

FRENCH

Paper 1342/01

Speaking

General Comments

The first cohort of candidates for this examination proved well up to the task. The majority displayed a very high level of maturity in terms of topic content along with splendid linguistic proficiency resulting from excellent teaching and practice. Even among the weakest (and these were few and only relatively so), comprehension was rarely impeded despite grammatical slips and errors of pronunciation. The initial group briefing before the examining began seemed to put the candidates at ease and there were very few instances of nerves affecting performance. Almost all candidates adapted well to the intended register – that of a formal interactive conversation on a topic that had engaged their interest.

The range of topics chosen, all of which fell within the requirements of the specification, was stimulatingly broad. All candidates, even those who had chosen a general topic, were able to relate their topic to francophone culture. Among the literary/philosophical topics chosen were Camus, Rimbaud, Hugo and Descartes. Film study proved popular (Jeunet, Truffaut etc.) and it was good to note that in Centres where a number of candidates had chosen the same film or films, all were able to present different aspects and reactions, with little or no overlap. Historical choices included the Algerian War, Charlemagne, Robespierre, Marie-Antoinette, Jean Moulin, Pétain and Napoléon, while sporting topics included, inevitably, Henry and Lacoste, but also, somewhat enterprisingly, the philosophy underlying the practice of *le Parkour*. Very few candidates limited themselves to the purely factual; the majority were happy to air their reactions and judgements without much prompting from the Examiner.

Factual Knowledge and Opinions

As stated above, the range of topics chosen was strikingly varied. Candidates had patently researched their subjects well, engaging, often with passion, with sometimes unexpected aspects. The majority were able to put forward articulately their personal reactions and to respond sensitively to the Examiner's questions. The Examiners were pleased to have learned something new from these discussions and were impressed by the candidates' enthusiasm.

The initial uninterrupted presentation allowed the candidates to get into their stride and most used this time to outline the areas they would subsequently explore. Inevitably, some prepared speech-learning had taken place but, in nearly all cases, they smoothly shifted register once they were in a conversation. This was thankfully the case with one candidate who started their historical topic in the Past Historic but happily reverted to the Perfect in response to the Examiner's questions.

Language

All candidates had clearly progressed well beyond GCSE level and many dramatically so, in terms of lexis, sensitivity to idiom, register and sophistication of structure. Tenses were generally well handled, though gender agreements in adjectival forms arguably less so in some cases. It was gratifying to note that only in a very few cases did Examiners need to repeat or rephrase a question: the majority of candidates listened well and responded accordingly.

Pronunciation and Intonation

Pronunciation and intonation, by and large, were sound to impressive: there were very few instances of English diphthongs, the u/ou distinction was generally respected, and tonic stress on final syllables was in evidence in the majority of the candidates' output. If a prevalent weakness is to be noted it is in numerals – particularly dates, decimals and fractions – where confidence was often lacking.

FRENCH

Paper 1342/02

Listening, Reading and Writing

General Comments

Even though this was a new specification and a new examination, much to the credit of all concerned, candidates generally appeared to be very well prepared for the task and to understand how to tackle the various exercises.

Candidates seemed to have organised their time well during the examination. Candidates provided answers to the comprehension exercises succinctly and without unnecessary preamble. Although some of the less successful answers tended to include as much material from the text as possible in the Reading Comprehension section, this was luckily a relatively rare occurrence. The Reading Comprehension questions in French were designed to discourage copying/lifting word-for-word from the text (as indicated in the instructions) and candidates generally avoided the temptation.

On the whole, candidates tackled this paper well.

Part I: Listening Comprehension

Questions 1–6

This listening test was generally well handled. *Vol* or *disparition* were sometimes offered instead of *perte* in **Question 3**, as was *séjour* for *coût* in **Question 5**, and *quatre-vingts* was sometimes mistaken for *vingt-quatre* in **Question 6**, but otherwise the test held few difficulties.

Question 7–15

There were some misunderstandings of *à domicile* in **Question 7** which resulted in attempts to render it phonetically as one word. Some mis-heard *patients* as *passions* in **Question 8**, and a number of candidates struggled with *les papiers pour la sécurité sociale* in **Question 10**, producing instead *avec les secrétaires sociales* or *pour des raisons de sécurité*. *Analystes* was tolerated for *analyse* in **Question 9**. **Questions 11–13** were very successfully handled by nearly all, but some suggested that doctors were all provided with phones (or, less likely, *des téléphones d'insurgence*) in answer to **Question 14**. *50 000* occasionally became *5000* or *500 000* in **Question 15a**.

Questions 16–24

Some candidates found it difficult to express the ideas of simply 'getting around' in **Question 16a**, whilst others failed to convey the idea that having a driving licence could be a specific requirement of a job in **Question 16b**, rather than a means of getting to the interview or to the workplace thereafter. Quite a number of candidates failed to pick up the idea of the possibility of having to wait up to eight months in **Question 17**, although it was less easy to understand why this should have appeared so often as ten months.

Question 19 stretched many candidates in asking them to render the idea of *fonctionnaires*, but *instructors* instead of *examiners/testers*' suggested some misunderstanding of where the problem lay. This was not penalised in **Question 20**.

