not previously encountered the words, but given that the topics for study, including that of pollution, are listed in the Specification, it was more surprising that items such as *marées noires* and *pétrole* were not always well known. 'False friends' such as *sensibles* and *touchant* also caused considerable difficulty and even more surprising was that some very common items such as *côtes* and even *plages* were not always known. Many students also failed to achieve the marks in some sections by simply not translating some words such as *surtout*, *très* and *alors*. Students should be aware that this is the one question in the paper where quality of English is taken into account and that the mark for each section is only awarded if the sense of the French is rendered in acceptable English. Thus in the first sentence 'concentrate themselves' rather than 'are concentrated' was not accepted, nor was the use of a double preposition (of which we have spoken a lot about) in translating the clause *dont on a beaucoup parlé*. A number of students were also unaware of the distinction between 'affect' and 'effect'. Precision is important; 'A number of' is not an accurate rendering of *De nombreuses...* – 'A large number' or something similar is needed – and 'attain' does not give the sense of *atteindre* in this context. Finally, if students think carefully about the sense of

the passage as a whole they should be able to work out the sense of expressions such as *d'une part ... d'autre part*. It is worth pointing out in this case that if *d'une part* was mistranslated and exactly the same error in translating 'part' was made over *d'autre part* then this was treated as a consequential error and not penalised again. The same was true over the translation of *pétrolier* and *pétrole*.

Question 9 also produced a full range of answers. The topic-specific vocabulary was not too demanding; most students knew *éoliennes* though *combustibles fossiles* caused more difficulty. However, this question also requires precision, of both spelling and grammar, and in the first case *de l'ouest/occidentaux*, *développer* and *pratique* all caused problems. As far as the grammar is concerned, a regrettably large number of students were unable to form *doivent* correctly or make the correct agreement of *nouvelles sources*, and very few indeed could give the correct past participle *agi* or write *tout le temps* accurately. Other grammatical constructions which caused difficulties were *de plus en plus de*, the distinction between *les* and *des*, the passive construction 'are being built' – though avoidance of the passive by a form such as *on construit* or *se construisent* was also accepted – *ce qui* and the *si* clause requiring the use of the pluperfect/conditional perfect in part (e). It might help students to realise that these sentences are designed primarily to test knowledge of grammar and a good approach is to think what particular constructions are required in each sentence; the aim is not to 'catch out' students by testing the most difficult or obscure points but to enable students with a sound understanding of the main grammatical structures listed in the Specification to show what they can do, and it was pleasing to see the better students writing French with a good degree of accuracy.

Section B

Writing

The Cultural Topic essays produced a full range of responses. Some students showed a very detailed knowledge of the topic studied and applied this knowledge to answering the specific question set in an essay that was well-structured, contained a wide range of evidence to support the ideas and was expressed in fluent and accurate French. Such an essay was awarded full marks. However, at the other end of the scale there were a number of essays where the examiner struggled to understand what exactly the student was attempting to express or where the ideas were so limited that very little credit could be given. The most challenging was undoubtedly adopting too descriptive or narrative an approach rather than analysing, as the question required. Perhaps the best advice which can be given to students is that if all they do is simply to describe a region or recount the historical events or what happens in a work of literature or a film, for example, then the essay is likely to be placed at best in the 'Limited' band for Content, for which one of the descriptors is 'Little evaluation and personal reaction; mainly descriptive or factual'. What students need to do to attract higher marks is to analyse what the factual knowledge shows, whether it be the relative importance of different aspects of the region, the causes/effects of the historical events, the themes or characterisation in a novel or whatever is required by the specific question set.

The study of a region was the least popular of the Cultural Topics, though a wide range of regions was offered, from the Paris area, PACA or Brittany to overseas areas such as Martinique. As was mentioned in last year's report, it is important to note that it must be a region where French is the main language spoken or else the essay must focus on the French-speaking community of that region, so that, for example, Vietnam, while retaining some French speakers, is not an appropriate topic unless the essay is focused solely on those speakers. Whatever the region chosen, many students found it difficult to get into analysis, simply giving facts with little or no comment. However, those who answered Question 10(a) most successfully indicated the sources of employment but more importantly discussed the kinds of people who might take advantage of them and there was often sensitive reaction to

the people who would not be so lucky. The second part of the question – how these sources of employment might change in the future - was rarely answered with conviction, but there were some very thoughtful responses taking into account the global financial situation or likely impact of global warming on ski resorts, for example. Question 10(b) produced some very good essays especially from students who took full advantage of the possibilities suggested by the question whereas less able students simply listed tourist attractions and failed to distinguish between living in and visiting a region. Finally, there was a very small number of students who treated this essay as a language exercise and reproduced an AS type essay on the advantages and disadvantages of tourism without referring to any specific region of a French-speaking area. Such students unfortunately failed to show any knowledge relevant to the question set.

