



Examiner's Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Russian (9RU0)
Paper 2: Written response to works and
translation

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GCE Russian 9RU0/02 Examiners Report – Summer 2025 (2506)

Paper Introduction

Purpose of the Paper

This paper is designed to test candidates' ability to write accurately in Russian, structure their responses and demonstrate their knowledge of the target-language culture and / or society through the study and critical and analytical response to two literary texts or a literary text and a film.

This was the seventh year of the current A Level specification. As has been the case in recent years, an increasing number of candidates had been well prepared for this paper this year. They had clearly been taught with reference to the specification, sample materials and previous examiners' reports, and had studied their chosen texts or films in detail. Pleasingly for the examining team there were examples of both heritage / native speaker candidates and learner candidates whose lessons had clearly focused on how to translate accurately from English and how to write a structured essay which makes critical and analytical points about the chosen works, following advice in previous reports.

As in previous years, there were also some examples of candidates who had clearly not been prepared at all. Often, they simply retold the story of their chosen work or were not able to offer any coherent essay with a critical or analytical response.

Centres must be reminded that it is not possible for a candidate to be entered for this examination without having studied two of the texts from the specification in detail. Simply having read the texts or seen the films is not enough for candidates to perform well. Candidates need to be able to offer a critical and analytical response to characters, themes and technical devices used.

Structure of the Examination

The paper requires candidates to complete a translation into Russian and then write two essays. Their essays must either be on two literary texts or on one literary text and one film. The two texts or text and film offered for examination must be from the list set out on page 51 of the specification.

The translation (section A) is worth 20 of the available 120 marks, and the two essays (section B for texts and section C for films) are worth the remaining 100 marks, with 50 marks for each essay. The essay marks consist of 20 marks for Critical and Analytical Response (AO4), 20 marks for Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary (AO3) and 10 marks for Accuracy (AO3).

The time allowed for the examination is two hours and 40 minutes. An appropriate division of time would be for candidates to spend about 30 minutes on the translation and about an hour on each of the essays, including spending time planning their response carefully.

Section A: Translation

Section A of this paper required candidates to translate a short passage of English into Russian. The passage will always be based on one of the sub-themes from Theme 1, 2, 3 or 4 from pages 8-9 of the specification. This year's passage was based on Theme 2 (*Political and Artistic Culture in the Russian-speaking World*).

The translation is split into 20 'assessable elements' (see the markscheme) and one mark is awarded for each correct element. For an element to be considered correct, it must have all the details contained in the English original (i.e. no word omitted) and the grammatical endings must all be completely correct (including noun, verb and adjective endings). Spelling errors are tolerated, provided they are not part of the grammatical ending.

Overall, the majority of candidates performed well in this task. As they had studied the topic of the translation, they knew the relevant vocabulary and were able to deploy their knowledge of grammar. Many learner candidates were able to score at least 12-15 marks out of 20, with some scoring 19-20. Some native speaker candidates lost marks due to omission of parts of elements.

Those with little ability to manipulate the grammar of the language scored very low marks in this task, even when they knew every word of the required vocabulary. Some candidates scored only 1 or 2 marks for this reason, although they had translated every word of the English.

Candidates faced the most difficulty with the following elements:

- 'Since 2008 in Russia' was usually correctly translated. Where there were errors, they were usually in the ending of 'в России' or where candidates used the wrong word for 'since'.
- 'all pupils must' was well translated, with a range of options accepted for 'pupils' and 'must'. 'должны' was used most commonly, with candidates usually recognising the ending that was required. Where candidates used 'надо' they did often make the mistake of not putting 'ученики' into the dative case.
- 'take the Unified State Examination' presented many problems for both learner and non-learner candidates. Some knew the abbreviation 'ЕГЭ' (which was accepted) but did not know what it stood for, attempting 'Единственный государственный экзамен', which was not accepted. Others misread the English as 'United States Examination' and tried something like 'Соединённые штаты экзамен'. Given that the topic is within the themes for A Level, examiners expect more candidates to know what the abbreviation stood for. 'Take' in this context also proved difficult, with many candidates losing a mark for using 'сдать' here, and others trying things like 'взять' and again losing out.
- 'at the end of their secondary education' was generally successfully translated, with 'at the end' often translated as 'в конце' or 'по окончании'. The inclusion of a word for 'their' was not necessary to gain the mark, and as many native speakers are using 'их' in this construction, this was accepted. 'Secondary' did present problems for some candidates, with 'второй' a reasonably common attempt which was not accepted. It was pleasing to see the correct soft adjective ending being used often in 'среднего'.

