



Examiners' Report June 2013

GCE Japanese 6JA02 01

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Introduction

The 2013 A level examination was very similar to that of previous years, and candidates had clearly been very well prepared by their teachers. It is evident that candidates continue to find the study of topics and texts very rewarding, and put lot of effort into preparing and learning towards this section of the paper. It is always a pleasure to learn new facts, or have new insights into the pieces of literature, from the candidates' work.

It was noticeable that less able candidates did not gain some marks through errors in examination technique - some had scored 13 or 14 out of 28 for one essay, but had not attempted the second essay. Even if they can only manage one or two paragraphs per essay, candidates are strongly recommended to attempt both essays.

Question 1

The mid to more able candidates were able to attempt all of the questions in the section. Parts (b), (e) and (l) were perhaps the most accessible. Some candidates got confused on (j), being unable to differentiate the two feelings required by the two parts of the question. Part (m) required understanding of the meaning behind the words, and some candidates did not gain marks on this.

Some candidates wrote only single word answers, although the greater problem was candidates just copying out large sections of the text, either without selecting the relevant part, or without adapting the grammar. For example, many candidates wrote "Hito ni nareta panda was yasei no panda yori yowaku kara desu" for (h).

Question 2

There was much evidence that candidates had prepared thoroughly for this section, and really made a good effort. It was of concern that some candidates did not know GCSE level words such as "underground", "station", or "to run".

Candidates need to be aware that some katakana words have different meanings in Japanese from the original English: "rekodo o tsukuru" being a typical error which came up this year. Candidates should transcribe people's names and UK place names into katakana, and not simply leave them in English.

Candidates were not expected to know the official translation of the "Japanese Tsunami Earthquake Appeal" in the first paragraph. Some of the native speaker candidates knew the correct translation, but many candidates who did not know it also made a good effort at conveying the meaning, and were credited accordingly.

The most accessible section was the second paragraph, although many candidates failed to convey the meaning of "running for up to 24 hours at a time", and translated it as "he ran for 24 hours" or "he ran in 24 hour bursts".

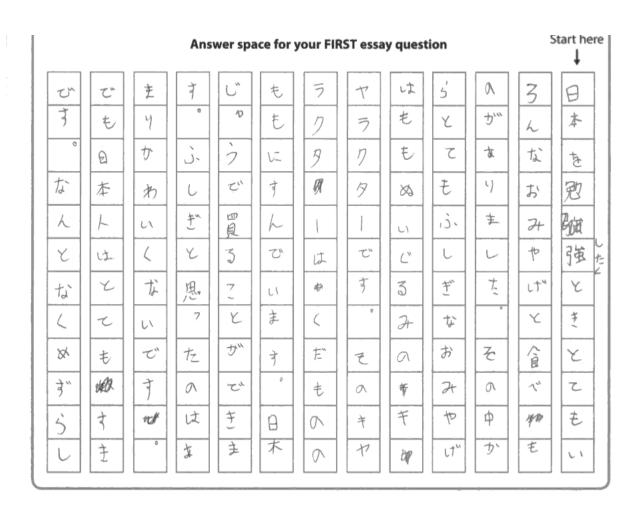
In the third paragraph, the word "the organisation" was unknown to many candidates, although of course this could have been translated as "The Guinness Book of Records". "Timed photos" turned out to be surprisingly difficult for candidates to translate.

The very last sentence could have easily been split into two before translating it into Japanese, although many candidates did not seem to spot this.

Some candidates who chose this topic had clearly prepared well, and knew a great many facts about current initiatives towards internationalisation in their locality. Depending on the region chosen, there were some historical perspectives, or specific current or legacy programmes (eg the Nagano Olympics) which candidates wrote about. Quite a few candidates, however, did not gain marks as they dealt with the whole of Japan rather than a local region (and so they had few specific facts and examples to put down), or they just wrote in very general terms such as "lots of people in the tourist industry are trying to learn English".

This was a popular question. Candidates who had studied their region were generally able to offer interesting and specific facts on both the unusual foods and souvenirs, although they sometimes did not gain marks because they only wrote about one or the other. Some candidates did not gain marks as they did not tie it to a region and wrote about eg maccha ice cream. Candidates should be reminded that detailed, specific knowledge, is required - they are expected to have spent considerable time both in and out of the classroom researching and studying their topics and texts.

This is typical of a candidate who has scored low marks because they have not tied their answer down to a specific region of Japan.





Although only the first page is shown here, you can see that there is only one specific mention of a "momo nuigurumi", and even this is not backed up with a specific brand name, reasons why this souvenir is famous etc.

The content was given a 5 (one relevant point made but no substantiation).

The quality of language was given a 3 - there are no A2 structures used, and there is a general lack of kanji.



