

MANDARIN CHINESE (Principal Subject)

Paper 9778/01
Speaking

Key messages

- There were some excellent performances on this Speaking component
- For the Prepared Topic, candidates should choose a topic that is of interest to them and which they are able to talk about with the language they have at their disposal.
- Candidates should prepare for the Topic Conversation by anticipating the kinds of questions an interested layman might ask about their chosen topic.
- In the conversation sections, candidates need to be prepared for straightforward questions but also ones which will stretch them.
- Candidates should be encouraged to get into the habit of developing their answers, even to straightforward questions.

General comments

There are two parts to this examination – **Section 1** is a Prepared Topic and Topic Conversation and **Section 2** is a General Conversation. The Prepared Topic is marked out of 15 with 10 marks for Content/Presentation and 5 marks for Language. The Topic Discussion and the General Conversation are each marked out of 15 with 5 marks for Comprehension and Responsiveness and 10 marks for Accuracy and Range of Language. In addition, 15 marks are awarded globally for Pronunciation/Intonation (5 marks) and Feel for Language (10 marks). This gives a total of 60 marks.

The Oral examination is scheduled to last between 12-15 minutes. The Prepared Topic/Topic Conversation should last 5-7 minutes and the General Conversation should last 6-8 minutes.

The Speaking Examination is the opportunity for the candidate to show the visiting Examiner what he/she can do; the practice and preparation before the examination with the candidate's own teacher should focus on this. The topic for the topic presentation should be carefully chosen; the topic should be of interest to the candidate, and, equally importantly, should be something that it is well within the candidate's reach to talk about with the language at his/her disposal. Where this is not the case, a carefully prepared presentation can sound stilted, and a candidate can be left exposed if he/she is then unable to engage with the Examiner's questions in the Topic Conversation. The candidate should not necessarily cover all aspects of the topic in the presentation, but might choose to leave out one or two obvious things which can be followed up by the Examiner.

The Examiner will try to make the move from the Topic Conversation to the General Conversation clear to the candidate and, wherever possible, will also signal the transition between topic areas within the General Conversation. For candidates taking Mandarin Chinese as a Principal Subject, the Speaking examination is conducted by an external Examiner with whom the candidate will not have spoken previously. This makes the listening element of the examination significantly more testing and so clear indication of a change of topic area is intended to help to avoid any candidate confusion in the General Conversation. Teachers should practise this with candidates before the examination. Examples of the kind of sentences used by the Examiner are 你今天讲什么题目? and 现在我们讲一讲其他的题目, 好不好?

Candidates have time during the year to work on their Prepared Topic and should be able, with practice, to present fairly fluently. This initial presentation should last a maximum of 2 minutes. Once the candidate has presented for 2 minutes, he/she can expect to be interrupted by the Examiner so that the conversation can take place. Whilst tones and pronunciation are not expected to be perfect, the presentation should be easily understood by a sympathetic native speaker; candidates should have a good feel for the rhythms and cadences of the language within the sentences.

Teachers get used to understanding their own candidates and making allowances for their errors, but in the examination, candidates need to present their topic in such a way that they can be understood by the visiting Examiner. Candidates will score highly on the Prepared Topic when they also demonstrate they have prepared well in terms of both the content of the material presented, and in terms of the vocabulary and the structures used – e.g. good use of conjunctions, correct word order and timeframes, etc.

In the Topic Conversation, the Examiner will play the part of the intelligent layman and will be genuinely interested to talk with the candidate about the Prepared Topic. Candidates' preparation should focus on anticipating and making sure they are ready to answer the kinds of general questions which could be asked by an interested layman.

During their course of study, candidates should have developed the vocabulary and linguistic skills to answer a range of questions both on their Prepared Topic and also during the General Conversation. Rather than asking a series of pre-prepared questions, the Examiner will seek to follow up what the candidate says so that a spontaneous and natural conversation develops. For the General Conversation, although sample questions are suggested in the syllabus, it is likely that a majority of questions asked by the Examiner will **not** be taken directly from this list, though they will be of a similar standard. Although questions will not be complicated it is important that Centres ensure that candidates have had the opportunity to prepare for the General Conversation. If, for instance, the candidate is asked about the differences between UK and Chinese secondary education, it should not be the case that he/she is discussing this fairly general topic for the first time in the examination. This kind of topic should already have been discussed in class.

