

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/02

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

Most of the candidates completed all sections, which indicates good time-management skills and, perhaps, familiarity with the exam format. Most candidates demonstrated good lexical and grammatical usage. About half the candidates were able to express their ideas and opinions coherently, but fewer candidates were able to make a case for their arguments. Their suggestions or opinions were not well supported and interesting ideas were often left undeveloped.

There was a general tendency towards shorter, simple sentence structures and there was a lack of conjunctive expressions. Missing particles, unfinished sentences, inconsistent style of sentence-ending, weak syntactic structures were also observed among weaker candidates. This writing approach *can* work with certain genres (computing, cyber-related, etc.) but was not suitable in this context where the passages were essentially emotive and personal and were situated in a social and interpersonal context.

Both texts in **Part 1** deal with personal experiences of social-work volunteers in different situations. The candidates' responses to the reading passages were overwhelmingly positive as demonstrated by phrases such as "I was really moved", "I felt tears in my eyes", "I want to do something for others like the protagonists", etc. Unfortunately however, it appeared that candidates struggled to find linguistic means to express their emotions. Many seemed to lack positive, emotive or social ranges of vocabulary, and thus they were at a loss when trying to express their positive responses in written form.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Part 1

Candidates' writing skills are tested in two questions.

Question 1

The two passages share a topic about which the candidates are expected to write a relevant short composition (circa 400 words). This question tests the candidates' ability to select, compare and summarise specific information from the two passages, A and B. Marks are also awarded based on the candidates' ability to express their opinions, thoughts, ideas, etc. clearly and coherently in response to the passages. While relevance is one of the key elements, the composition cannot be a mere summary of the reading passages: the candidates' original response to the chosen topic must be clearly, logically and coherently expressed. Given the word length, unnecessary repetitions and circumlocution are best avoided. Therefore, good composition planning is essential. Spelling should be carefully checked.

An example of a format used by competent candidates is as follows:

- Firstly, state very briefly (no more than a sentence or two) what the shared topic is (in the passages A and B). Alternatively, give a brief personal reaction to the reading passages (e.g. the stories are surprising, moving, familiar, etc.). This constitutes very short introduction.
- Secondly, refer to the contents of [A] and [B]. For example, give a brief account of the common theme and compare the differences of opinions in the two passages.
- Explain how the facts and experiences described in the passages are similar or dissimilar to one's own viewpoint/experience. Develop the argument further by analysing the personal viewpoint/experience, etc. then compare that to the situations/viewpoints that are described in [A] and [B].

- Give a short concluding remark. This can be for example a short summary of the main points followed by suggestions, and/or predictions for future situations.

There are, of course, other possible formats. The important point is that the structure of the composition should be clear and well thought out.

Question 2 invited a response to the passages in a variety of forms (e.g. a selective summary, a letter, a report, a speech, a script of a conversation or broadcast, a continuation of a story, or expressive development of an idea in the passage, etc.) This question tested the candidates' ability to write more creatively and communicatively using high-level linguistic skills. Needless to say, the composition must be relevant to the topic (the title in this case), coherent and succinct. It is also expected to follow a style accepted for the genre. As in **Question 1**, accurate and appropriate use of Kanji, katakana, hiragana, punctuation and Genkôyôshi was also tested. This year, candidates were asked to write a brief letter to the main protagonist of passage A or B, enquiring about the possibility of working with him/her during the summer vacation. The candidates must write in circa. 300 words why they are interested in the voluntary work and state briefly how one might be able to contribute using certain skills based on relevant experience. They must also make use of Japanese polite expressions and grammar.

Nearly half the candidates were able to satisfy all of the above requirements. Their descriptive writing skills were adequate to good. Logical or analytical writing skills were less satisfactory. Many candidates struggled to express their ideas clearly and succinctly. Weaker candidates tended to lose the thread in the middle of writing. Stronger candidates displayed a good command of formal language, showing their solid knowledge of polite expressions and grammar. Writing a shorter composition can be more challenging than an extended one because it has to be succinct. Again, good composition planning is essential.

Part 2 consisted of four subsections. The questions tested:

- logical, semantic and grammatical knowledge (**Questions 3-7**),
- lexical and semantic knowledge (**Questions 8-12**),
- synonyms and Kanji (**Questions 13-17**)
- grammatical knowledge and relevant metalanguage (**Questions 18-22**). **Questions 3-17** test the candidates' linguistic knowledge, which forms the basis of good writing. Questions in this section test the candidates' linguistic flexibility. Messages are expressed in a variety of ways through rephrasing and paraphrasing, using appropriate words, grammar, expressions, etc.