- 'Russian language and mathematics' was translated correctly by nearly all candidates. Where it was wrong, it was most often because candidates tried to use 'математики' as a plural form.
- Quite frequently candidates struggled with 'are compulsory but other subjects are optional', with the words for 'compulsory' and 'optional' presenting some issues, as well as the endings needed. Both 'обязательны' and 'обязательные' were accepted, as well as their negative forms for 'optional'. 'По выбору' was known by many, and used well. Some candidates tried to use 'являются' but did not get the correct instrumental endings after it, and so lost their mark here.
- The element 'including sciences and foreign languages' was nearly always correctly translated. Where candidates lost marks here it was because they did not know the word for 'including' (a range of possible options was accepted), or they tried to put something like 'химия' instead of 'науки'.
- 'Young people have to pass the exam' was well translated, with many candidates knowing that 'сдать' is the correct verb form to use here. Other options, such as 'пройти' were also accepted. 'Must' presented some of the same difficulties as in element two, with dative case endings sometimes missing when 'надо' was used.
- 'to enrol at university' was well translated, with the correct verb 'поступить' well known by both learner and non-learner candidates. The omission of 'чтобы' was perhaps less common than in previously, which was pleasing.
- The last element of the first paragraph, 'and it can be a difficult experience' was generally well translated, with many candidates knowing that they needed the instrumental case after 'может быть'. Often candidates lost marks because they did not use a word that was close enough in meaning to 'experience'. A range of options was accepted for 'difficult'.
- 'Although this exam is considered' was usually translated correctly, with candidates only generally losing marks where they did not use an appropriate word for 'although' or where they had an incorrect ending on 'считается'.
- 'to be less open to corruption' proved more difficult than some of the other elements, with 'less' often incorrectly translated. Candidates sometimes struggled with the ending needed on 'коррупция' after the preposition they had used.
- 'than the old system' was correctly translated by nearly all candidates, with only occasional errors caused by candidates thinking that they needed a genitive case ending after 'чем'.
- The main reason that candidates lost marks in the element 'some universities have again begun' is because they omitted a word for 'again'. Occasionally there were ending errors on 'некоторые' or 'начали'.
- 'to introduce independent entrance exams' caused some issues for some candidates, with the word for 'introduce' often misremembered. 'Independent' was sometimes

translated as ‘самостоятельный’ which was considered incorrect in this context. ‘Entrance exams’ proved complex for both learner and non-learner candidates.

- ‘The government now wants’ was translated correctly by most candidates, with errors only occurring occasionally with the correct form of ‘хотеть’.
- ‘experts to create’ was generally well translated, which was pleasing for examiners. Candidates usually recognised that they needed a subjunctive form with ‘чтобы’, and were able to form this correctly. Where they did not, they lost marks for writing something like ‘эксперты создать’.
- The element ‘a new system of exams’ was frequently correctly translated, with the correct accusative case endings being used.
- ‘that combines traditional Soviet methods’ occasionally presented issues for candidates who did not know the word for ‘combine’. A range of possibilities was considered correct.
- ‘with more modern ideas’ was often correctly translated, with candidates only generally losing marks where they used ‘больше’ instead of ‘более’. It was pleasing to see correct case endings more often than not on ‘современными идеями’.

Overall, examiners would advise candidates to go through the translation carefully and annotate it with the case endings or particularly difficult structures you are going to use. Candidates are also advised to examine the required grammar appendix in the specification and ensure they know the most difficult structures. It is likely that the translation will test the range of the grammar in this appendix.

Section B and C: Written Response to Works or Films

In section B or C candidates were required to write an essay on two of the texts or one text and one film that they have studied. They have to present a critical and analytical response to access the highest mark bands.

