

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Papers 0510/01 (Core) and 0510/02 (Extended)

Reading and Writing

General comments

The vast majority of candidates seemed to have been entered for the appropriate tier (but there are still some very low achieving candidates who are ill served by being entered for Extended tier). Examiners reported fewer omissions in completion of exercises on the papers than in previous sessions. Where candidates left gaps those were mainly on **Part 2 Exercise 2**, the summary question, **Part 2 Exercise 3** (Extended) the note making exercise, and in **Part 3 Exercise 1** or **2**.

Misinterpretations where they occurred were most usually to be found in answers to the summary question, in cases where candidates failed to refer to the bullet points of the task. Some difficulties were experienced by many in **Part 2 Exercise 2** because of failure to read the rubric thoroughly, and in **Part 3 Exercise 1** some candidates wrote about careers or simply produced a piece of writing which had no relevance to the question set.

Most Examiners reported that many scripts gave evidence of a good level of understanding in the reading comprehension parts of the paper. Writing skills have also improved, with more candidates using appropriate tone and register. There have been improvements in structure and in the use of tenses and spelling. However, the weakest candidates still ignore recommended word lengths or totally ignore question prompts.

Once again handwriting was often a problem. Some candidates' handwriting is illegible to the point that it is impossible to award marks. Candidates should use black or blue ink and not pencil or red pen.

Comments on specific exercises

Part 1

Exercise 1

This was intended as an accessible question for all levels and abilities, with most scripts duly scoring full or almost full marks for it. Poorer candidates lifted whole sentences rather than the key words, showing a lack of vocabulary or non-comprehension of the text. For **(a)**, correct answers were divided fairly equally between 'a place for birthday parties' and 'professional entertainment'. Incorrect answers mainly featured 'disco parties'. When no mark was awarded for **(b)**, 'trained marshals', an incorrect lift, often accounted for it. Sometimes the answer to **(b)** appeared for **(d)**. **(e)** was mostly answered well; incorrect responses from weaker candidates were often 'entrance fee of R5' or 'free coke'. **(f)** was answered correctly in the main, but some candidates failed to give the key word, 'early' to gain the mark.

Exercise 2 (Paper 1)

Many candidates did well here, although in **(a)** some confusion arose for some who wrote 'a novel memento' which only partly answered the question. While **(b)** offered an easy mark for most, **(c)** was often answered wrongly because of incorrect lifting such as 'Morocco' or 'the city'. Very few candidates failed to gain marks in **(d)** and where none were gained it was usually because of a fairly nebulous answer such as 'the studio'. In **(e)** a significant number of candidates did not understand that there was indeed a reason for the two different prices. Again, weaker candidates lifted incorrectly from the text.

Exercise 2 (Paper 2)

Most candidates found this another accessible exercise, making few or no errors. Those who gained no marks for **(a)** usually did so because they wrote about the bamboo shoot needing to be the correct height but gave no reason for this. Nil scores on **(c)** were often because of lifting phrases such as 'buggy on three wheels'. In **(d)** some candidates failed to understand that to win a prize it was necessary to enter the competition in order to take the winning photograph. Many wrote about the key-cutting competition instead.

Exercise 3

(a) and (d) proved the most accessible questions to the majority of candidates. Difficulties were more marked with (b), (c), (e) and (f). In (b) a significant number of candidates incorrectly lifted 'injuries to soft tissues' and in (c) many made a similar error by describing the muscle as a 'pulled hamstring'. In the weakest scripts there were some odd spellings of this word. Where mistakes were made in (e) it was most often because candidates did not include the idea of 'beneath the skin' and simply copied 'blood capillaries'. In the final question many candidates ignored the request to write in sentences.

