

Examiners' Report Summer 2009

GCE

GCE Japanese (8JA01)

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AS Unit (1 6JA01) Understanding and Written Response

Passage A turned out to be a challenging start to the examination paper. Informal feedback from centres suggested that candidates were unfamiliar with the topic, and found some of the vocabulary challenging. The passage was discussing a computer simulation game which takes place in an imaginary world, if candidates failed to pick up the idea that this was a computer simulation game, they got totally lost on the weirdness of the imaginary world.

Question 2 required candidates to write the pronunciation of kanji. Most candidates knew ど and the せい of せいさん. 説明 seemed to be either known as a compound or not known at all. Candidates need to be very accurate in the way they transcribe the hiragana, as どう was a common mistake for (a). Similarly, several candidates lost marks because they wrote きん or ざん instead of さん in (c).

Question 3 was a new question type, but it was pleasing that candidates seemed to be aware of what they needed to do. (e) seemed to be the easiest, with most candidates making some kind of attempt. (d) was the hardest, whether this was because the word かんたんな was not known, or whether it was lack of the vocabulary item はんたい cannot be discriminated from student responses.

Again most candidates tackled question 4, which was pleasing. (b) and (c) were the easiest, with many candidates correctly able to insert 名前 and the number 6. (d) was the hardest, some candidates identified that they needed a 'te' form to go in this gap, but chose the distractor やめて. There was a general tendency for candidates to put 試合 in to any gap where they did not know the answer - presumably they thought it looked impressive in difficult kanji and therefore reasoned that it must feature somewhere.

The candidates' performance on section 5 was very pleasing. The vast majority of candidates attempted at least some of these questions. They need to work on identifying key question words (だれ、どこ、どんな) etc. so that they are clear about what they are being asked. Native speaker candidates need to be reminded to write in full sentences. In this section, questions (a), (e) and (h) proved to be the easiest. In questions (f) and (g) there was a lot of confusion between the 大学の先生の授業 and the 科学未来館; with many candidates failing to understand that these were two separate initiatives that the specialist science high school had introduced.

Candidates are reminded that these questions are marked not only for content but also for quality of language; purely copying out the relevant section from the text is not going to score well for the quality of language.

It was again pleasing that even the weakest candidates attempted something on the translation. Candidates' reading of katakana, and the transcription of "discovery" into English caused a lot of problems. However, most candidates understood the key point that Mr. Hoshide was going to space in an American space shuttle and were given credit for this. The second sentence was much harder; with many candidates falling down either on understanding the time frame of events (ie that the plan had been decided in March) or guessing from the kanji 歩 (often confused by candidates with the kanji 走) and thus offering translations such as "he is walking (or jogging) every day in preparation).

The first sentence of the second paragraph was again easy and most candidates got the gist of this, although the quality of English they produced was more variable. Most candidates were able to understand the "Kennedy Space Centre" in the next section, but many were unable to understand 連れていってもらおう and thus said things like he was training at the Kennedy Space centre. The grammar of the next sentence was within the candidates' understanding, but "Star Trek" produced an amazing variety of mis-spellings.

There were two main problems with the third paragraph (1), candidates failed to grasp the conditional tense といいますね. Thus there were many wrong translations in the past tense etc. (2) The use of the kanji 月 now meaning moon (and not month as it had done earlier in the passage) confused a lot of candidates.

The vast majority of the candidates knew がんばって and were able to produce a suitable concluding sentence to the translation - a wide variety of translations were allowed, provided the remark was directly addressed to Mr. Hoshide.

In section C, the continuous writing, most candidates wrote an essay of the required length, and made an attempt to use the A/S grammar structures they had learnt. One notable problem was that candidates would put in a sentence with correct A/S grammar, which was not related to the rest of the passage and appeared quite random. If this was a strong feature of their writing, a maximum mark of 11 was awarded, as it could not be described as "good communication" as per the marking criterion. Weaker candidates are encouraged to use a smaller range of grammatical structures accurately and appropriately, rather than scattering their essay with half correct A/S grammatical structures which impede communication due to the number of errors.

On the content, quite a few candidates misread 有名 as 名前, and thus did not address the first bullet point. Similarly the word 環境 and / or the word 活動 seemed to be unknown to many candidates, and therefore they were unable to address the third bullet point adequately. This meant that they lost a lot of marks on the content. Many candidates wrote an essay purely about "My town and what you can do there", and this did not score more than 10 out of 28 marks as the task had not been fully grasped. Candidates are strongly urged to spend a good amount of time making sure they really understand the bullet points and what is being asked of them before attempting to write the essay.

On the whole candidates would benefit from addressing the bullet points directly, and then working on expanding them and making the content of what they say more interesting. For example, having said that there is a cinema, library and restaurant in their town, there is little point in adding a second sentence saying that there is also a sports ground and park. They would gain more marks by saying the cinema is particularly known for showing Asian films, and they enjoyed a Japanese film there last weekend etc.

Candidates are encouraged to use genko yoshi correctly (many candidates are putting commas and full stops at the top of lines, or writing little characters in the centre of the boxes) and to also write in paragraphs.

Statistics

Unit 1 6JA01/01 Understanding and Written Response in Japanese

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	90	56	46	37	28	19
Uniform boundary mark	100	80	70	60	50	40

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