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Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCSE  
In Japanese (1JA0) Paper 4H: Writing

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## Introduction

This being the first time that students sat the 'new' writing exam, there was doubtless considerable concern on the part of teachers as to how well their students would perform. It was the general consensus of all the examiners on this paper that there was absolutely no need to worry: the standard of writing was generally high and taught students had clearly been well prepared. It must have helped, of course, that for students of Japanese there was not such a big jump from the old specification to the new, as there was for other languages which had got used to controlled assessment. For Japanese, a big potential hurdle could have been the withdrawal of access to a dictionary, but in fact, it seems to have helped students focus more on having to learn the words (and kanji!) they might need, rather than depend on a dictionary which was not always very user-friendly.

Comments on the individual tasks are given below, but first a few general points that examiners felt it would be helpful for future students and teachers alike to be conscious of:

There were a good number of scripts that had extra sheets attached and, whilst this is not 'against the rules', examiners felt that students did not gain more marks for either Communication and Content (CC) or Linguistic Knowledge and Accuracy (LKA), compared to those who adhered to the 原稿用紙 given. During the process of planning the new exam, imaginary answers were drawn up to check that a good enough answer could be composed within the space given, and indeed, many students succeeded admirably in gaining full content marks with an impressive range of 'complex' grammatical structures, whilst not having any need for extra paper. Students should, perhaps, be advised of the need to make a rough plan (evidence of which was seen on many scripts) to avoid (a) extra 'filling' which does not substantially contribute to the CC mark and (b) repetition of grammar structures, which will not increase the LKA mark. Completing the writing tasks within the space given is not necessarily an easy task, but many students across the ability range showed that it is achievable.

Connected to the first point above is the need to ensure that the whole task is addressed. Lack of planning perhaps contributed to some students failing to mention all four bullet points (BP). Whilst the specification does state the coverage of the BPs does not need to be equal, it does also say that ALL BPs must be addressed to enable access to the highest marks. Examiners were careful to check that each BP was clearly mentioned and marks were adversely affected where this did not happen, regardless of the quality of the rest of the piece. (Details of the BPs commonly omitted are given under each task.) Students should, therefore, be urged to say something, even if brief and simple, about each BP to allow access to the full range of marks.

One final area that students and teachers need to be aware is taken into account is the range and accuracy of kanji used. When deciding upon a CC mark (note that kanji are mentioned here, not under LKA), examiners not only considered how well the task had been addressed, but how well kanji had been used overall in each task. Of course, the range of kanji

needed will to some extent be determined by the topic of the task, and while students would not be expected to know 環境 (not on the list, but useful in task 1b), there is an expectation that 'common' kanji such as 友だち、日本、好き are known and can be written correctly. On the other hand, there is a recognition that kanji such as 祭り could be classed as 'difficult' (although on the list) and it was not expected that students would use this if tackling task 2a.

#### Question 1 (20 marks)

##### 1a

Of the two options for question 1, this was by far the more popular choice, since it appeared to be more approachable, allowing students the opportunity to use a possibly pre-learnt description for BP1. While weaker students decided their friend was 楽しくておもしろい, stronger students used more complex phrases such as あたまがいい、せが高い. For BP2, most managed to convey 'where' and 'when' they had met the friend, even if use of the past tense was not totally clear. However, the number of students who used に with the verb あいます was quite small; this is one 'exception' that teachers would do well to address in class. It was pleasing to see how many students, when addressing BP3 (how important are friends?), knew the word 大切 (often in kanji!). What was more difficult, of course, was to give a reason but, here again, the range of vocabulary was very impressive, many correctly using phrases including the verbs 助ける、手伝う、役に立つ. Where a good many students lost marks on this task was on BP4, where the phrase 'after leaving school' in the task was misunderstood. Whilst there was no expectation that the verb 卒業する would be known, examiners were looking for a clear indication that life after school (i.e. after 'graduation') was being discussed. Common acceptable indications were 大学で or 仕事で、 but the phrase 学校の後 was taken to simply mean 'after 3:30' which was not the meaning of this BP.

##### 1b

As stated above, this task was not the preferred option of most students, but examiners agreed that those who did choose it often performed relatively better than those who chose 1a, possibly because, to produce the best answers, it needed a degree of technical vocabulary and opinions about the effect of transport on the environment, which presumably those who decided to tackle this task had at their disposal. Many students struggled to express the concept of 'transport' (often writing the word in katakana with varying degrees of success) and this raises another teaching point: is it always necessary to use the task vocabulary to address the question? In this case, although it would have been helpful to know 公共交通手段, it was not indispensable for successful completion of the task. A simple statement such as 私は車が好きです would have sufficed to answer BP1. Whilst the last BP in this task was quite demanding language-wise as a 'good' answer needed the student to know the phrase 環境にいい and ideally needed a 'should' structure (たほうがいい is on the grammar list), a simpler approach such as みなさん、町でグリーンのじてん

しゃにのりましょう would have been taken as an acceptable way of responding to this BP.