In both conversation sections, the Examiner should keep the flow of conversation going in as relaxed a manner as possible. Candidates need to be aware that in addition to straightforward questions, they will be asked questions to stretch them. Examiners have to ensure that they do provide stretching questions, even for weaker candidates, as otherwise they are not providing the opportunity for all candidates to demonstrate the full extent of what they know in an examination at this level. While the aim of the Examiner is to foster a genuine conversation, candidates should be advised to make the most of any opportunity to show the Examiner what they can do, in order to maximise their chances of good marks (these are obtainable when a natural conversation showing good use of vocabulary, structures and idiom takes place). At this level, candidates should be encouraged to develop their answers, even if they are asked a very straightforward question. If a candidate has areas of a topic where he/she feels particularly confident, it is up to the candidate to try to respond to questions in such a way as to be able to demonstrate this to the Examiner. Candidates should not worry that their answer to a question is factually untrue or does not really reflect what they think; the Examiner is interested in the level of their Chinese and will not judge them on what they think. Candidates should not worry if they do not understand a question; they should ask for it to be repeated or rephrased (this request should be made in Chinese); if they still do not understand it, the Examiner will try to move swiftly on to another question.

Cambridge Pre-U Mandarin Chinese is an examination for foreign language learners. Therefore, native speakers of Mandarin who have a well-prepared topic may, in all likelihood, score maximum marks. However, it is the standard required for the foreign language learner which will be borne in mind by the Examiner in the testing and marking of candidates.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Principal Subject)

Paper 9778/02

Listening, Reading and Translation

Key messages

- The majority of candidates had been well prepared by Centres, which was reflected in many above par to highly meritorious performances. There did appear to be some inconsistency in levels of preparation across the candidature.
- Centres are advised of the need to acquaint candidates with the mechanics and structure of the examination. Key resources here are the specimen and past papers (2010-2013).
- The recognition of tones remains a critical area for candidates in the *Listening* section. They need to prepare thoroughly. Additional practice listening to authentic recordings, especially for the 2nd and 3rd tones, which can be very difficult for learners, is recommended.
- In preparation for the *Reading* section, Centres must introduce and develop the necessary dictionary skills. They should provide candidates with sufficient practice in using a dictionary to enable them to become familiar with the various features so that they can find information quickly and efficiently. When candidates tackle the open ended questions, they are advised to provide full answers.
- Centres should continue to remind candidates that comprehensive preparation, combined with careful checking of their work in the examination, will guarantee a high score in **Section 3: Chengyu**.
- In the *Translation* section, candidates should not be over-literal. Instead, their objective should be to use their common sense to produce translations which read naturally. They should avoid slavish word-for-word renderings of the original as these are unlikely to convey meaning.

General comments

The content of the examination clearly reflected the prescribed themes and topics for Pre-U Mandarin Chinese as expressed in the teaching syllabus. The overall level of difficulty was judged to be slightly higher than last year and this was reflected in the grade boundaries. Most of the candidates had been adequately prepared for the examination and were presented at the level in the National Qualifications Framework appropriate to their ability.

By the end of the two-year course of study which leads to sitting this paper, candidates should be able to recognise all the characters listed in the core vocabulary. They should also be able to recognise these characters as part of different compounds. Candidates should be advised that they will encounter additional characters on the question paper, though these will not be tested explicitly. Teachers are reminded of the need to ensure that they are using an up-to-date copy of the core vocabulary. This can be downloaded from the Cambridge teacher support website.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Listening

In general, candidates delivered commendable performances in the *Listening* section.

The examiners were very pleased to note that a number of candidates scored full marks for **Exercise 1** (*Pinyin* with tones), which has proven to be a demanding task in previous years. Those candidates who did not score full marks seemed to find the following challenging:

- Initial – differentiating between ‘j’ (玩具) and ‘zh’.
- Tones – differentiating between 2nd and 3rd tone continues to cause difficulties.

Candidates are to be congratulated on the superb results for **Exercise 2**, where the vast majority were awarded full marks.

There seemed to be evidence of a substantial amount of guesswork on **Exercise 3**, where some candidates could not identify the subject matter accurately. For **Question 7(b)**, 'long (长) sentence' was sometimes confused with 'sing (唱) a song'.

