

GCSE CHINESE

Unit 4 Writing
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

It is pleasing to report that the standard achieved by students this year was generally good. On the whole, teachers administered and carried out the examination well. There was good evidence that the majority of teachers understood the requirements of the specification and applied the assessment criteria correctly. It was pleasing to see a wide range of tasks, covering different contexts, in this year's examination. At the lower end of the mark range, students were generally able to provide some clear information relevant to the title, including simple opinions and basic ideas. The overall marking outcomes were concentrated in the higher bands of the assessment criteria.

A few schools did not submit all required assessments and documentation. More importantly, a small number of school-designed tasks did not have a clear title or the school-designed tasks did not give students much flexibility to develop their answers; this could affect students' marks. Teachers should be aware that there is a great deal of help available during the preparation and teaching of Writing tasks through e-aqa, via the AQA website.

Administration

Schools/colleges are encouraged to:

- enclose a correctly completed Attendance Record Form; a few schools did not submit the Attendance Record Forms, and on some forms there was no indication as to whether the student was absent or not, which caused some confusion.
- send the work in the same student order as on the Attendance Record Form, as for a terminal examination paper
- collate each student's work – ie the two tasks - together with the Candidate Record Form and the Task Planning Form. The use of treasury tags or stapling work is preferred, as paper clips and plastic wallets cause some handling problems.
- make sure the examiner receives the full Controlled Assessment Task Sheet relevant to the student or group. Marking cannot begin until the examiner knows what the students are writing about. There were task titles missing this year, which delayed marking.
- remind students to use black/blue pen to write and to write neatly as illegible handwriting can affect marks.
- check that the students have correctly filled in and signed the Candidate Record Form and the Task Planning Form (if used). There were some students' or teachers' signatures missing on the relevant forms this year, which could have been avoided if schools had checked properly.
- make sure the task titles on the Candidate Record Form are the same as task sheets and students' work. There were some differences in some students' work, which caused confusion.
- Task Planning Forms should be checked carefully to ensure that Specification requirements have been met – with regard to the number of words and no sentences on the TPFs. Students

themselves should obliterate rather than just crossing out any offending items and they can re-write their plan if they wish. Failure to follow this requirement can seriously disadvantage students.

- adhere to the deadline of 7 May by which all materials should be sent to the AQA examiner.

Task Titles

Once again, many schools/colleges chose to use AQA exemplar task titles. For those schools/colleges that designed their own tasks, the task titles were generally better designed this year and the majority of schools/colleges now seem to recognise that it is the response to the title which is assessed. Task formulation and design settled mainly on familiar areas: holidays, lifestyle, health and fitness, school, environment and tourism, free time and hobbies, work, local area.

Titles work better if they are not over-complicated. If there are two or more dimensions to a title, then each one should be addressed with more or less equal balance. For example, 'Local area and future travel plans'; if the response includes only one sentence on 'future travel plans,' then that will affect the overall judgement about relevance. A similar problem occurs if there is insufficient attention to the focus of the title. If, for example, the title is "A trip abroad", but there is only passing reference to the holiday abroad, that too will affect the overall judgement about relevance.

The following issues occurred in this year's examination:

- Task titles like 'Letter to a problem page', 'An article for the local magazine' and 'An article for the school blog' are not appropriate as the task title must be specific eg. 'A letter to a problem page about my life as a teenager', 'An article about local environment'.
- A letter to a pen pal in China could be about anything as candidates do not have to follow the bullet points. A good task title could be: 'A letter to your pen pal about your school'.
- It is essential that schools/colleges use different task titles. If part of the title for one task was, 'Local area and future travel plans' this is very similar to a second task 'Holidays', which could potentially affect a student's marks if there were any overlaps in the content of the written answers.
- Teachers must make sure the bullet points given for each task are **not** the same, as overlapping content could affect students' performance.

Schools/colleges should look critically at their task design to address the issues above. Controlled Assessment Advisers can of course be consulted on proposed tasks.

Task Planning Forms

On the whole, the use of the plan was disappointing this year. Many students did not use it, as it is optional. However, it appeared that some less able students would have benefitted from using a plan. Teachers should advise their students to use the Task Planning Form as appropriate.

The following should be noted:

- 40 characters/words are allowed on the plan. For example: 老师 are two words; *lǎoshī* is one word because it indicates a complete concept, the same as “teacher” in English. The examiner does not credit beyond 40 characters when assessing and this could affect the Content mark.
- Complete sentences appeared on the plan and these were disregarded for assessment purposes.
- Schools are reminded that task titles need to be on the Task Planning Forms and teachers must make sure the task titles written on the Task Planning Forms are exactly the same as the ones on the Candidate Record Forms.

Excessive characters/words and sentences appearing on the plan, should be obliterated by the student. If it ends up looking too messy, students can re-write their TPFs.

Use of Dictionaries

Students can use dictionaries at Stage 3. However, given the misuse of the dictionary, which caused errors, it is advised that students turn to a dictionary as a last rather than first resort. Ideally, students should be taught how to use a bi-lingual dictionary correctly and alerted to the pitfalls of incorrect usage.

Word Processed Work

Few students submitted the one permitted word-processed task this year. There were two extremes: excellent, sentences were detailed and points were explained and developed; or full of mistakes due to the wrong characters being chosen. It is essential that schools/colleges planning to word process one assignment remind students to pay more attention to choosing the correct character.

Assessment

Content

A significant majority of work submitted attracted marks in the Good or Very Good categories. Many students produced full, detailed and relevant responses and there was clear evidence of very effective teaching, leading to positive outcomes. Students were less successful when tasks included bullet points not totally relevant to the title. Teachers must remind their students that when there are two or more aspects in the title, they must make sure both or all of the aspects are illustrated at a balanced length in order to achieve a high content mark. For example, My holiday experiences and plans: most students described their holidays in detail but not their future holiday plans. This affected the Content mark, as the piece was not fully relevant to the task title. This did not demonstrate the students’ real ability, as they were clearly very able.

A further problem occurs when students enumerate their paragraphs according to the bullet points, so that the response becomes a collection of ‘mini’ responses. Students should be advised against this, since it affects judgement as to whether the piece is a well organised, coherent whole.

In some cases, even though students were native speakers, they did not always produce good pieces of work with detailed information. On the contrary, the pieces were short and sentences were simple. For example, if a student did not give any opinions at all throughout the whole piece, this would affect the Content mark.

In addition, more able students should be encouraged to give more information as, the shorter the assignment, the more difficult it becomes to meet the requirements of the upper bands of the assessment criteria for Content and this in turn affects the other categories. There is no upper limit on the number of words: examiners will read and mark the whole piece. Over-lengthy pieces should also be avoided however, as there is no credit for the quantity of information – it is quality that counts.

Range of Language

Over a third of students wrote responses which merited marks in the 9-10 band and the majority scored between 7 and 10 for Range of Language. This clearly represents a very good performance overall. Students had clearly been encouraged to use a good variety of vocabulary and to develop complex sentences with a good variety of structure, some of which went well beyond the requirements of the specification. For instance, it was pleasing to see some Chinese traditional sayings and proverbs in the writing.

It is inevitable that candidates use English words for places etc in their tasks but it was pleasing to see that more and more students used Chinese to indicate those names of places, compared to last year.

As occurred last year, common errors were word order, tense formation, inappropriate use of conjunctions and adjectives. Students should be reminded to use different linking words/phrases in the writing rather than repetition in order to achieve higher scores.

As addressed under Content, those pieces of work, when students simply responded to the bullet points in the task, tended to offer no development. The language they used was very basic, giving simple answers to questions, which affected their marks.

Accuracy

It was good to see that quite a few students achieved 4 or 5 marks for Accuracy, and the majority managed to score 3 marks. The main errors were in relation to tense formation, mistakes in character writing and omissions of verbs, including particles, for indicating actions completed in the past, which often impeded communication. More commonly, students made mistakes due to the influence of their mother tongue.

Some students would have benefited from using a Task Planning Form. Students should also re-read and check their work once completed to reduce mistakes.

Advice to Students

Below is some advice you may wish to provide to your students:

- Once the title of your task is known and your teacher has given you the bullet points to use in your task, think carefully about how you intend to write about each one and prepare to write as much as you can and as clearly and accurately as you can.
- Using a variety of vocabulary and structures will improve your mark. Express opinions clearly and, when you can, justify these opinions by giving a reason. It also helps if you can use different time references to say what you did in the past, and/or what you are going to do or will do in the future.
- You are allowed to use a Task Planning Form on which you may write up to 40 characters or 40 words in English and you may use this form at Stage 3 (once it has been checked by your teacher). Be sure to write characters or spell words accurately on this sheet so that they will be accurate when you write up your piece of work. It might be wise to include the same order of bullet points on your Task Planning Form as the teacher gave you on the Task Sheet and then jot down a few characters/words next to each one. If you are worried you may forget what the character means, you could write the English translation next to it, as long as the English word is included in your final count. Remember that no complete sentences are allowed on the Task Planning Form.
- You are allowed to use a dictionary when you write up your piece of work. You should use this to look up occasional words but do not waste too much time looking up lots of words; you only have 60 minutes and you need to write as full a response as you can.
- Be sure that everything you write is relevant to the title and use different vocabulary and structures if you can. Try to write as much as you can about each bullet point, expressing opinions and developing information on the task you are writing about. However, you must keep an eye on the clock. If you follow the order of the bullet points provided, this should bring a well-organised structure to your piece.
- Remember that you are producing a piece of continuous writing, not answering a series of questions. Make sure you aim to produce a well organised and coherent piece of writing.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw or scaled marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below.

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