

FIRST LANGUAGE CHINESE

Paper 0509/02
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

This year's candidates did very well. Most could not only write fluently, but were also able to use sophisticated language to express their ideas. As in previous years, areas of weakness were candidates' organisation of their material and their awareness of audience.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most candidates had no trouble understanding the two passages this year nor did they have problems expressing themselves in written Chinese. In **Question 1**, the syllabus requires the candidates to demonstrate the ability to summarise what is said in the two passages provided on the question paper. This means that candidates have to find a way of (i) assimilating material from the passages in order to answer the question, but without copying the passages word-for-word; and (ii) expressing the main ideas in their own words, but without drifting away from the passages, writing their own thoughts, and thereby producing a piece of writing which in all likelihood has little connection with the source material.

Question 2

The performance in this question was satisfactory, with candidates usually achieving higher marks for **Question 2** than they did for **Question 1**. However, a common problem in answers to both **Questions 1** and **2** is the tendency for some candidates to introduce beautiful phrases with many adjectives, but which have little, and sometimes no, relationship with the question set. Such irrelevancies detract from the overall focus and organisation of the answer and this is taken into account by Examiners when awarding marks.

For **Question 2** it is also important that the candidates use the right register and have an awareness of audience. The language and style of a letter to a friend should be quite different to that of a report for a local newspaper.

Question 3

Most candidates did well in this question.

Question 4

The performance was satisfactory.

Question 5

The performance was satisfactory.

Question 6

Some candidates did not understand the meaning of the saying and therefore could not produce the correct answer.

Questions 7

Most candidates did well on these questions.

Question 8

The candidates needed to write the characters correctly before marks could be awarded. Unfortunately, on occasions, although it was clear that they knew the correct words, they wrote the wrong characters.

Question 9

Again, on the whole, successfully tackled by candidates. Candidates must only supply one word or phrase for each blank: some gave two words and, unless they were both correct, which was rarely the case, they could not score.

FIRST LANGUAGE CHINESE

Paper 0509/03
Continuous Writing

General comments

The four areas considered by the Examiners when awarding marks are as follows:

- 1 Material:** in most cases content was relevant to the question set and appropriate in terms of maturity. Candidates attempted to incorporate interesting detail into their essays, in the form of argument, description or narrative, depending on the type of essay they had chosen. The very best essays produced by candidates were interesting to read and often moving. Essays which do not relate closely to the title set will not score highly.
- 2 Structure:** in general, candidates seemed aware of the importance of structure. Essays had clear beginnings and endings (or introductions and conclusions) and material was set out in paragraphs which were clearly linked. However, there were cases where poor time management or lack of planning had clearly been a factor and where the ending was rushed or where there was no attempt at drawing the various threads of the writing together in the form of a conclusion. It is a shame when what is otherwise a good piece of writing comes to an end abruptly. Candidates should be reminded yet again of the importance of planning their work.
- 3 Style:** at the very top end, Examiners saw many examples of essays written in sophisticated Chinese, where candidates made use of an excellent range of vocabulary and complex sentence patterns. In general, although candidates showed a good sense of audience and were able to write clearly and fluently with an awareness of style, they would benefit from reading more. This would help to widen their vocabulary and allow them to express themselves with greater variety and clarity. In a few cases, candidates switched between the third person (s/he) and the second person (you) in their essays, thereby confusing the Examiner.
- 4 Accuracy:** although many candidates showed good control of grammar, characters and punctuation, for many this was an area where there was room for improvement. There were cases where candidates had shown good ability to develop and structure their material, but where the overall quality of the work was adversely affected by the inaccuracy of the language used. Regrettably, there were a few cases where the level of inaccuracy was such that Examiners had difficulty following the gist of what the candidate was trying to say.

Argumentative, narrative and descriptive writing all require different approaches. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of playing to their strengths and choosing a question in the examination which allows them to do the type of writing they are best at. Teachers can help by practising these different types of writing in class and ensuring that candidates are aware of their differing requirements.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

'The person that loves me the most' was the most popular question on the paper. There were many very moving pieces of writing which either related compelling personal experiences or took the form of sophisticated fiction. Less successful were essays where candidates simply recounted a list of facts which they failed to develop in any way.

Question 2

Candidates were expected to explain their understanding of this well-known Chinese saying and exemplify it. Quite a few candidates chose this question and answers were generally satisfactory.

Question 3

Many candidates chose this title. Some of them organised their ideas and arguments clearly and illustrated their answers with relevant examples; some essays lacked coherence and were not so convincing.

Question 4

Candidates were expected to write about 'an unforgettable lesson'. Another very popular title which inspired candidates to produce some interesting essays. Essays needed to focus clearly on convincing the reader of why this was 'an unforgettable lesson'.

Question 5

Quite a popular choice though there was a tendency for weaker candidates to stray away from the title.

Question 6

Here the candidates were expected to write about an interesting gathering. The most convincing essays were those written from personal experience. Again, where time is limited, it is important that candidates spend time thinking about their material and how best to use it to answer the precise question set in such a way that will keep the Examiner's interest. Candidates will need to be selective and concentrate on developing their 'best' material rather than trying to include everything.

Question 7

This was one of the most popular titles and candidates produced some interesting work on the subject of 'family and career'. Weaker essays tended to lack ideas and organisation. Ideas were introduced randomly and then either not fully developed or continually repeated.

Question 8

Candidates who chose this question were required to write an article for a paper on the trend for many secondary school candidates to concentrate only on their studies and neglect various social and physical activities. Again, with this kind of essay, candidates need to focus on the question, exploring a range of ideas and developing them as appropriate.

Question 9

This question took some well-known lines from a Chinese poem as a starting point for an article or story and each candidate tended to approach the task in his/her own personal way, resulting in some beautifully written and very moving essays.