Write in paragraphs.

Use kanji wherever you can.

This was a very popular question, but many candidates did not gain marks because their essays were either far too personal (I like using products X, Y and Z) or bland (young people use technology but old people do not). Candidates also had a tendency to write about technology in general, rather than focussing on the impact of technology on people's lives. Some of the most able candidates were able to discuss the use of technology by old people (particularly in the context of the ageing society) but this was rare.

This example has been included to illustrate the point above.



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The content was given a 5, mainly for the mention of the effect of the internet on modern life on the first page.

The organisation and development was given a 6 - the ideas do not seem to have been organised at all, and the impression is that the candidate is just putting things down as they occur to him / her.



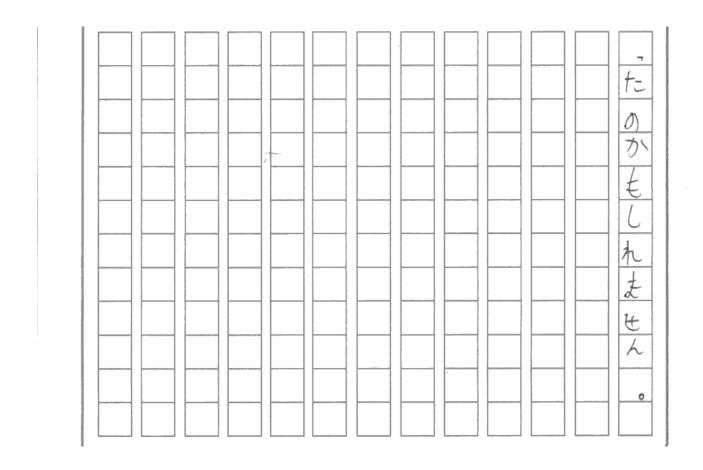
Do answer the question with specific factual information.

Do plan and organise your answer before you start writing.

Not many candidates attempted this question, and again was characterised by a lack of evidence that the phenomenon of "employment" had been studied from any sociological or academic perspective by those who did attempt it. Candidates tended to write in the most general terms about "My father worked very hard all his life in his company, but university students nowadays think it will be hard to get a job and don't want to work very hard."

There were some thoughtful and well thought through answers to this question, particularly where candidates focussed on the religious aspect, and demonstrated that they had both studied and understood some of the typical views held by Japanese people on Shintoism / Buddhism / Christianity. Less successful candidates tended to focus on describing the party / food / celebration aspect and tended to produce essays that were descriptive or narrative, rather than analytical.

This essay really makes the same point as the one above - candidates are not going to score well unless they have studied and prepared for this examination, even if they are a native speaker.



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This was given 4 for content (writing in general about weddings, but has not specifically addressed the question), 5 for organisation and development (ideas not always logical and clear) and 3 for quality of language.

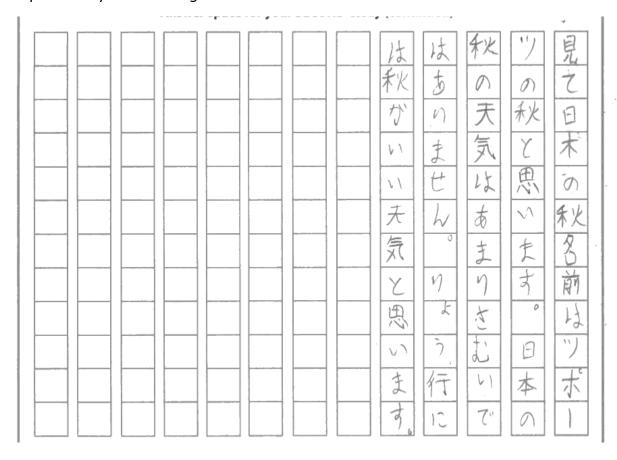


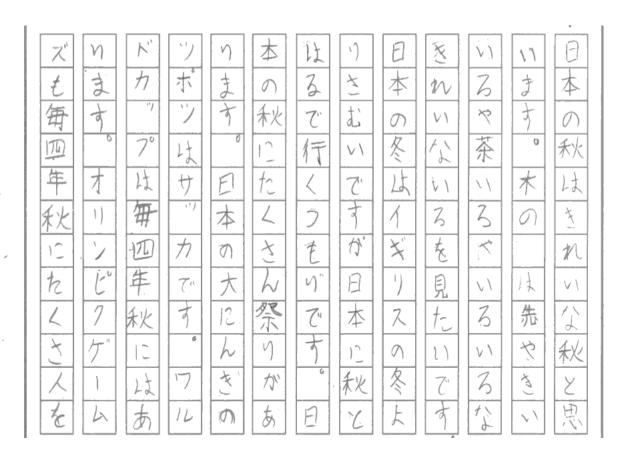
Include specific, relevant details in response to the question.

