

FOREIGN LANGUAGE MANDARIN CHINESE

Paper 0547/02

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

The standard achieved by candidates was similar to last year, with the great majority continuing to achieve excellent marks. Responses to **Section 2 Question 25**, the longer of the two Writing tasks, were particularly impressive this year – providing evidence of strength in practical written communication skills. Candidates in the middle to top range of marks were able to produce well-structured and informative letters which were also interesting to read.

Following comments in last year's report, there has been a marked improvement in the legibility of scripts, with very few candidates writing in pencil or light coloured ink. This has made the Examiners' job much easier. Sincere thanks to all who have helped get this point across to candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1

Questions 1 - 6

Candidates performed very well in these multiple choice questions. The few errors which occurred appeared to be due to lack of familiarity with some of the vocabulary specified in the Defined Content for the syllabus e.g. the names of animals, or of different professions/occupations.

Exercise 2

Questions 7 - 11

Candidates performed strongly in these Yes/No choice questions indicating a high level of familiarity with simple expressions of time.

Exercise 3

Questions 12 - 15

Once again, candidates performed strongly in these multiple choice questions and were clearly very familiar with the vocabulary tested, particularly terminology relating to school and travel. Candidates generally demonstrated no problems in the use of the *de* construction used to indicate relative location e.g. 'the Dining Hall to the North of the small building'. Where problems did occur, they appeared to be due to limitations of vocabulary rather than misunderstanding of the grammatical use of *de* to indicate relative location.

Exercise 4

Question 16

Candidates were required to write a short letter to their mother. Performance in this question was of a good standard, with the majority of candidates achieving full marks. Those candidates who performed less well, generally displayed one (or a combination) of the following weaknesses:

- incomplete understanding of the rubric leading to a small number of candidates answering a question other than the one asked

- problems writing the Chinese characters required
- misreading of the rubric. In particular, a very small number of good candidates appeared not to notice that part (c) of the question required them to write about **two** activities and only discussed one. The importance of reading the rubric carefully cannot be over-emphasised.

In relation to the second point, above, it might be helpful to remind candidates that a simple phrase that they are sure of is preferable to a more complex phrase which they are uncertain how to write. As the mark scheme shows, **Question 16** tests communication. There is no distinction in marks awarded for a response that uses complex grammar and sophisticated vocabulary and one that uses simpler grammar and vocabulary, as long as both are accurate enough to communicate and the information requested by the rubric is conveyed, they receive the same mark. A small number of candidates attempted to use complex grammar and characters to convey their meaning and lost marks because what they wrote failed to communicate (particularly where they used English and/or Romanised Chinese because they were unsure of the Chinese character required). Had these candidates used simpler characters and grammar with which they were more familiar it is likely they would have achieved a higher mark. Marks are not awarded for use of words written in other languages e.g. English words or words written in a Romanised form of Chinese such as Pinyin.

Section 2

Exercise 1

Questions 17 - 24

Responses were of a high standard, with the majority of candidates achieving full, or close to full, marks. Candidates who performed less well copied chunks of the original passage in answer to the questions, commonly, sentence 1 in answer to **Question 17**, sentence 2 in answer to **Question 18** and so on. In these cases, responses were not generally relevant to the question. Candidates need to ensure they answer the question, but there is no need to do so in a complete sentence in **Section 2**. For example, 'the Airport' or 'Beijing Capital Airport' are completely acceptable as answers to **Question 21**. There is no need for candidates to write out the full sentence 'Xiao Li will meet John at Beijing Capital Airport'.

Exercise 2

Question 25

The standard of responses to the question was high. Those at the top end displayed excellent command of both vocabulary and grammar. The content of candidates' letters was frequently original and interesting (at the middle as well as the top of the mark range) which demonstrated impressive communication skills.

The mark scheme differentiates between candidates' knowledge of grammar (five marks awarded for grammar) and characters (three marks awarded for characters). While there was evidence of a wide range of ability in both areas, the majority of candidates were awarded marks towards the top of the range (3-5 for grammar and 2-3 for characters).

A number of candidates could improve their marks by ensuring that they make twelve comments *which relate to the topics given in the rubric* (there are twelve marks available for content here – one mark for each relevant comment made). To score full marks, candidates had to make at least one comment for each topic listed in the rubric (four topics in this case: self, place where I live, family and what classes I like). With very few exceptions candidates displayed a good understanding of the question rubric and made at least one comment on each of the four points requested. The remaining points (eight in this case) were given for comments/points made on any of the four rubric topics. The mark scheme allowed for a maximum of two points to be awarded for content not related to the four points stipulated in the rubric. Candidates that did less well on content either wrote a letter too short to contain twelve points of content or wrote too much content completely outside the rubric. Candidates should be reminded to stick to the rubric topics in their answers. A small number of candidates spent time re-stating the question (i.e. some candidates began their letter 'I am writing to tell you about myself and my family etc.): this is unnecessary as no marks are awarded for it.

