

Examiners' Report Summer 2009

GCE O'Level

GCE O'level French (7193)

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Paper 1: Dictation

Teachers are thanked for preparing their candidates very carefully for this Paper. Work was almost without exception extremely well presented. Handwriting was legible and candidates had gone to much trouble to do their best and to be a credit to their teachers.

There was a wide range of difficulty in the dictation. Any candidate correctly entered for the examination should have been able to access the following phrases: *Mes parents; que je me; j'avais; de la musique; de la famille; mes copains; un soir; ma mère ; j'avais aussi; beaucoup; je voulais; qui a une; très belle; et maintenant* as well as at least two other phrases.

At the other end of the range, candidates who successfully dealt with *je manquais; par hazard; découverts; voix; carrier musicale* are to be congratulated.

Candidates in the middle ranges had difficulties with the following:

- verbs: plural and imperfect not always recognised - *ils voulaient; je manquais.*
- nouns : spelling of near cognates - *musiciens; profession; artiste; orchestre; parisien; théâtre; par exemple.*
- agreements: common errors were - *leurs profession; une seul / une seulle; le plus âgée ; rebel; parisienne ; mes coupains / mes coupines ; d'autre rêve ; je me suis mariée ; une important.*
- un/en confusion : *un secret ; en orchestre de jazz ; en soir*
- accents - there was not one candidate who did not lose both minor error points

The examiners were surprised at the low level of success in the following phrases: *trop de* (*tros de* was common); *les cours; de mon lycée; j'ai commence* (*je commençais* was common) *de la chanson* and yet the rather difficult expressions *que je me; pour aller; répéter avec; avec ma femme* were very frequently correctly transcribed.

Paper 2: Listening and Reading

GENERAL COMMENTS

Candidates responded well to the layout of the paper and generally took the trouble to think carefully about the two points per question which they had to find. There were very few instances of blank answers. Even the very weakest candidates managed to glean a few marks over the two tests.

English spelling and punctuation are generally not taken into account unless the incorrect English alters or obscures the meaning of the candidates' answers.

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Candidates correctly entered for the examination should have written the following answers correctly:

- (a) *published*
- (d) *aunt(y)*
- (f) *every day*
- (j) *accept(ed)*
- (m) *her parents*
- (n) *in Italian*

as well as two other correct answers.

There were items which were aimed at the more able candidates:

- (a) *novel*
- (e) *abroad / in another country*
- (i) as this was a listening test, it was considered that *books (ses livres)* constituted a high level task
- (k) *publicity / advertising / hoardings / posters*
- (l) *labels / cooking instructions / ingredients list*
- (n) *after she had read*

There were many mistakes made by average and above average candidates which should not have been made:

- (a) the significant event was the publication of Christine's *first novel*
- (b) no candidate correctly entered for the examination should have written *journey* for *travallaient*
- (d) swathes of candidates confused "months" for "weeks", and in some cases wrote "years"
The spelling of *aunt / aunty* frequently left much to be desired
- (f) many quite good candidates did not spot that it was *young people* who responded to Christine's blog
- (l) whilst it is understandable that many candidates would have incorrectly used *sardine boxes* instead of *sardine tins* it was disappointing to note how many candidates wrote *sardins* or even *salmon*.

- (n) it is surprising that so many young candidates, who are probably frequently accused by their parents of “not listening”, turned the tables in this answer and incorrectly accused Christine’s parents of *not listening to her*.

On the whole, candidates found the listening comprehension test as easy or as difficult as they found the reading comprehension test.

READING COMPREHENSION TEST

One of the main difficulties faced by candidates in this test was that of expressing themselves clearly. This was not because their English was not adequate. Indeed, many candidates wrote excellent English. Their weakness lay in their inability to distinguish between “him” when referring to the hamster and “him” when referring to the hamster’s master:

- (f) *when he heard* ✓ *him coming* ✗
(g) *he ate / he liked to eat* ✓ *his shoes and his jeans / everything he owned* ✗
(h) *his / her uncle* ✗
(j) *in the pocket* ✓ *of his / her jumper* ✗

The one use of an unrelated pronoun that was accepted was:

- (n) *in a forest* ✓ *near his / her house*.

It was considered that the house could have been the hamster’s given that the narrator’s house was the hamster’s home.

The examiners’ favourite answer was:

- (i) *he rested* ✓ *and washed his knees* ✗

Candidates’ inability to interpret punctuation may have been the reason why so many candidates answered (c) with a reference to *ces petites bêtes sont ... attachantes et intelligentes*. It is clear from the way the original text is punctuated that the hamster is comparable to a cat for the reason given after the colon within the sentence and not the comment found in the previous sentence.