As usual, the summary task in **Exercise 4**, elicited the greatest range of performance on the *Listening* section of the paper. Candidates should be reminded that there are always more possible points to be made than the number of marks available so that even if they struggle to understand parts of the recording, full marks are still possible.

Section 2 – Reading

Most of the candidates seemed to be have been well prepared by Centres on the topics of 'Tourism' and 'Environment', and the resultant efforts were generally pleasing. At this level, it is important that candidates are trained to respond to comprehension questions with full details rather than providing stunted replies lacking the appropriate level of precision. For **Exercise 4, Question 18**, a number of candidates answered 'increasing recycling' and were not awarded a mark because at this level this answer was considered too vague. The required answer, which appeared in the text, was 'increasing the number of recycling stations'.

Section 3 – Chinese sayings (Chengyu)

Centres seemed to have taken on board previous advice for handling this exercise. The majority of candidates provided accurate responses. A very small number of candidates continue to rely on a dictionary to check each character in order to give their answers. Such a strategy can result in a poor quality, or distorted, translation. For example: 'One arrow two eagles/birds' was not awarded a mark.

Section 4 – Translation

Performances on this exercise were rather polarized. There were some excellent responses. There were also a small number of rather disappointing responses from candidates who seemed to have resorted to dictionaries to reference some key vocabulary items and then pieced these items together with a modicum of guesswork rather than by working to understand the actual text and render its meaning in English.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Principal Subject)

Paper 9778/03
Writing and Usage

Key messages

- As in previous years, there were some excellent performances on this Writing and Usage component.
- In order for future candidates to improve their performance, they should work on their character strokes, consolidate their knowledge of basic Chinese grammar, expand their use of more complex sentence structures, and enlarge their vocabulary well beyond GCSE level.
- When writing the letter, candidates should use a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures.
- For the opinion essay, it is important that candidates develop a series of coherent arguments supported by detailed examples. They should include a brief and clear-cut introduction and a strong conclusion. Candidates will also find it helpful to draft a simple essay plan before they begin writing the essay itself.

General comments

There are three sections to this component. **Section 1** tests candidates' knowledge of the radicals and strokes of Chinese characters, as well as Chinese grammar in terms of grammar markers and measure words. **Section 2** tests candidates' ability to write a letter according to a series of specific bullet points. **Section 3** requires candidates to write an opinion essay on one of six pre-determined topics. The total marks for the paper are 60. **Section 1** is marked out of 10 with 6 marks for the character exercises and 4 marks for the grammar ones. **Section 2** is marked out of 20 with 5 marks for Communication and 15 marks for Language (5 for Accuracy of Characters and 10 for Accuracy of Grammar and Structures). In **Section 3**, the Opinion Essay is marked out of a total of 30 with 20 marks for Accuracy and Linguistic Range and 10 marks for Development and Organisation of Ideas.

This year's candidates did extremely well on Exercise 1, **Questions 1(a)**, and **1(b)(ii)**; Exercise 2, **Question 2(b)**; the coverage of the bullet points and accuracy of characters in Exercise 3, **Section 2**; and accuracy and linguistic range in the essay in Exercise 4, **Section 3**.

Exercise 1, **Questions 1(b)(i)** and **1(b)(iii)**, Exercise 2, **Questions 2(a)** and **2(d)** proved the most challenging in **Section 1**. In **Section 2**, candidates should aim to use a wider range of vocabulary and more complex sentence structures in the letter they write. In the opinion essay (**Section 3**), those candidates who showed they could manipulate a wider range of vocabulary, make proper use of more complicated sentence structures, and develop a well-structured argument scored highly. Successful candidates often draft a brief essay plan before they start writing the essay itself.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Radicals, stroke order and grammar markers

Candidates performed well on Exercise 1 which required them to work with the radical and stroke order of characters. This year, candidates were usually successful in identifying the radical. Providing the stroke order of characters (i) 梅 and (iii) 岭 proved challenging. To be more successful on Exercise 2, the grammar exercise, candidates ought to revise the tense indicators and grammar markers which form unusual word order in Chinese, e.g. 把 etc. Candidates should also pay more attention to the three different *de* particles in attributive (的), adverbial (地) and complementary (得) structures.