Section 3

Exercise 1

Questions 26 - 32

Candidates generally performed strongly in **Questions 16 - 31**. There was no discernible pattern of common errors. In **Question 32**, Examiners were looking for three relevant comments on the meaning of the text. The majority of candidates did well, achieving two or three marks here. The mark scheme made no distinction between abstract responses and those grounded in the text e.g. the responses 'mothers are prepared to put up with unpleasant things to ensure their children get the best' and 'mothers will eat the unpleasant bit of the fish to ensure their children can eat the tasty part' received the same marks. Candidates that performed poorly here quoted directly from the end of text 'when women become Mothers they like eating fish heads' without attempting to explain the meaning of the phrase: no marks were awarded for this.

Exercise 2

Questions 33 - 36

Candidates did particularly well in these questions. There was no discernible pattern of common errors.

Exercise 3

Questions 37 – 56

The range of marks achieved in the Cloze test is comparable to those in previous years. The most common errors made by candidates appear to be due to:

- not knowing how to write the Chinese character required (again English and Romanised Chinese such as Pinyin are not accepted)
- difficulty with use of some particles, most commonly *dou* ('all') and aspect particle *le*
- limitations of vocabulary.

Paper 0547/03

Speaking

General comments

Most Centres are to be congratulated on their efficient conduct and administration of the Speaking Tests. Teacher/Examiners were skilful and patient and the vast majority of candidates acquitted themselves very well, with even weaker candidates being able to show the full extent of their knowledge of the language.

Some problems do, however, remain:

- In some Centres, the beginnings of the Topic Conversation and the General Conversation were not clearly indicated. This can be done by saying *Xianzai women jinxing di (er, san) bufen* or words to that effect.
- Centres are reminded that there are no half marks in the mark scheme.
- Some Teacher/Examiners allowed candidates themselves to announce the candidate name, number, etc – this must be done by the Teacher/Examiner.
- Although, the quality of recordings was generally excellent, in a few Centres it was so poor as to render candidates inaudible. Audibility can be improved by sitting candidates nearer to the microphone and conducting tests in a quiet place where interruptions are unlikely.

- It is intended that candidates should prepare a topic for the Topic Conversation section, but they should not prelearn it, and must certainly not read from notes. As stated in the syllabus and Teacher's Notes Booklet, no written notes of any kind are permitted in the Speaking Test. The candidate should be interrupted after a one to two minutes and questioned on his or her topic by the Teacher/Examiner.
- The marks of the sample candidates should be as widely spaced as possible in order to represent the full range of attainment at a Centre.
- No more than **six** candidates' recordings should be submitted as a moderation sample by each Centre. Where a Centre has large numbers of candidates and wishes to use more than one Teacher/Examiner to conduct/assess the Speaking tests for its candidates, permission must first be sought from the Product Manager at CIE. If permission is granted, the Centre must make arrangements for internal moderation to take place before marks are submitted to CIE.

Comments on specific questions

Role Plays

A Chinese Teacher is visiting your school...

All but the weakest candidates managed to give the number of students in their school. (As this is a role play, the number can of course be entirely fictitious.) The question about the academic year in which they started to learn Chinese caused some problems for weaker candidates.

You are discussing with a friend what to do this evening

The most problematic question seemed to be about the distance to the cinema. Some candidates seemed not to be used to the *li... yuan* pattern. A surprising number of candidates answered the final question about the price of the tickets using *...qian* rather than *kuai* or *yuan*.

You have lost your way trying to find your friend's home

Most candidates had little difficulty with this role play. In giving the telephone number at the end, surprisingly few seemed to use *yao* for number 1, but they were not penalised for this as it was clear in context.

A Chinese friend has asked you to buy a bike...

Some candidates seemed unfamiliar with *nianji* for 'age'. In the final question, there were further problems with the use of *qian*.

A passer-by who is feeling unwell is talking to you

The *li... yuan* structure again caused some problems here. The term *jiuhuche* was unfamiliar to weaker candidates.

You are buying a plane ticket for a holiday in Xi'an

The most difficult term seemed to be *tingliu*, but the context and the question *duochang shijian* should have made the meaning clear.

Topic (prepared) Conversation

The subject matter for the topic should be chosen by the candidate and the most successful presentations and conversations took place when the candidate had a genuine interest in his or her topic. The topics included a variety of pets, hobbies, comparisons between countries and so on. A few candidates are still choosing topics very close to 'Myself', which then makes the General Conversation more difficult to develop. The vast majority of skilful Examiners managed to give candidates plenty of opportunity to show their knowledge of the language.