Weaker candidates should have had as accurate answers:

- (a) *two years + near Marseille*
(j) *in a pocket*
(m) *an evening + in / of July*
(n) *in a / the forest + near his / the writer’s house*

as well as two other correct answers.

The most challenging questions were:

- (f) the distinction between *saw* and *heard*
(k) *mordu* was not widely known
(l) it was not expected that weaker candidates would know *grimper*
(o) the question was difficult both lexically (*doux / fidèle*) and because candidates had to distinguish between what was the advantage to the writer of the children having a hamster and what was the advantage to the children themselves.

The standard of work on this paper was high.

Paper 3: Reading and Writing

QUESTION 1: TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

The French text presented many problems for the weaker candidates:

- vocabulary - *cambricoleurs; serrure; pièce, d'abord; espace vide, parmi ; surveillance* were generally not known ;
- tenses - the passé simple was not known by the very weakest candidates, although most candidates who had thought about the theme of the text were able to deduce a past tense. The pluperfect was known and well used in many cases;
- omitted words - *ne ... plus; plus près ; non* were frequently omitted.

The majority of candidates fared well up to *Le policier la suivit*. From this point on, until *Qui est venu* it was clear that many candidates had failed to follow the story and were, therefore, unable to translate the French correctly. The text was, however, divided in such a way as to give even the weakest candidates a chance to achieve some marks:

à la maison et frappa; une jeune femme; bonjour madame; la personne qui; je suis sûre que; pendant la nuit; qui est venu; j'habite seule should have been accessible.

QUESTION 2A: GUIDED ESSAY

This essay was chosen by only a small minority of candidates. On the whole the essays were not of a high standard. Common faults were:

- over-long essays which did not gain adequate marks for Communication as the last element of the scenario fell outside the 150 word mark;
- inability to understand the English scenario (summer holidays, spending time in a hotel etc were inappropriate);
- inability to use tenses accurately - many candidates put themselves into a position of needing to use the pluperfect which they had not mastered in active use.

QUESTION 2B: TRANSLATION INTO FRENCH

Marks for this element of the paper ranged from 1 to 79. There was much that a weak but careful candidate could have translated accurately. The examiners were concerned to note how frequently they saw the following: *en Toulon; deux ... homme; verres (for tasses); sa grand'mère; une heure et demie (for une demi-heure); à son ami; c'était cinq heures; j'ai fatigué; un question difficile;* (and from many otherwise excellent candidates) *quelle âge*.

Generally, vocabulary was not too challenging. Candidates' biggest difficulties lay in verb usage: *buvaient* often not known; inversion after speech not known; interrogative forms not known; future (*tu seras*) not known; *tu n'a pas* was a common error; the incorrect *il n'a pas su* was as common as the correct *il ne savait pas*.

QUESTION 3

It is quite possible for the very best candidates to achieve full marks for Questions 3a / 3b. Many did. Weaker candidates have a chance to choose their own words and, with care, should achieve (pro rata) their best mark of the paper on Question 3. Weaker candidates should be encouraged to write simply and to ensure that they do not exceed the word limit.

QUESTION 3A: FREE ESSAY

This essay was not as popular a choice as the Picture essay, but nevertheless a sizeable number of candidates attempted it and managed to tell a coherent story. Whilst some candidates wrote essays which were unimaginative and which petered out at the end with a feeble response from the teacher, other candidates responded well to the theme which evidently struck a chord with them: their essays were lively and at times amusing. The biggest failing of such candidates was that they exceeded the word count and could not be fully rewarded for Communication if, for example, the teacher's reaction was described after the 130 word limit.

QUESTION 3B: PICTURE ESSAY

Candidates did well describing the presentation of the bicycle to the young person. However, some candidates spent so long on this part of the story that they could not do full justice to the rest of the story within the word count.

The major difficulty which candidates experienced was finding the words to describe the boy once he was on his bicycle: *il a fait un tour; il est monté sur; il roulait en vélo; il a pris son vélo pour faire une promenade; il se promenait en velo* were beyond many average candidates.

Although candidates did not need to refer to the fact that the neighbour was putting out his rubbish, many did themselves a serious disservice by saying: *il a mis le garbage dans la poubelle*. Candidates should be advised to avoid at all costs the use of English words and phrases.

Prepositions caused considerable difficulty with many candidates: *il est sorti sa maison ; tomber de la rue; courir avant le vélo; téléphoner le SAMU ; courir devant le chien*.

Statistics

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Marks	61	49	37	33	27

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