Of the periods of history studied the most popular were the Second World War/Occupation, May 68 and the Algerian war. Those students who chose to answer Question 11(a) tended to be very narrative; the most challenging was to recount an event and say it was interesting or surprising but without really justifying the opinion expressed. The number of events chosen was not important other than those who chose a larger number of events were often more superficial than those who concentrated on perhaps three. The same was true of those who chose Question 11(b). As the question specifically asked for an analysis of causes, there was often more successful analysis than in Question 11(a) but only the more able students provided a convincing response to the second part of the question as to how inevitable those events were.

Among the authors chosen for study Sagan, Joffo, Camus and Maupassant were the most popular but a whole range of other authors was offered by some students. More philosophical writers such as Camus tended to polarise students; there were many excellent essays which showed a clear understanding of the concepts involved, but less able students struggled to express coherent ideas and often referred to 'existentialism' or 'the absurd' without suggesting they had any idea of what the concepts actually mean. However, it was pleasing to note that the vast majority of those who had studied a short-story writer (usually Maupassant) did conform to the requirement to refer to at least three stories in their essays. Most of the students who had studied this topic did give some analysis in their answers and provided some evidence to support their ideas, though inevitably in some cases there was an element of "telling the story". For Question 12(a) the definition of who the *personnages principaux* are was left to the students and again the number of students analysed was far less important than the depth of analysis. The second part of the question was less well answered and was often restricted to two or three sentences in the conclusion. Many of those who chose Question 12(b) clearly thought carefully about the choice of themes and wrote excellent essays, analysing how these themes are developed within the novel or stories and in the conclusion produced a well-justified argument as to the relative importance of the themes chosen. Others discussed themes in general but ignored the reference to 'development' and so did not answer the whole question in the sort of depth needed for the top band for Content.

The most popular choices for the study of a poet or playwright were Prévert and Baudelaire among the poets and Molière, Sartre, Becket and Ionesco among the playwrights. Question 13(a) was rarely chosen, especially with reference to a poet, and although those who had studied a playwright did sometimes give a perceptive analysis of how characters and themes were introduced there were a number of fairly superficial essays which concentrated purely on plot development. There were, however, a number of excellent answers to Question 13 (b) on the techniques used by the poet or dramatist, though in the latter case only the best students considered how the techniques would actually affect a stage performance of the play studied.

Finally, of the various options available for the remaining Cultural Topic, a film director was by far the most popular, with Truffaut, Kassovitz, Malle and Jeunet being offered by many students and answers on an architect being extremely rare. As was mentioned last year, it is

important to consider in this topic the medium in which the artist was working. This is especially true of Question 14(a) where in analysing the influences on a film director or a musician, say, many students restricted themselves to the elements which influenced the themes or storyline without discussing the influences on cinematographic or musical technique. However, there were also some excellent and very detailed answers from students who successfully identified a whole range of influences and analysed their relative impact on the works studied. As with Question 11(a) on the period of history, those who answered Question 14(b) were often descriptive in approach, with little depth to the analysis of why the aspects chosen were impressive and if techniques were dealt with at all it tended to be in passing.

In conclusion, to repeat a remark that was made in last year's report, whichever topic is chosen, the key to success is for the student to answer the question, the whole question and nothing but the question. The questions will of necessity be general in nature but students are advised to look very carefully at the precise wording of the question and work out its implications. If the question has two parts to it then both parts must be dealt with – not necessarily at equal length but it is unwise to leave the second part to one or two sentences at the end. To plan the answer carefully before starting to write is also highly advisable and students are also advised to ensure that their conclusion does indeed answer the specific question posed in the title.

The following information and guidance is provided on the suitability of some of the topic choices this summer.

General

A very few topics may fall into two categories (Brassens & Brel as poet or musician; Hergé as author or artist.) However whichever question is answered, the topic discussed must fall into that category. Hence if a question is answered on Hergé as an artist, then it is his artistic technique which must be discussed and if a question is answered on Brel or Brassens as a musician, then some aspects of musicality (rather than just the themes of the songs) should be discussed.

French-speaking Region

Where a country has some French speakers but French is not the language generally spoken, such as Vietnam, then it is inappropriate unless referring just to those French-speakers. Similarly, where a country has a French-speaking region such as Canada or Belgium, then it is only that region which should be discussed, not the country as a whole. A single city or town (such as Cannes) with little or no reference to the surrounding area will probably not allow sufficient depth and detail in the response.

Period of 20th Century History

Too wide or too narrow a period.

Author

It is unwise to answer a question on characters in a short story with reference to one very short story. Students must not answer this question with reference to a poet/playwright or film director.

Dramatist/Poet

Nothing specific which was inappropriate though it is difficult to answer questions on poetry effectively without some quotation. Some students answered this question with reference to an author or film director which is not permitted.

Director/Architect/Musician/Painter

For the topic of a director, architect, musician or painter, students should refer to work produced by one person; a film on which two directors worked in collaboration, for example, would not be appropriate. A musician must be defined as someone who writes music rather than just a singer and answers should contain some reference to musical aspects rather than just the lyrics. The topic of 'painter' cannot include sculptor, fashion designer or photographer.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion.