

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCSE

GCSE Chinese (1666/1667)

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Paper 1 - Listening and Responding

Overall the standard of entry was good. Examiners were very pleased to see the continued improvement in the performance of learner candidates, including Question 9 which targeted at the A and A* grade. There were less learner candidates who left this question completely blank. However, examiners also noted that there was a slight increase in the number of candidates who gave answers in Chinese and failed to earn any marks.

Question 1

This was a very well answered; only occasionally weaker candidates confused 'telephone' and 'computer' in their responses to (i) and (ii) and lost both marks.

Question 2

All candidates scored well.

Question 3

The question was generally well attempted. 'Grandmother' was tested for the first time in this paper and caused problem for some candidates. Directions, as usual, were confusing for some candidates. 'Woods' also invited some wrong answers.

Question 4

Parts (i) and (ii) proved accessible for all candidates, while (iii) (iv) and (v) invited some incorrect answers. Weak candidates responded more confidently to (iv) 'factory' but did not get (iii) 'bridge' and (v) 'river' right. This could be because 'factory' had appeared in the paper of last year.

Question 5

Examiners were surprised to find quite a few candidates did poorly on this familiar topic of weather, particularly on (ii), (iii) and (v).

Question 6

Well answered by all candidates across the ability range.

Question 7

Weaker candidates found (i), the subject about different parts of the body, demanding. Examiners were also disappointed to find a noticeable small number of able candidates lost 1 mark on this part by picking only 2 instead of the 3 answers required. It is not sure if there was problem with the graphic or it was due to the carelessness on the part of the candidates for not noticing 3 marks being allocated.

Question 8

A tiny number of weak candidates did not score a mark on this question. There was also a noticeable small number of able candidates produced duplicate answers and lost marks. It could be because they were not used to the new layout, not because they did not understand the utterances.

Question 9

In general the majority of candidates across all ability made an encouraging attempt. Examiners were pleased to find the number of candidates who tended to give several alternatives in their responses significantly reduced. But there were still some based their answers on guessing. Candidates are again advised to read the questions to allow themselves some ideas of what to look for before listening to the dialogues.

- (a) This was a question set to encourage all candidates to take part. Whilst responded well by the majority, some candidate wrote the job title such as TV presenter or reporter rather than where she worked and lost mark. A noticeable number of learner candidates gave 'France' as the answer. They might have mistaken 'fangwen / interview' as 'Fa guo / France'.
- (b) Again a question with simple theme set to encourage weaker candidates to take part. All responded well.
- (c) (1) Quite a few candidates simply wrote 'jumping up and down', which was inadequate.
(2) Some did not give a specific enough answer, for example, 'not being able to go home often' or 'only allowed to go home one time'.
- (d) This question targeted A* and discriminated well. Quite a few candidates either confused the Asian Games and the World championship (1994 / 1995), or confused the year and the age 16 (wrote 1996 instead of 1995).
- (e) (i) Some candidates were not able to spell 'university' correctly.

(ii) A fair number of candidates either did not understand the Chinese expression '多讀一點書 / 多读一点书' or were not able to transfer it meaningfully into English. Often they wrote 'she need to read books.'

- (f) A lot of candidates were not able to earn all 3 marks. Examiners were disappointed to find a large number of candidates could not write the keyword 'interview', a word included in the list of basic vocabulary and a concept that always directly related to this part of the test.

Paper 2 - Speaking

The overall performance of the candidates this year was very good. The requirements and topic areas for this paper remained similar to previous years'. Majority centres have made significant improvements and the most of the candidates were well prepared and demonstrated good skills in the exam.

This year there has been a continual increasing number of new centres joining the speaking exam both from overseas and national wise, mainly for Mandarin (Paper 22) from mainstream schools. On the whole the new centres followed the guidelines and performed well in the exam.

It was discovered in some new international centres where the teacher-examiners set their questions to a higher standard than required. While many of the candidates managed to give good responses and scored high grades, there were some weaker ones who failed to respond hence being disadvantaged. It is suggested that questions should be set to the appropriate level (please refer to the suggested questions in the Teacher's handbook), and there should be questions at foundation level to suit individual needs.

Comments on Candidates' performance

As in the past years, majority candidates performed well in this examination and achieved good grades. Many of them managed to convey their ideas and opinions with appropriate lexis and structures. Those who achieved higher grades normally demonstrated their language abilities in a genuine interactive conversation with the teacher-examiner.

There were still some centres / teacher-examiners who failed to observe the guidelines of the examination, allowing candidates to engage themselves in monologues without any language interactions with the teacher-examiner. These candidates were mostly Native speakers and should have achieved higher grades if they were given chances to demonstrate their interactive skills. It should be emphasised again merits are given to those candidates who can demonstrate their competence in manipulating the language skills through interactions with the teacher-examiner, rather than a piece of monologue.

Some weaker candidates, mostly real learners, achieved lower grades as they were not well prepared for the examination, e.g. insufficient vocabulary on describing people, places or events. Some even failed to understand terminologies, e.g. “Part-time job” [兼職 / 兼职], “family relationship” [家人關係 / 家人关系], “savings” [儲蓄 / 储蓄] which were found in the core vocabulary bank. There were some candidates who failed to understand teacher-examiner’s questions and couldn’t go beyond giving their own names and a piece of pre-learnt narrative on their families or schools.

It was discovered a number of Mandarin candidates showed a common error in pronouncing the sound /xue/ as in [下雪] and [學生 / 学生]. They often replaced it with /xu/ or /sui/ which gave a completely different meaning.

Comments on Administration

Some centres failed to observe the exam guidelines affecting both the candidates’ achievement and the exam marking process. All centres are urged to note the following and avoid future mistakes:

- Topic 1 was chosen by the Candidate, and he / she was allowed to give a talk up to 1 minute on the topic chosen. Then the teacher-examiner had to intervene and carry out an interactive conversation basing on the contents spoken. Some teacher-examiners allowed candidate to carry on with the monologue, hence candidates were deprived of chances to demonstrate their interactive language abilities
- Topic 2 & 3 were to be chosen by the teacher-examiner from a pre-allocated sequence list found in the Examiner’s Handbook. Centre Administrations should allow teacher-examiners to be aware of this list before the test.
- LT3 form - It should be downloaded from the Edexcel Website, one for each candidate, with their topics of conversations written down. No duplicates are required.
- Timing - The majority well timed and evenly distributed the 8 - 12 minutes among 3 topics. However, there were still a few centres which were found not conforming to the guidelines. Some centres were found to allocate 6 minutes or less for all 3 topics. The insufficient timing would affect candidates’ performance and score.

- Lack of competence in using Cantonese / Mandarin by teacher-examiners or candidates often caused communication problems and affected candidates' performance. As suggested in the previous years, candidates should be tested in the dialect (Cantonese / Mandarin) they were prepared for. There were some examiners who used a different dialect or English to ask questions while candidates answered in their chosen dialect. This is not to be encouraged as it does not justify effective interactions between the teacher-examiner and the candidate.

Comment on the topics

Topic A - In the UK & Abroad

- Candidates generally answered well on weather, home-town and trips abroad with detailed description related to personal experience. Many were well prepared for the additional higher questions on "If you had a lot of money, where would you like to go? Why" and came up with various interesting answers.
- Not many candidates from the home centres gave good description on the questions related to "Places of interest in your area" and "Festival celebration" which reflected both their general and cultural knowledge. Candidates from the international centres generally gave better performance on this topic.
- There were some confusion in the past tense (去了) and future (會去 / 会去) in description of trips. Some just used the present tense [去] in all occasions.

Topic B - Education, Training & Employment

- Questions on school life, timetable, subjects and uniform were rather straight forward, and the majority of candidates managed to give detailed answers.
- Questions on: "Part-time job" [兼職 / 兼职], "future plans" [將來計劃 / 将来计划], "work experience" [工作經驗 / 工作经验] remained problems to some candidates who were weaker in the appropriate knowledge and language skills for expression.

Topic C - House, Home & Daily Routine

- This appeared to be the most favourite topic chosen by candidates, and most of them did well on sub-topics such as description of their houses / rooms, family members, routines, likes & dislikes.
- Questions on “housework” [家務 / 家务], “family relationship” [家人關係 / 家人关系] were not well answered. Many candidates just gave the answer “washing up”, or “getting on very well” without elaborating the answers.

Topic D - Media & Social Activities

- This topic was less favourably answered. Many of those who attempted this topic managed to give the names of their favourites on hobbies, music, TV Programs, books etc. Not many candidates gave elaboration or opinions to their answers.
- The questions on “savings” [儲蓄 / 储蓄] and “famous people” [名人] continued to be problematic for some candidates. Not many candidates came up with good answers.

As in the previous years, it was noted that the teacher-examiner played an important role in the assessment. Apart from monitoring the timing and topics in the examination, teacher-examiners were also responsible to carry out a genuine interaction with the candidates and played the part of interlocutor in the conversations. Their performance often affects the achievements of candidates. The majority of candidates were privileged by being taught and examined by the same teacher-examiner, and their performance often reflected the same. However, for the less privileged candidates who were not examined by their teachers or did not have any taught lessons at all, they should be familiarised with the examination requirements. Centres and teacher-examiners are strongly advised to note and follow the examination guidelines when conducting the speaking test so as to give candidates a favourable chance to achieve their best grades.

Paper 3 - Reading and Responding

This paper tests candidates' reading comprehension of a variety of texts, which includes signs, notices, weather forecasts, a school timetable, an e-mail, short passages on weekend activities and Mid-Autumn festival celebration, as well as an extract from the media. It takes the form of ticking the right answers to multiple choice questions, matching texts to pictures or texts to texts, answering questions in Chinese and for the last question in English. At the higher level, candidates were expected to extract relevant information from longer passages and give more accurate and detailed answers.

Overall candidates performed well, exhibiting a high standard of reading comprehension. A continued improvement in the performance of learner candidates was particularly noted. The last question, which tested candidates' bilingual skills, was also well answered by most candidates.

Question 1 and Question 2 tested straightforward vocabulary: Candidates responded very well to these questions, with most scoring full marks. A small minority could not understand the word 'temple' in Q2.

Question 3 required inference skills and served as a good discriminator. Strong candidates scored full or nearly full marks. A significant number of candidates had difficulty in answering part (iv) 'you want to board the train'. Instead of ticking 'G' (going to the platform), they chose 'D' (waiting room).

Question 4 was generally well attempted with some candidates answering 'having breakfast' to the question (ii) 'What does he do **first** after getting up?' They failed to comprehend the text 'I have breakfast **after** the bath.'

Question 5: Almost all candidates scored full marks on this question; the topic area of 'weather' being familiar to them.

Question 6: This question differentiated well. Although reading a school timetable was straightforward, some weaker candidates might not be able to understand questions such as (ii) 'When is **the last** lesson?'; (iii) '**How many** ICT lessons are there in a week?' and (iv) 'When does school **finish**?'

Question 7 and Question 8: Most candidates did well, scoring full marks. A few candidates could not understand the word 'drugs' in Q8.

Question 9: On the whole candidates did well in this question. For part (ii), some candidates ticked 'toothache' rather than 'coughing' and 'feeling cold' rather than 'having high temperature'. A few who did not take note of the three marks given in this question chose more than the three answers required and thereby lost marks. Some weaker candidates chose 'B' (having a meal) in answering part (iii), unable to comprehend the negative part in the text 'I do not feel like eating.'

Question 10 (a), (b) and (e) required one word or one phrase answers. Most candidates did well. However, for part (b), some careless candidates misread 'when they were born' as 'where they were born' and answered 'China', thereby losing one mark. For part (e), some simply answered 20, missing out the word 'years' and scored no marks.

Question 10 (c) and (d): Most candidates could answer (c) correctly. Weaker candidates could not render '害羞 (shy)' and '安静(quiet)' into English. Instead they gave answers such as 'timid' and 'calm'. Many spelt 'quiet' as 'quite', which is wrong.

Question 10 (f): A significant number of candidates simply answered 'cold' (as a feeling) rather than 'catching a cold' as a disease.

Question 10 (g): Some candidates only gave a partial answer 'People cannot buy pandas' rather than 'they cannot buy and sell pandas.'

Paper 4 - Writing

This paper proved to be accessible to candidates, with a majority scoring high marks. It compares well with previous exam series. The format of the questions, the timing of the exam, the number of tasks which candidates were required to complete and the assessment criteria remained more or less the same. There were no questions which posed particular difficulties to candidates.

Examiners were particularly encouraged to see an increasing number of learners who took the examination scoring good marks. As in previous years, some weak candidates who could not write Chinese characters in Questions 1 and 2 used *pinyin* instead, which scored no marks. Candidates are again reminded that the inclusion of *pinyin* is only allowed in a continuous piece of writing in Questions 3 and 4 and the assessment criteria reflect this. For candidates of Chinese origin, whose English was weak, the English rubric and bullet points in Question 3 continued to pose some difficulty, which resulted in them writing about something completely different from what was required, and thereby losing marks.

Question 1: Shopping

This question tested candidates' ability to write down 5 items they wanted to buy in a department store and was well answered by most candidates. However, some wrote 'dogs', 'cats', 'aeroplane' or 'cars' which were not feasible items one could reasonably expect to purchase in a department store and resulted in losing marks. Some Cantonese-speaking candidates used Cantonese dialect rather than standard modern Chinese, eg 手物 and scored no marks.

Question 2: Meeting my family

This question required candidates to complete sentences using pictures to guide them as well as taking into consideration the syntax of the sentences when filling in blanks. While most candidates tackled this question well, some could not recognise the map of Britain in (i). Instead they wrote 'China', 'America', 'Europe', or the places they themselves came from as an answer, which was wrong. For Part (ii), some candidates could not write the model answer 'doctor', and wrote 'chemist' or 'scientist' which were acceptable because they wear white coats, while others described the outlook, eg '很胖' (very fat), '高个子' (very tall), which could not be accepted. Surprisingly quite a few candidates could not write 'swimming' and

'jogging', despite the fact that both words are in the published core vocabulary list. For Part (v), some candidates wrote their own names or '小平' rather than 'student' and scored no mark.

Question 3: A football match

This question was easily within the grasp of most candidates, who scored full or nearly full marks. However, a sizable number of candidates were unable to write 'football' and 'match' correctly, nor did they read the rubric carefully. Instead of telling a friend about a future event, they wrote an account of a match which had already taken place. Some candidates misunderstood the last bullet point 'how you get there' to be 'how their friends can get there'. Some careless candidates missed out one or two points in the first bullet point, eg time, date or where the match is held.

Question 4: Where I live

This question discriminates well, as it can be answered with minimal response and at the same time provides scope for elaboration.

Most candidates did well, responding fully to all the bullet points. More able candidates were very ambitious, employing a wide variety of vocabulary, Chinese idioms and complex sentence structures. They used appropriate adjectives to enhance the description of the places they live, eg pretty, clean, without pollution. They also provided more details, eg there are mountains, rivers, trees and flowers. They gave reasons for why they like/dislike their area. Their language showed a high level of accuracy. Less able candidates, however, could only give a minimal response to each of the bullet points. It was also noted that more and more candidates used English word order and sentence structure in writing Chinese. This might be because more British-born Chinese were entered to take the exam. Again, as in previous years, those who used *pinyin* in this and Question 3 did not mark it with the correct tones, nor did their romanisation always follow the *pinyin* system.

Statistics

Overall Subject Grade Boundaries 1666 (Four skills)

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Overall subject grade boundaries	100	88	78	68	59	50	42	34	26

(NB each paper is worth 25% of the total)

Overall Subject Grade Boundaries 1667 (Three skills)

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Overall subject grade boundaries	100	85	77	69	61	52	43	35	27

(NB each paper is worth 33% of the total)

Paper 1 Listening and Responding

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Paper 1 grade boundaries	50	43	39	35	31	26	21	16	11

Paper 2 Speaking

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Paper 2 grade boundaries	20	18	16	12	12	10	8	6	4

Paper 3 Reading and Responding

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Paper 3 grade boundaries	50	43	39	35	31	26	21	16	11

Paper 4 Writing

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Paper 4 grade boundaries	55	47	42	37	32	29	26	23	20

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