General Conversation

Ideally this should develop naturally out of the Topic Conversation and then go well beyond it. In most cases candidates were given the opportunity to show the full range of their linguistic skill.

<p>Paper 0547/04 Continuous Writing</p>

General comments

As in previous years, the overall quality of candidates' work in the Continuous Writing test was very good. There were a large number of interesting and lively essays with a good range of vocabulary and structures correctly used.

For each essay, the Mark Scheme is divided into marks for Relevant Communication, Accuracy (of Characters and Grammar and Structures) and Impression. There was a noticeable improvement in the marks for Relevant Communication. This was because candidates paid attention to the guidelines and covered what was asked of them. Some candidates managed to work into their essays some obviously memorised sentences on a particular topic – for instance Chinese New Year. This was acceptable where candidates kept to the overall framework of the essay question. However, it was obviously not acceptable, as occurred in some cases, to memorise a piece of Chinese and write it down in the examination, whether or not it was of any relevance to the topic in question.

Candidates were not penalised for writing too much. There is no need for candidates to waste precious time counting the number of characters written, but it should be remembered that quality not quantity is rewarded. The candidate filling a whole page with characters, without interesting elaboration of the guidelines and with a lot of repetition, will not do as well as a candidate who writes a shorter, more interesting essay using idioms and a good range of vocabulary and structures. Candidates writing significantly fewer than 150 characters were unlikely to do themselves justice.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

There were some very well-planned and well-expressed answers. The majority of candidates took care to cover the guidelines required, thereby achieving full marks for Relevant Communication.

A majority of candidates answered **(a)**. In this essay, the fifth mark for Relevant Communication was awarded for an appropriate beginning and ending to the letter. Most candidates gained 5 marks for Relevant Communication.

A few candidates muddled 近况 with 进步, but since they picked up on 学习 and talked about what they had been doing at school, then this did not matter. A small number of candidates found 这笔钱 puzzling and could not work out whether it referred to a pen or money. In this case, going back and re-reading the question would probably have helped to solve the problem.

Those candidates answering **(a)** were able, with a little planning, to show their knowledge of a wide variety of characters for different types of food, activities, school subjects etc. Their letters often read as if they were really thinking about their granny as they wrote; these letters were very successful.

The straightforward guidelines for this essay meant that candidates choosing this topic needed to ensure that they still used Chinese to their maximum capability, rather than just using simple structures.

There are always problems in the use of *de*. Candidates should learn to acquire as much help as they can from the guidelines. In this case, when the question says 你生日过得怎么样, then there is no reason why the correct *de* should not be used in response.

A smaller number of candidates answered **(b)**. Candidates who answered this question wrote ambitious, interesting and largely successful essays with a wide variety of views on the pros and cons of watching television and taking part in physical activity. This topic gave the confident candidate the opportunity to express more complex ideas, but was a topic where the ideas could be expressed in a more simple fashion as well.

All candidates should clearly number their essay in this section as either **1 (a)** or **1 (b)**, so as to ensure there is no confusion.

Question 2

This question was designed to give candidates the freedom to write a story of their choice, using their own imagination as to what might happen next. Most candidates went with their old classmate to a restaurant/coffee bar and exchanged news with them. There were a number of imaginative twists to this basic story-line.

Candidates scoring highly were those who wrote a good story using a wide range of vocabulary and structures and idiom.

There was no need to copy out the question and then start the story. This wasted time and candidates did not score marks for what they had copied.

Although this was not a problem for most, it is worth reminding candidates to consider, before they start writing, whether they are broadly familiar with the characters they will need for the essay they wish to write. In a few cases, a significant number of characters written in pinyin marred an otherwise successful essay. (It should be added that one or two characters written in pinyin is not something which is penalised, particularly if a good range of characters has been used.)

General comments on characters and grammar

The essays of many candidates displayed an impressively wide range of characters. Characters which were frequently written incorrectly are as follows:

担心, 名字, 漂亮, 汽车, 知道, 已经, 物理, 地理, 名胜古迹

There was some confusion between 可是/可以, 都/到, 后/候, 今/今, 住/往, 那/拿, 要/有, 活动/运动, 在/再

Candidates showed a good knowledge of Chinese grammar. The most frequent problems are listed below:

- There was considerable confusion over the use of 的, 得 and 地 – with correct use of the latter two causing particular problems.
- In some cases, 有 was used to indicate the past tense e.g. 我有去 for 'I have been'.
- 和 may only be used to join words or expressions, but it was frequently used to connect clauses.
- Some candidates did not seem to know the difference in usage between 时间 and 时候.
- There was a tendency to overuse the particle 了.