Part 2

Exercise 1

This proved a challenging exercise for many candidates at both Core and Extended, and differentiated well. A good few candidates (for both tiers) failed to do the whole exercise. (a) was usually correct, although some candidates lifted almost the whole of the first sentence as a response. The more discerning recognised that the special feature of the funeral house was that it was 'unrobbed' or was in a special 'location'. In (b) most candidates stated that permission had not been granted but failed to qualify it with 'to go inside', failing to gain the mark. There was quite a wide variety of response to (c), with many giving generalised answers, most of which were rewardable. Irrelevant responses included 'difficult not to stumble upon some structure'. (d) was challenging for many and relatively few candidates got the correct response, that there were no written records left by the Chachapoya. (e) was answered better, with stronger candidates giving answers such as 'Maranon', 'Andes', 'dense forests' and 'steep hills'. Some answers which were irrelevant included the names of the towns, such as 'Bolivar', and many wrote 'the author's journey'.

In the Extended Paper, (f) was often well answered, with many scripts gaining three or four marks for it.

Exercise 2

Candidates of all abilities found this question very challenging, and although most picked up content marks the language marks were often quite poor. The main reason was that the candidates failed to read the requirements of the rubric carefully. They did not strictly adhere to the two bullet points which restricted the information they were required to use. As a result many wrote well over the maximum required word length and many gave too much detail, through inappropriate lifting, which inevitably increased their word count. For example, many listed all the possible sources of plants that could yield natural perfumes and many more failed to realise that the other source was from the scent glands of animals. Many wrote that the scent came from animals themselves, which was incorrect. There was much extraneous information given about which fragrances are preferred in which cosmetics, when a short sentence explaining that cosmetics of all kinds included various fragrances would have been enough. However, marks could still be gained even where candidates opted for safe, relevant lifts.

Candidates must be reminded once again to read the question carefully and focus on its requirements in their answers. By contrast with the performance on the equivalent exercise in June 2001's examination session, this was often disappointing to mark.

Exercise 3 (Paper 1)

Although many candidates find the form-filling task an easy and accessible exercise, for some candidates it seems to cause quite a few unnecessary problems. The main difficulties are that candidates are not approaching the form itself with enough care. Quite a few candidates simply ignore the sections where they are requested to use basic form-filling conventions such as capitalisation and deletion. In this exercise many did not use capitals for the first half of the application form and many did not make the required deletion in the 'Male/Female' and 'Access to Computer' section. The telephone number and age responses were usually correct but often the format of the date of birth information was not: some candidates struggled to squeeze the name of the month into the two boxes available for it, which were clearly designed for a number. The course code was generally answered accurately. The sentence length responses were quite well done although some difficulties were experienced in 'why you want to enrol' as a few candidates did not give a full enough answer to gain the mark. Overall, a reasonable proportion of candidates gained fairly good marks here, but it is still a cause for concern that others seem ill-equipped for simple aspects of this basic, everyday task; not knowing how to complete such a task can only be a disadvantage in many aspects of daily and working life where English is used, well beyond the examination room.

Exercise 3 (Paper 2)

In general, this was the least well-answered question on the Extended Paper and many candidates struggled to give coherent answers to the prompts. Some candidates made different points on the same line and some wrote the correct answers in the wrong part of the note making exercise.

Part 3

Exercise 1

This was generally well attempted, even by candidates whose language was limited. The inventions chosen were wide-ranging, with many candidates showing some keen and personal interest in the topic. The most popular choices were the computer, the Internet, the aeroplane, the space rocket, and electricity. Other ideas included satellites, the car, the light bulb, trains and the electric windmill. The rubric was occasionally misinterpreted by candidates who either wrote about several inventions, usually the ones illustrated on the examination paper, or wrote quite erroneously about their choice of career. Across one or two Centres in particular there were several pieces of writing about being a pilot or a health worker; here candidates seemed to be offloading a 'prepared' answer with little relevance to the question. Despite the accompanying illustrations in the question paper, one or two candidates showed quite a startling misunderstanding of the rubric by talking about 'an investment' rather than 'an invention'. Examiners were pleased to report that many of the responses were well-structured and employed relevant vocabulary. The best answers were succinct and focused, covering the bullet points with lively writing and good sense of audience. The most common problems in weaker scripts involved tenses and spelling.

Exercise 2

Once again this was well answered by many candidates who used appropriate tone and register. Often the third prompt was ignored or only implied, but in the main good answers were given with quite a lot of detail and suggestions about keeping the school clean. In some cases candidates wrote rather off the point and at some length, about completely refurbishing the school or getting it repainted or having a new gym or swimming pool built. In many scripts there were some intrusive incorrect spellings of *garbage*, *rubbish* and *litter*: this was especially to be regretted in the cases words which were given in the rubric.

Exercise 3 (Paper 2)

Answers to this task showed some improvement on previous sessions, with candidates being able to express their own ideas without so much reliance on the prompts. Stronger candidates were able to express their own ideas and develop them quite well to produce some well-balanced arguments, often going beyond school life to the wider aspect of society itself. It was obvious that candidates could identify with this idea. Many candidates felt that mixed schools were better on the basis that society is mixed - so why not school? These were mature and often fluent responses which made interesting reading. As in previous sessions, weaker candidates placed near total reliance on the prompts, merely repeating with little if any personal comment.

Papers 0510/03 (Core) and 0510/04 (Extended)

Listening

General comments

There was good evidence that most Centres had prepared candidates thoroughly for this component and that candidates across the ability range responded well to the paper. Most candidates were able to complete all the sections of the paper, and omissions were relatively few.

Teachers may like to be assured that, as in previous sessions, spelling is not assessed on this component, in accordance with its 'listening for understanding' ethos. Phonetic attempts at answers could usually be accepted if there was evidence of understanding. An exception to this was where the answer made another word and therefore altered the sense, for example, 'root' for 'route'.

Numbers and units of measurement are still causing problems (especially for Core candidates). 'Kilogram' for 'kilometre', for example, was a frequent slip; sometimes a necessary number or unit was omitted completely. Ensuring that more practice is gained before the exam in listening carefully for numbers, quantities and everyday units in such matters as length and weight (feet, inches, meters, centimetres, grams, kilograms etc.) and currency (pound, Euro, dollar), for example, might sound a basic and obvious piece of advice; but adhering to it would pay dividends for many candidates (and not just in the exam room).

Examiners reported problems with the legibility in some scripts; the importance of writing clearly in dark blue or black ink should be stressed to candidates well before the exam.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Part 1 of each paper comprised 6 questions based on short *realia*, requiring short, precise answers.

Paper 1

Question 1

This was generally well answered, although a small number of candidates failed to quote both subjects involved as demanded by the question: 'French' and 'Physics' (in either order) were *both* necessary in order to achieve the mark.

Question 2

This was very well answered with just a few mistakes on one digit.

Question 3

This required 'Gate 5313'. Some candidates failed to give complete information here and so could not be credited. Often the gate number was omitted or 'Gate' was left out of the answer.

Question 4

This question required the idea of the drivers having to leave the motorway or having to follow an alternative route to their destination. Generally responses here were accurate, as most candidates understood that drivers were advised to leave the motorway; but a few interpreted this as 'leave the motor' and therefore failed to score.

Question 5

This question's special 'two for the price of one' offer was capably dealt with by most candidates. Some thought that a customer could buy two shirts and receive a third one free. Candidates who wrote 'half price' were not credited, as this did not prove understanding of the concept.

Question 6

The most challenging question in this section. A large number of candidates stated when the theme park was closed rather than when Indira and Ashok would be able to go there.

Paper 2

Question 1

This was generally accurately answered.

Question 2

Again, this was generally accurately answered. As seen on the Core tier paper, some thought that a customer could buy two shirts and receive a third one free. Candidates who wrote 'half price' were not credited, as this did not prove understanding of the concept.

Question 3

As on the Core tier paper, a significant number stated when the theme park was closed rather than when Indira and Ashok would be able to go there.

Question 4

While many candidates answered this precisely ('next to the gymnasium') and achieved the mark, Examiners also reported some long, rambling answers, with directions how to get to the courts rather than 'where exactly' they were situated.

Question 5

This was well answered with most candidates understanding '3/4 hour' although some wrote '3 ¼ hours' and failed to score.