Section 2 – Letter writing

Candidates wrote excellent letters to apply for a gap year teaching job in Xi'an. All were careful to cover all four bullet points. In terms of Accuracy of Grammar and Structures, candidates were successful but could

have done even better. To access the highest marks in this section, candidates should be encouraged to make use of words and characters clearly beyond the level of GCSE. They should also be encouraged to use compound and complex sentences, as well as comparatives and negatives where appropriate. It should be noted that the colon is used after the addressee of the letter. In closing a letter, the term 'hereby' (此致) is placed on an imaginary vertical centre line, and the term 'salute' (敬礼) is generally followed by an exclamation mark.

Section 3 – Opinion essay

Candidates chose to respond to four out of the six essay titles provided on the question paper. They produced excellent essays that were both interesting and convincing. The better essays began with a clear, to-the-point introduction, which led into an organised and well-developed argument. The most successful essays finished with a strong, pithy and logical conclusion. Candidates made use of a very good range of vocabulary and both simple and complex sentence structures. In order to achieve even higher marks in this section, candidates could be encouraged to draw upon more detailed examples to illustrate the points they are making. In terms of Accuracy and Linguistic Range, candidates need to pay attention to the meaning of words in a specific context (not just to the primary definition in the dictionary), to their control of conjunctions, prepositions and punctuation, as well as focusing on the confident and proper use of more complex sentence structures. The best pieces of writing flowed fluently and naturally from beginning to end in a coherent and logical manner. Candidates should read the selection of essay titles carefully and should only choose to answer a title if they are confident they have understood it (titles are provided in Chinese and English) and have something to say on the subject. The practice of learning an essay by heart and reproducing it in the examination without considering the title that has been set is not to be encouraged, as where the essay written does not answer the question set, this will be reflected in the mark awarded.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Principal Subject)

Paper 9778/04
Chinese Culture

Key messages

- Questions are open to interpretation and it is important that candidates start by considering the wording of the question and outlining the approach they will take.
- There is often no right or wrong way to answer a question: it is up to the candidate to develop an argument and produce evidence to support it.
- As well as facts, answers should include discussion (backed up by examples), analysis and evaluation.
- To score highly, candidates must write a well-argued essay which is clear and focused.

General comments

Candidates are required to answer two questions for this paper, one from the *Topics in Chinese Culture* section and one from the *Chinese Literature and Film* section. Each answer is marked out of 30 with a mark out of 25 for content and a mark out of 5 for structure. In all cases, questions are open to interpretation; it is up to the candidate to develop an analytical response to the question with clear, specific examples/evidence (not generalized statements) to back up his/her argument. The Mark Scheme gives some indicative content for each question on the paper. However, there is often no right or wrong way to answer a question; it is up to the candidate to develop an argument and find evidence to support it. There were some very successful essays which demonstrated in-depth analysis backed up by specific reference. In general, candidates seemed to find **Section One** – *Topics in Chinese Culture* – slightly more challenging.

Candidates should make sure they read the question very carefully before they start, making a careful assessment of what is asked for; they should plan their answer before beginning to write.

Each essay should start with an introduction which should outline how the question is going to be tackled; candidates should avoid giving away the conclusion to their essay in their introduction. Subsequent paragraphs should develop a clear argument/line of thinking with specific, relevant examples/evidence to illustrate the argument, which should always link to the question, and essays should finish with a strong conclusion.

Essays should not be a descriptive list of facts or the story of what happened in a period of history, a novel or a film. Candidates obviously need to have a lot of facts at their fingertips, but then need to be in a position to manipulate those facts to demonstrate their deeper understanding and analytical capability in response to the question. Evaluation is the key. Organisation of material is vital and an appropriate style should be used. In the case of *Yellow Earth*, candidates need to have a good grasp of the Chinese history of the period in which the film is set and also of the context in which it was made and released. The two sections of the paper can be mutually supportive in this respect.

In order to be able to respond to these essay questions appropriately, candidates need to be exposed during their studies to a range of commentaries/view points about a particular topic and to have had the opportunity to discuss ideas with their teachers and other candidates to inform their interpretation of events or their interpretation of a book or film. It is only this exposure to a variety of views that will give candidates the ability to handle these essay questions with sufficient analysis.