Plan your essay before you start writing.

There was clear evidence that candidates had studied the seasons in Japan, and were familiar with the main autumnal events in Japan. They were less successful in adapting their answers to the 3 specific names for autumn given in this year's examination. The sports aspect was probably the easiest to tackle, as an obvious link could be made to "taiiku no hi" (which most candidates showed evidence of having studied), but some candidates even failed to make this link.

As mentioned above, it was distressing this year that many of the least able candidates wrote only one of the two required essays. This example has been included to encourage all candidates to write something for both essays. Although this essay is very short, basic and includes GCSE level language errors, nevertheless it was given 9 marks. The difference between scoring 9 marks for an essay of this quality, and scoring 0 for leaving the page blank, can potentially make one grade's difference to the overall result.







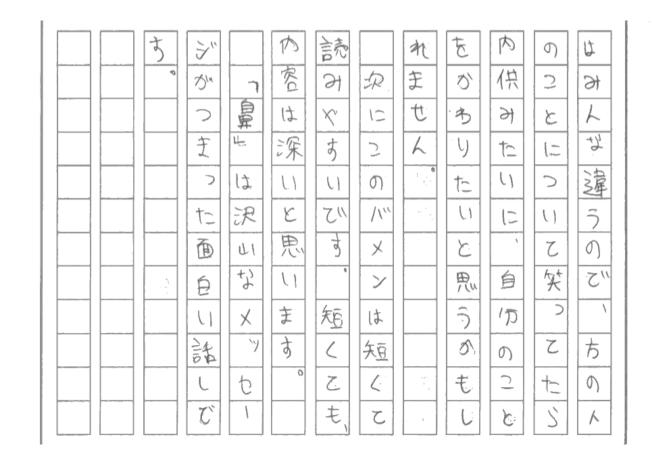
This was given 3 for content (writing about the autumn in general but not the specific question), 4 for organisation and development (partly because it was too short) and 2 for quality of language.



You have spent at least a term studying these topics and texts - write down something relevant that you have learnt, however difficult you are finding the examination.

This was a very popular question. Most candidates were able to give a good outline of the story they had chosen, although there is a tendency for this outline to get longer and longer, not leaving the candidate enough space to answer the second half of the question. A good aim would be for the outline (arasuji) to be around 200 characters, no longer. Many candidates were able to describe their favourite scene, although they were weaker in giving reasons as to why this was their favourite scene.

This piece was awarded very high marks. The question has been directly addressed and answered, and several reasons have been given as to why this is the candidate's favourite scene.



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The content was given 13; the organisation and development 9 and the quality of language 4. The content is excellent; detailed, well organised and explained clearly. Generally the most able candidates would write more kanji (and more difficult kanji compounds) than are seen in this essay.



Remember to address the question that is asked; make several relevant points in answer to the question; and justify these points.

Not very many candidates attempted this question in comparison to 6(a), but nevertheless was tackled by quite a few candidates. They generally picked out the following themes from the text: accepting oneself; not worrying about other people's opinions; not pursuing impossible or unrealistic dreams. Generally candidates who tackled this question demonstrated that they had thought about the text and understood its main themes, and were able to relate those ideas to themselves and the modern world.

Similar to the comments made about question 6 above, this question also demonstrated that candidates had read and understood the text, and had prepared thoroughly for their essays. Again there was a tendency for the outline of the story to be quite long; thus limiting the space available to the candidate for making reflective points about the text. There is also a tendency across all the literary texts for candidates to learn a "multi-purpose" essay - covering favourite scene, reasons why they like the text, author's message etc - which will score some marks for content, but will not score top marks for content, as there will not be enough on any one point to score the highest marks. This will limit candidates from accessing/gaining high marks, especially at A or A*.

This candidate is writing about the short story "omiyage".





Only one page has been included to given an example of the level of kanji, grammatical sophistication and accuracy demonstrated by a candidate who was given a 5 for quality of language.

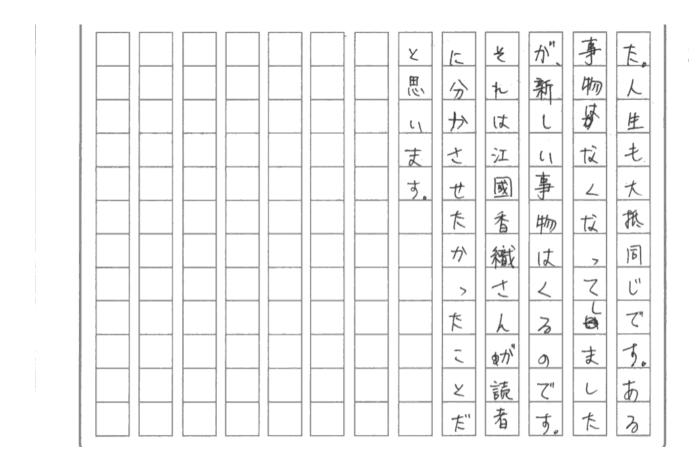


It's worth learning some kanji compounds specific to your topic and text, and making sure that you include them in your essay.