Question 6

This question carried two marks – one for the ideas of the 'morning of the match' and the second for the concept of the 'queue'. Some candidates fared very well, but others seem to have had problems in understanding here.

Part 2

Question 7

Paper 1 and Paper 2

This was a note-completion exercise in response to an interview with an international surfer. Candidates generally engaged well with the subject matter presented and the task. The first question required the idea of riding 'through' waves. Candidates who wrote 'throw' or 'threw' did not score here but generally most candidates answered this correctly. For the 'Equipment' question results were more varied. Stronger candidates responded accurately with 'surfboard' and 'wetsuit', but other candidates wrote 'boat' or 'sun cream' instead. 'Flag' was usually supplied correctly in the 'Safety' question and its indication of danger too. In response to the 'Practice' part, some answered 'ahead' for 'head first' which failed to achieve a mark. The next part (Paper 2 only) required 'land with knees bent' but there were some inaccuracies on 'land' and some misunderstandings of 'knees'. The website address was usually accurately written.

Question 8

This question was a form-filling exercise in response to an interview about a pyramid-shaped parachute. Again, candidates generally showed good evidence of engagement with the subject matter and the task presented. Examiners were pleased at the precision with which many candidates tackled the whole exercise. The design date (Paper 2 only) was almost always accurately answered. Most answered the 'purpose' question correctly with the idea of 'escape', although some negated their answer by writing 'for escape from a high town' instead of 'Tower'. 'Cotton' was needed for the next answer and most wrote this correctly. The dimensions question caused more problems. The size needed to mention square metres and often this was omitted and the weight was often given in kilometres rather than kilograms. 'Air balloon' was the next required answer and most answers were correct here - a few candidates thought that a university professor had hoisted the parachute. The location (South Africa/National Park) (Paper 2 only) was generally accurately answered. The height of the jump prompted some inaccuracies - often 7,000 for 700 - and often the units of measurement were omitted completely meaning that marks could not be awarded.

Part 3

Paper 1

There was evidence of much effort here - with crossing out and reworking prevailing; it is important of course that the final choice of answer is given clearly in the script. Candidates now seem at ease with the general format of this section.

Question 9 (Exercise 1)

This was in response to a challenging interview about hurricanes. Most candidates coped well here; four out of the available five marks was a common score. Many candidates had difficulty with question (e) - it is possible that their understanding of 'consistent' in the statement caused some doubt.

Question 10 (Exercise 2)

This concerned a new landspeed record. The earlier questions were generally accurately answered but the dates in (i) caused some confusion, as did the number of kilometres in (k).

Paper 2

Question 9 (Exercise 1)

- (a) Was generally well answered, although a few candidates omitted 'hurricanes' and wrote 'it will increase' which made no sense in the context and could not be credited.
- (b) Many candidates did not understand how scientists made predictions and failed to write the correct 'past records'. Many gave the answer 'looked at air pressure'.
- (c) Most candidates were able to give two factors accurately.
- (d) Most candidates answered well, realising that the rise in sea temperature was responsible for the hurricane.
- (e) Some candidates only supplied one feature here – 'calm' or 'winds' - but two ideas were needed to achieve the mark.
- (f) Most candidates found this question very difficult and failed to find the correct category – nearly all wrote that category 1 was the lowest hurricane when in fact this was a storm not a hurricane.

Question 10

This was a response to an interview about genes. Although a challenging topic, many candidates performed well here (and performance overall was better than on **Question 9**).

- (a) Needed the idea of genes making people 'unique' (all synonymous expressions were accepted) to gain a mark. Most were able to supply the necessary information.
- (b) This was well answered, and candidates wrote about hair and eye colour and height.
- (c) This was usually well done, with 'parents' being the answer preferred by candidates.
- (d) While irrelevance marred a significant number of scripts here, many realised that the genes were located 'in the DNA' and scored both marks.
- (e) Candidates fared quite well here, understanding that the research could help in the treatment of disease. Unfortunately some negated the answer by writing 'hard disease' for 'heart disease'.