Questions 21 and **23** were very well handled, but **Question 22** produced some rather awkward or incomplete answers which failed to make the two points that lessons are expensive and that those who fail have to pay for further lessons (as opposed to simply a further test).

Manifestation was usually well handled in **Question 24** (apart from the too weak *meeting* or too strong *strike*), but the idea of *sensibiliser* often produced unacceptable renderings such as making the government *see sense* or *come to their senses*.

Part II: Reading Comprehension

Questions 25–29

Questions 25–26 were well handled apart from some possible confusion caused by *la vente* and *le voile*.

Question 27 discriminated well: there were a number of possible ways of gaining the mark, but a fair proportion of candidates missed the point and still insisted on the stars being used *par temps couvert*. A number resorted unsuccessfully to word-for-word ‘lifts’: *baissant la voile*, or *préférant rester sur place*.

There were some suggestions of piracy in answers to **Question 28**, stimulated no doubt by the appearance in the text of the word *attaqués* (in reference to sharks), and a number of cases of resorting to indiscriminate ‘lifting’: *Etre percutés par un grand navire* or *La perspective d’être attaqués par des requins les inquiétait moins que celle d’être...*

Question 29 presented the challenge of manipulating the language to transmit the idea of an earlier arrival/shorter journey than anticipated. Resorting to *expecté* or the straight lift *Quelle bonne surprise donc...* did not earn the mark.

Questions 30–36

Question 30 produced some awkward answers e.g. *l’ouvertement*, *l’ouvrirant*, *l’ouvert* (as did **Question 36**: *le fermé* etc. later on) and lack of clarity in expressing the idea of the opening of Paris-Plage. Although most appeared to understand what was going on, a number resorted to the unrewarded ‘lift’: *Les Parisiens pourront profiter...*

Most found an easy way round the ‘lift’ of *réservés à la circulation des voitures* in **Question 31**, although some envisaged the creation of a giant car park. In addition to identifying *un poste de premiers secours*, **Question 32** required either the idea of there being a *bassin surveillé* (rather than *un bassin pour se laver*) or the fact that swimming in the Seine was prohibited (without the ‘lift’: *Interdiction de nager dans la Seine*.)

Question 33 proved a challenge to some who were unable to express the two elements required without resorting to lifts: *faute de moyens* and *des exigences du métier*, whilst the appearance of *des petits* in **Question 34** misled many into thinking that this was a children’s project or that Toulouse and Lyon are small towns.

The straight lifts *Même si l’accès à ces plages...* and *la location des articles ne l’est pas...* were not rewarded in **Question 35**, and there was some confusion over the meaning of *location*, which was sometimes taken to be ‘a spot on the beach’ – *une location avec un parasol*. *Place* caused similar problems elsewhere.

Questions 37–45

Surprisingly, many identified the wrong machine in **Question 37**, and *congélateur* was often not recognised in **Question 38**, resulting in consequential difficulties over *givre*, although the best candidates took this in their stride.

Question 39 posed few problems, but relatively few successfully expressed *en veille* in **Question 40**.

Question 41 produced many references to *carbon emissions* (presumably prompted by *carburant*) and some inadequate renderings of *les pneus mal gonflés s’usent*.

Questions 42–44 were generally successfully negotiated, although *par personne transportée* sometimes emerged as *by personal transport* in **Question 42**, and some thought old engine oil should be taken back to the garage or to ‘*waste deposits*’.

Question 45 caused problems with *bac en plastique* (*‘plastic bag’*) and several candidates had difficulty in providing an appropriate response.

Part III: Guided Writing

Questions 46a and 46b

Content

The ‘vending machines’ topic (**a**) was more popular than the ‘uniform’ one (**b**), but both appeared to appeal to candidates and to provoke some lively and interesting responses. The candidates had ideas and opinions and were happy to express them in a coherent and convincing manner.

Some made direct reference to the texts to provide evidence for their arguments (resisting the temptation simply to re-cycle the material) whilst others supported their views with evidence from their own experience. They were also generally willing to use the opportunity offered in the final task to broaden the range of the issue under discussion.

There were very few cases of candidates failing to cover all the five tasks required in the instructions, and they helped themselves considerably by working through them systematically. There was evidence of ability to organise an answer and to use paragraphs appropriately. Candidates also observed the 220-250 word requirement and organised their material succinctly within it.

Language

The overall standard was very encouraging indeed and virtually all candidates could use the language sufficiently accurately to convey the intended messages. The stronger candidates (of whom there were plenty) displayed a most impressive range of vocabulary and idiom.

There were some errors in verb forms, but tenses were generally manipulated with a good degree of confidence and competence, as were constructions involving modal verbs. Impressive too was the confidence with which many candidates handled the subjunctive and incorporated it into their essays.

Pronoun usage was refreshingly secure, and there was a confident use of adverbs/adverbial phrases and adjectives which added weight and colour to the points expressed, even if there were occasional lapses in agreements.

In some cases, English patterns hovered not far beneath the surface, and whilst many candidates wrote with a spontaneous flair and fluency which made their essays a real pleasure to read, a few appeared slightly over-anxious to press into service as many pre-learned phrases as possible, some of which were irrelevant.

Overall, a commendably high level of linguistic achievement was on display from a very able cohort of candidates.