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/03
Continuous Writing

General comments

Candidates performed satisfactorily. Improvements were seen in the following areas: relevance of content to the chosen topic, originality, and paragraph links. On the other hand, candidates performed less well with regards to clarity of arguments, coherence, grammatical accuracy, Kanji and appropriateness of lexical choices. In general stronger candidates employed varied expressions and sentence structures that were appropriate to the style and context, while weaker candidates used, haphazardly, a mixture of archaic and colloquial expressions that are characteristic to Japanese “anime” language. Their sentences were often uncoordinated and incomplete.

Candidates appeared to have enjoyed writing about their chosen topic, however, it was clear that weaker candidates had not necessarily been exposed to a variety of words that express senses, emotions, thoughts, etc. They were unable to find the exact words to convey their reactions towards the chosen topic that had provoked strong emotional responses in them. They appeared to be sometimes frustrated. Evidence for this observation can be seen in the candidates’ own words, for example, “I wish I knew how to express this” or “I just feel very strongly about [the topic], but it is difficult to put it down on the paper”.

Teachers are encouraged to use a good selection of reading material as part of their teaching resources. While use of manga or popular magazine articles may motivate candidates, the range of vocabulary may be severely limited or unbalanced. Judging from successful candidates’ compositions, stronger candidates appear to have had exposure to a selection of reading material, which can be found in classical and contemporary literature.

Comments on specific questions

A selection of nine titles was given and called for the candidates’ imaginative, narrative or argumentative response in an appropriate style.

Marking criteria were as follows:

- Material (Interest, Relevance, Exemplification, Explanation, Detail, and Maturity)
- Structure (Paragraphing, Paragraph Links, Balance and cohesiveness in the overall structure, Sentence sequence, Structural effects, and Clear beginning and end of the composition)
- Style (Word range, Sentence structure, Sense of audience, Varied style in the choice of vocabulary and structure, and Stylistic effects)
- Accuracy (Grammar, Punctuation, Dialogue, Word usage, Spelling including Kanji use, and Usage of GenkôYôshi)

Candidates are expected to write not only with linguistic accuracy, but also with clarity of argument and originality in the content. Furthermore, an appropriate style and discourse structure must be chosen according to the genre in which s/he is writing and it should be consistent throughout. For example, a creative-writing essay requires originality and appealing story-telling methods, while a socio-cultural or a socio-scientific essay requires analytical and logical arguments and convincing reasoning.

The nine titles were as follows:

- 1 It was four years ago when Hiroyuki’s father was transferred to a branch of his company in Germany... (complete the story).

- 2 Should installing a display of moving images such as “car navigation (GPS)”, TV and DVD near the driver’s seat be banned? State your opinion and give reasons, facts, etc. to support your opinion. Discuss convincingly.
- 3 What does the word “hometown” mean to you? Do you live there or would you like to return there in the future? How would you like to set up your life there? Write clearly giving concrete examples.
- 4 Explain the term “Hikikomori (nowhere kid/stop-at-home/reclusive youth)” succinctly and consider the cause(s) of this phenomenon.
- 5 What do you think will help promote “recycling household garbage”? State your opinion and give specific suggestion(s).
- 6 Write a sentence using the following expression: “Jiki-Tourai to wa masani kono koto da (This is exactly what they call “Jiki-Tourai [whose time has come])”.
- 7 What does the idiom “Amadare Ishi wo Ugatsu (The drop, by continually falling, bores its passage through the hardest rock)” make you think about? Write freely.
- 8 State whether you agree or disagree with the idea “politico-religious separation” and give reasons. Supply specific examples to support your argument and discuss logically.
- 9 Write a composition based on your impression of the picture below.

Question 1 required creativity and originality as well as coherent and appealing story-telling skills. **Question 9** was also a creative writing task, but it used a visual stimulus (a photo), and thus candidates were expected to describe vividly what they see in the picture using appropriate expressions. **Questions 2, 4, 5 and 8** required the candidates to indicate their standpoint first, then to develop analytical and logical arguments consistently using an appropriate structure. **Question 3** is a free essay in which candidates were required to employ richer linguistic skills to express a semi-fantasy world effectively. For **Questions 6 and 7** a clear and succinct explanation of the idiom/proverb was required. For example, fixed expressions may be paraphrased in more ordinary language. Candidates are then expected to discuss the phrase in a coherent manner.

Essays should be relevant to the chosen topic. Needless to say, a clear structure – such as the typical Japanese format consisting of four sections KI, SHÔ, TEN, KETSU – was required. Candidates are encouraged to plan the contents of their essays carefully prior to writing their composition.