<p>Paper 0510/05 Oral Communication</p>

General comments

The Examination on this occasion was taken by approximately 11,000 candidates.

A striking feature of this year's examination was the very considerable improvement noted by Moderators in the efficiency and accuracy with which the required procedures were carried out. Some problems are referred to later in this report, but these comments should be seen in the context of the overall improvement referred to above. Moderation is always made much easier when required procedures, as laid out in the Guidance for Examiners pamphlet, are followed meticulously.

The assessment cards

The assessment cards were well-received and provided most candidates with more than adequate opportunities to demonstrate their linguistic skills. The choice of card (by the Examiner!) is a very important moment in the examination procedure. If the candidate is well known to the Examiner, the choice may be relatively easy; where this is not the case, the warm-up conversation may provide a good opportunity to assess where the candidate's interests lie, and provide a clue to the best choice of card.

Moderators noted on occasions that some Examiners appeared to choose cards following a pre-determined pattern, going through the cards from A-E, rather than tailoring the choice to the individual candidate. This is an unwise procedure. It sometimes results in candidates being presented with cards on topics totally outside their range of interests. In extreme cases, real distress and poor performance can be caused by injudicious choice of card.

Card F is not always appropriately used. Because this card required candidates to open the assessed conversation with a short (very short!) presentation, it makes extra demands on the linguistic skills of candidates. It should be used, therefore, only with candidates who are very strong and secure, and who are likely to perform at the top of the mark range. Weaker candidates often find the demands of this card beyond them. Their performance may be adversely affected.

Sometimes, despite great care being taken in the choice of card, the candidate does not respond well and the conversation threatens to break down. When this happens, it is perfectly permissible for the Examiner gently to steer the conversation into more fertile channels. The prompts on the card are intended to be helpful, but not to impose boundaries, which Examiners must remain inside.

The topics of the cards are chosen as being likely to lie within the range of interests on the majority of candidates. However, there is never an element of 'knowledge-testing' involved. The assessment criteria are specifically linguistic, and a candidate's ignorance of facts surrounding the topic is irrelevant to the assessment.

Likewise, the quality or soundness of opinions expressed is irrelevant. There were one or two examples this year of conversations where the Examiner appeared to be testing the validity of opinions expressed. This may, of course, have been the Examiner's way of making the conversation a stimulating one, but it would have been easy for the candidate to feel that it was necessary to justify her/his views to achieve success in the examination. The other danger of this approach is that the conversation will develop into an interrogation where the candidate might well feel threatened.

Procedures

Every year, some Centres send tapes for Moderation, which for one reason or another are inaudible. In some cases the voices fade, leaving the Moderator with only a distant mumble; in other cases, there is loud interference, which drowns the speakers. It goes without saying that inaudible tapes cannot be moderated; it is vital therefore, that audibility levels are checked frequently during the recorded sessions. In some situations, the candidate has only to move a very short distance away from the microphone, for her/his voice virtually to 'disappear'. It is worth also, considering the position of the microphone in relation to mechanical/electrical devices in the examination room. Sometimes, a fan or an air conditioning unit produces interference sufficient to spoil a tape.

The size of sample required for Moderation is set out clearly on the reverse side of the Oral Examination Summary Form. It is very important that these requirements are met. It is also important that the sample covers the range of marks awarded by the Centre. Where two or more Examiners have conducted the examination, the sample should include examinations conducted by every Examiner. When these requirements are not met, it is sometimes difficult to be sure that justice is being done to candidates. It is worth bearing in mind that Moderators are just as concerned to make sure that candidates have not been assessed severely, as checking that there has not been over-assessment.

Moderation is made much easier if tapes are clearly labelled and are wound back to the beginning of side A before being despatched. Moderators sometimes have difficulty locating a particular candidate; this can be time-consuming and unproductive. It is very important that the identity of each candidate, (name and candidate number) is established clearly at the very beginning of the examination process.