## Question 2 (28 marks)

2a

Statistically this was by far the less popular of the two options in question 2 and whilst it gave rise to a few interesting and original answers, most students who attempted to write about a festival failed to address the task in one of two ways. Firstly, despite there being a clear indication in the first two BPs that there was a need to talk separately about the festival in general (present tense) and then one particularly memorable occasion (past tense), most responses to this task either stuck to one tense or used a mixture of tenses to produce a very 'ambiguous' narrative. Similarly, it was of course necessary for the content of the two points to be different; simply repeating おいしいピザを食べたり、花火を見たり in different tenses was not rewarded twice. The second way in which many students failed to gain top marks for CC was with regard to BP4. The task required students to write about 'a Japanese festival', so 日本の祭りに行きたい was judged an insufficient answer, as there was clearly no answer as to which festival they wanted to attend. The task was felt to be reasonably within the expected range of a student's cultural knowledge of Japan; 花見 would have been a perfectly acceptable response (and also allows for good details about why this festival was chosen), but something even as vague as 夏祭り was deemed to have answered the BP satisfactorily.

2b

Out of the four extended writing tasks on this paper, this was the question that gave rise to the most interesting responses, partly as BP1 was clearly something that all students could write about (often with great enthusiasm!), while BP2 gave a chance to show off cultural knowledge, often including details such as food/drink, 神社, お寺, おんせん, 旅館, スカイツリー. In contrast to the 'ambiguous' use of tense mentioned with regard to 2a, in this task there was almost invariably very clear use of the past tense when writing about a previous trip abroad in answer to BP3. It was BP4 that, in contrast, often felt a little lacking in substance. Whilst stronger students were able to indicate how the trip would be beneficial - 新しいことばをならいます, 上手になります, 新しい友だちを作ります - in some cases the link between the activity (often 日本人に会います) and the desired outcome was not made clear. Even adding a sentence such as 日本語をたくさん話します would have sufficed.

## Question 3 (translation, 12 marks)

For many students (and teachers too, perhaps), this was the task that was the biggest 'unknown' and cause of most anxiety, but in fact, in many cases the translation was dealt with extremely well. Students had clearly been taught to use the language they had as best they could and to 'avoid' problems where feasible. Thus, for example, in the first sentence,

the 'ideal' translation would have included a linking で (買い物が好きで、。。。), but splitting into two separate sentences (some students turned the first sentence into 4 separate parts!) was perfectly acceptable. Whilst examiners were generous about some vocabulary items (e.g. 'stylish'), other substitutions (such as きもの for 'clothes') were not allowed. Examiners were surprised at how many students did not know relatively 'simple' vocabulary, especially time words ('often' became ときどき, 'last Saturday' was often understandably but incorrectly 先土曜日) and clothing ('trousers' is a difficult word to write in katakana!). The number of students who wrote ズボン in hiragana was also surprisingly high.

As far as linguistic structures were concerned, the sections which were intended to test those at the higher end of the ability range and with which some consequently struggled, were 'have never been' (examiners were looking for たことはありません as opposed to simple past tense), 'my friend says..' (examiners were generous here about the verb used and the tense), and 'I intend to..' (whilst 行きたい is not totally 'wrong', it is not the same as つもり, signalled clearly in the English as the desired structure.)

#### Final remarks

Finally, a few general points that are relevant to all or some of the writing tasks:

- students would benefit from greater focus on correct spelling, both where the long sound う is needed, and which okurigana are needed for each verb. (思います was often written with one too many kana - 思もいます - or one too few - 思ます.)
- whilst the correct use of 原稿用紙 is not taken into account while marking, it is a part of writing in Japanese and many students did not appear to be aware of the 'rules', especially as regards punctuation.
- students should be encouraged to write kana as clearly as possible; in a few cases it was nearly impossible to make out what had been written, whilst in others it was difficult to distinguish pairs of similar kana, e.g. う and ろ. With regard to the writing of kanji, many students produced these with a high degree of accuracy, but occasionally components of a single kanji were written over two boxes (this happened quite often with 好).
- teachers and students should be aware that there is no CC credit given for writing an introduction, aimed at the recipient of the email/letter. In question 2b, for example, some students 'wasted' about 4 lines introducing themselves to the embassy staff.
- teachers should stress to students that they choose ONE option for Questions 1 and 2, and indicate their choice by putting the cross in the box. Quite a few students tried to answer both options.