

FIRST LANGUAGE CHINESE

Paper 0509/02
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

The standard demonstrated by the candidates was comparable to that of previous years. Most candidates could write fluently and convincingly. They showed they were able to summarize the material contained in the passages provided and to present arguments in their own words.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most candidates were able to produce a good summary, using their own words, of the two passages. A significant improvement this year was that many candidates seemed aware of the need to provide a clear structure for their essay. For instance, many listed the three sources of pressure (school, parents and the candidates themselves) and developed their essays in three sections. For future sessions, candidates should be reminded of the importance of including a clear conclusion.

Question 2

Candidates' performance in this section was satisfactory. A small number wrote in letter form instead of writing a conversation, which affected their marks. The better essays allowed both parent and child to present their view points and to give reasons. A significant number of candidates let the child speak at length with only occasional questions from the parent which did not adequately present both sides of the argument.

Question 3

Most candidates did well in this question.

Question 4

The performance was satisfactory.

Question 5

Questions 5(a) and 5(b) proved to be difficult: many candidates seemed to know the meaning of the words but not when and how they should be used.

Question 6

Most candidates knew the meaning of the words but, as in **Question 5**, they did not know the context in which they should be used.

Question 7

Most did well in this question. There were a number of correct possibilities. Full marks were awarded as long as the result made sense.

Question 8

Most candidates did well on this question.

Question 9

Again, most candidates did well on this question. The candidates needed to copy down the paragraph and insert the punctuation marks. Marks were not awarded when only the punctuation marks were listed without any indication of where in the paragraph they should be placed.

FIRST LANGUAGE CHINESE

Paper 0509/03
Continuous Writing

General comments

- 1 Material:** in the majority of cases, content was interesting and relevant to the question set and showed sufficient maturity at this level. Many of the candidates who attempted argumentative questions produced very balanced and well supported arguments. Many of the stories were convincing, demonstrating candidates' concerns about friendship and the wider world outside their schools. Although relatively few chose to do descriptive writing, most of the work produced was actually of a good standard, reflecting a firm grasp of the genre on the part of these candidates.
- 2 Structure:** in general, candidates showed awareness of the need to structure their writing appropriately. Most of the essays had clear beginnings and endings (or introductions and conclusions) with appropriate signposting between paragraphs and ideas. Very occasionally, some essays were divided into just 3 paragraphs: an opening paragraph and ending and in between a disproportionately large middle paragraph, which would have been better organised into 2 or 3 smaller chunks designed to aid the development of the argument or story. At the other extreme, to split an essay of around 500 characters into 8 or so paragraphs was not justified. For such candidates, organization could be improved by grouping together less significant, but related ideas, rather than adopting the approach of 1 sentence, 1 paragraph.
- 3 Style:** at the very top end, Examiners saw examples of sophisticated writing with an excellent range of vocabulary, complex sentence structures and very good organization of ideas. In general, many candidates wrote fluently showing a clear awareness of audience, but often the range of expressions and ideas was fairly limited. It was evident that some candidates seldom read in Chinese and clarity of thought and expression was an area where significant improvements could be made. Extensive reading in Chinese and lots of discussion of well chosen reading materials would surely help in this area.
- 4 Accuracy:** while many candidates showed good control of grammar, characters and punctuation, others made fairly frequent mistakes in characters, most notably in the number of misused homonyms. E.g. 条见* instead of 条件, 根句* instead of 根据, 通长* instead of 通常, 放气* instead of 放弃, and 服*导 instead of 辅导. Misuse of correlative conjunctions was another feature of weaker candidates.

In general, the level of achievement on this paper was pleasing. Candidates at the top end produced very sophisticated arguments, beautiful descriptions or very touching stories. Some papers contained frequent grammatical and character mistakes. Most of the errors in homonyms could be eradicated by comparison, practice and attention to detail.

In terms of time management, most candidates managed well, except for a very small number of scripts where there was strong evidence of rushing towards the end. More timed essay practice should improve this area.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Candidates were expected to write about the person they most trust. This was the most popular narrative question and on the whole candidates produced good quality work. At the top end, the writing was convincing and included interesting details. Weaker candidates did not explore their material in sufficient depth and failed to include convincing details to demonstrate why they trusted their chosen person.

Question 2

Candidates were expected to write about the quality of subtlety as a personal trait (or as a national/racial/cultural characteristic) or implicit ways of doing things. This was a challenging question. Only a handful of candidates attempted it, but their work was of a very high standard, revealing a high level of maturity in thinking and very sophisticated mastery of the language.

Question 3

Candidates were expected to write about their perception or experience of winning or losing. This proved to be the second most popular argumentative question and the overall standard of work produced was fairly high. Many candidates were able to develop their material showing clear, logical thinking and using a variety of structures and expressions, but weaker candidates tended to produce work that was repetitive and lacked clarity of thought.

Question 4

Candidates were expected to comment on the fact that many schools put students into different sets according to their grades. This was the most popular question on the whole paper as most candidates had relevant experience of this practice and had a lot of say. The standard was safe, with some exceptionally strong arguments. There were also some very poor essays, which were repetitive and lacking in content.

Question 5

Candidates were expected to write about a day last year. This was a popular choice, with many convincing, moving stories. In this question, although the candidates' material tended to be well developed, answers generally showed little verbal sophistication.

Question 6

Candidates were expected to write a descriptive piece about early spring. Although this was not a very popular choice, those who did decide to answer this question tended to be very strong candidates so the standard was good with answers displaying a good degree of verbal sophistication.

Question 7

Candidates were expected to write about the love between siblings or very strong friendship. The standard was varied. Material was generally developed well, however, there were a few candidates who did not fully comprehend the title. One candidate wrote about parenthood instead of brotherhood.

Question 8

Candidates were expected to write an argumentative piece discussing whether travel broadens the mind. Again, the standards achieved in this question varied a lot. Some produced highly structured convincing arguments while others produced weak, repetitive arguments.

Question 9

Candidates were expected to write a story or essay based on a line of ancient poetry. This proved to be the least popular and most difficult question. Only a handful of candidates chose this question but they all produced excellent pieces of writing, demonstrating very high competence in Chinese.