The warm-up conversation is an important part of the examination process, and should always take place and be recorded. This conversation is intended to achieve two purposes. In the first place, it gives the candidate a chance to become familiar with the examination situation and to relax a little. Equally important is the opportunity it gives to the Examiner to choose an appropriate assessment card, and to get clues as to likely fruitful areas of conversation.

Most Examiners made extremely good use of the warm-up period this session. Where there were weaknesses these were usually caused either by the conversation becoming too formal – at worst a series of standard questions about family, hobbies, favourite subjects – or by the conversation going on and on, long after the candidate is obviously thoroughly at ease. It is important for Examiners to be conscious at all times of the purpose of these conversations.

Moderators are required to check that examination procedures have been explained to the candidate, that the card has been chosen by the Examiner after the warm-up conversation, and that there has been plenty of opportunity for the candidate to ask questions both about procedures and the assessment card. All of this should, therefore be recorded.

The accuracy of assessment was very impressive this year. The number of Centres where adjustment of marks was required was relatively small, and it was clear that the assessment criteria had been applied with great care. It is very important that each of the assessment strands – Structure, Vocabulary and Fluency – is assessed separately, with no assumption that performance is likely to be the same or similar on all three. It is easy to fall into the habit of a making an overall assessment, ignoring the very specific criteria set out on the assessment page. This may result in less than justice being done to candidates' performances.

Moderators are conscious of the time-consuming hard work that is involved in examining oral candidates and in preparing the samples for moderation. They are grateful for the very real help that is given by Centres when procedures are followed and assessment criteria are applied accurately.

Note

Centres should note that from 2004 Assessment Card F (the 'choose a Topic' option) is discontinued, as stated in the syllabus booklet. (It is used for the last time in the November 2003 session.)

<p>Paper 0510/06 Coursework</p>

General comments

Centres should read this report in conjunction with the report above on 0510/05 – Oral Examination, where several matters, such as selection, size and preparation of samples for moderation and audibility of tapes, are relevant to the coursework option.

It is very important that entries are made accurately. On this occasion, as in the past, a few Centres, although entered for the coursework option, used the examination assessment cards, and submitted only one activity for each candidate. This, of course, is technically a deficient programme of assessed coursework, and could lead to candidates being disqualified. A careful check that entries are correctly made is vital.

The coursework option provides Centres with an opportunity to devise tasks and situations, which are tailored to the needs of their own candidates. It is a pity, therefore, when Centres produce tasks, which are similar, or in some cases identical to those used in the examination option. Any activity which involves speech in English can be considered as a legitimate vehicle for testing the assessment criteria.

Some Centres took full advantage of the flexibility which the coursework option provides and gave candidates a variety of situations in which to demonstrate their linguistic skills. It was clear from listening to these tapes that candidates were not only enjoying their oral work, but were furthermore being given excellent opportunities to satisfy the assessment criteria at the highest levels.

Centres considering the coursework option might consider assessing their candidates in three distinct situations:

- A group of 3 - 6 candidates. Such a group is ideal for debate and discussion, and enables the Examiner to assess a candidate's ability to influence – even to control - the direction and content of a discussion. Abilities of this kind are particularly important when considering awarding marks in the highest band.
- Paired activities. This could be for example an interview, a telephone conversation, or, perhaps, a role-play situation.
- A solo presentation, followed by questions/challenges from fellow candidates.

When choosing a situation for assessment, a decision must be made regarding which particular skills, mentioned in the assessment criteria are being tested, and, clearly, the three activities should as far as possible, be targeted on different skills. There is no particular point in testing the same skills again and again.

When submitting coursework for moderation, it is particularly important to ensure that the performances of particular candidates are easily retrievable by the Moderator. It is also important, when paired or group activities are submitted, to make it possible for the Moderator to be able to identify the voices and distinguish between them. For example, mixed gender pairs are far easier to moderate than a pair of candidates whose voices are similar to each other.

It was gratifying to moderate those Centres which showed great ingenuity and creativity in constructing their teaching and assessment programmes. Centres which at the moment may feel a little diffident about devising their own programmes may be reassured that the outcome, in terms of standard of performance is likely to more than repay the effort involved.