This question was not tackled by many candidates. Candidates came down on both sides of the question, but generally did so by arguing their case from the text, demonstrating that they had read and understood the text.

This question was attempted by many candidates. Many candidates picked up the themes of death, love or overcoming sadness. They were generally able to support the case they were making from the text.

This has been included as an example of work by a middle band candidate.



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The candidate has produced quite a long outline of the story, which could have been shortened. Right at the end s/he does make the point that the author's message is about loss and new beginnings, and prior to stating this point, s/he has explained her / his viewpoint briefly. This was therefore given a content mark of 9 (at least one point made and justified). This mark could have been improved by writing less of an outline and therefore allowing more time and space to either give more details about the point s/he has made, or by adding another, separate point

The organisation and development was given a 5, which could have easily been improved by writing in paragraphs, and adding an introduction and conclusion.

The quality of language was given a 4.



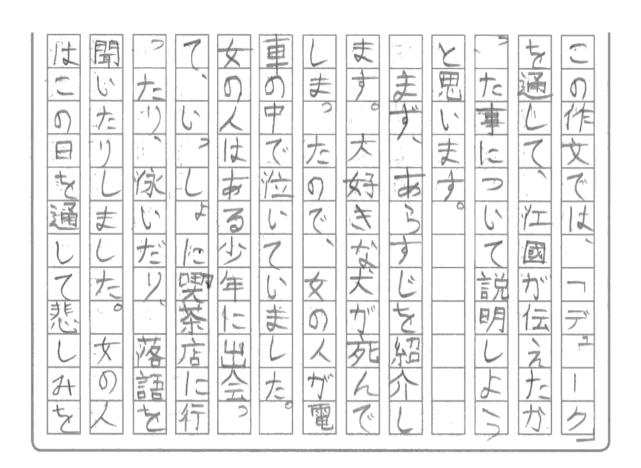
Don't make your outline of the story too long - leave yourself plenty of space to answer the other parts of the question too.

This piece was given full marks, and has been included in this report as an example of excellent work, and, perhaps, inspiration.



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It is clear that the candidate does not buy the line that the young man was the pet dog come back to life - this point has been made clearly, whilst not distracting the candidate from answering the main question posed in the examination about the author's intention.



You are allowed to argue any case you wish - providing you justify yourself from the text!

This question attracted reasonably many candidates; the main challenge candidates had was to frame their answer in some kind of structured, analytic framework, rather than just re-telling the story.

This is an example of where better planning and organisation would have improved not only the organisation and development mark, but also the content mark.



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The candidate is clearly trying to not merely repeat the story, but to trace the development of the relationship. Nevertheless, the attempt is only partly successful. The candidate should have clarified perhaps 3 key points in the development of the relationship; set these out as 3 separate bullet points with the significant feature of the relationship at that point clearly stated as the first sentence in the paragraph, and then illustrated from the text.

This piece was given 8 for content (there is the beginnings of justifications of some of the points made, but one has to go looking for it), 5 for organisation and development and 3 for language.



Before you start writing, clarify the key points you are going to make. An essay plan is a good way to do this. Make sure that you state these points explicitly in a direct, clear sentence.

Paper summary

Based on their performance on this paper, the following advice is offered to candidates.

- 1. The most able candidates continue to try the translation with some success, and should be encouraged to really try hard on this section, even though they find it the most difficult part of the paper. Please continue to teach them the skills of re-phrasing in English, "talking around" unknown words etc.
- 2. Attempt both essays. Candidates will almost always gain more marks by doing two shorter essays rather than one longer essay.
- 3. Some katakana words change their meaning from the original English. Therefore it is not necessarily appropriate to simply transcribe unknown words into katakana, although UK place names and people's names should be so transcribed.
- 4. Candidates should be aware of the correct use of genko yoshi for the topics and texts essays.
- 5. It is important to set out topics and texts essays in logical paragraphs, with suitable introductory and concluding paragraphs.
- 6. Native speakers of Japanese should bear in mind that the topics and texts essays need to have academically worthwhile content: a personal story is unlikely to score high marks.
- 7. Native speakers of Chinese and Korean must write in Japanese. Full sentences written in Chinese or Korean will not be credited.

Grade Boundaries

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