Critical and Analytical Response (AO4)

A critical and analytical response is defined in the specification as selecting relevant material from the works, presenting and justifying points of view, developing arguments, drawing conclusions based on understanding, and evaluating issues, themes and cultural and social contexts related to the works studied. In order to access the highest mark bands (9-12, 13-16 and 17-20) for ‘Critical and Analytical Response’ (AO4), essays must partly or wholly address this requirement for a critical and analytical response.

Accordingly, essays that simply re-presented the story from the text or film scored very low marks, usually in the 5-8 mark band unless there are some elements of critical or analytical response, where they may be placed on the 9-12 mark band. A critical and analytical response always involves the candidate using the essay to make points about the question being asked and using evidence to back up these points. Many non-taught candidates did not reach the top half of the 13-16 mark band because they had not considered how to structure their essay coherently, or planned its content before starting.

Essays that scored the highest marks (17-20) in the 'Critical and Analytical Response' (AO4) mark grid were relevant, succinct, carefully planned and focused on giving a critical response throughout. Examples (usually in the form of targeted quotations or short descriptions of events or actions) were used consistently to back up the points being made, and the points were linked to an overall argument. The structure was fully coherent and the examiner could follow the sophisticated points being made throughout. In most cases, every paragraph took a 'point-evidence-explain-link' approach, with links being made to the wider thread of the essay and leading to the overall conclusion. There was no retelling of the story or lack of focus on the specific question being asked. There was invariably a very detailed knowledge of the text amongst those candidates scoring the highest marks for AO4.

Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary (AO3)

Essays that scored the highest marks (17-20) in the 'Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary' (AO3) mark grid had a range of complex structures, such as passives, conditionals, relative pronouns in cases other than the nominative, extended sentences to express abstract ideas (e.g. sentences requiring conjunctions and pronouns), synonyms for more common vocabulary, correct use of verbal aspects, correct use of verbs of motion, use of the subjunctive with verbs of commanding, etc.

The highest scoring essays also contained regular use of terminology and structures appropriate for literary and cinematic analysis, with a good command of specialist vocabulary such as 'director', 'character', 'plot', and also frequent structures allowing for appropriate critical and analytical response (such as 'the reader can see that...', 'from this it can be concluded that...' or 'this quotation shows that...'). Learner candidates often scored in the 13-16 band due to their ability to use essay phrases and specialist literary vocabulary. Weaker non-learner candidates often scored in the 13-16 mark band because the register of their essay was not appropriate, even though their language was completely accurate and they made relevant points. Addition of literary terms and more formal essay structures would have enabled these candidates to access the 17-20 mark band for 'Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary'.

'Accuracy of Language' (AO3)

For 'Accuracy of Language' (AO3), most native speaker candidates scored 10. To score the highest marks, writing does not have to be error free, but the general impression does have to be of accurate language with errors likely to be in more unusual or irregular forms. Learner candidates whose communication was clear and where the reader can always understand what is being said, even if not entirely accurate, can score in the 7-8 band. For the highest band, 9-10, learner candidates had to demonstrate that they were able to apply their knowledge of case and verb endings consistently, with errors not occurring from a lack of understanding but instead from lack of knowledge of a more complex situations or from how to apply their understanding in a particular context. The overall impression is of a candidate who has been taught their grammar and knows it well.

Popularity of Questions

Around 67% of candidates answered on one text and one film, and the remaining 33% answered on two texts.

Around 68% of the candidates chose *Пиковая дама* as their literary text, including the majority of learner candidates entered for the examination. This is around the same as last year, with those centres not selecting *Пиковая дама* usually studying *Ревизор* instead, with 27% choosing this. *Вишнёвый сад* seems have become more popular again, rising to 16% of candidates choosing it as one of their works.

About 24% of candidates chose *Утомлённые солнцем* as their other work, this falling further from last year. *Кавказский пленник* and *Левша* have increased in popularity, being studied by 16% and 18% of candidates respectively.

The works are given below in order of popularity:

Пиковая дама

Ревизор

Утомлённые солнцем

Левша

Кавказский пленник

Вишнёвый сад

Неделя как неделя

Крылья

Сонечка

Один день Ивана Денисовича

There are individual comments set out below on the different texts and films.

Question 2(a) - *Пиковая дама* (Pushkin)

There were many successful answers to question 2(a), but it is true to say that it was significantly less popular than 2(b), with nearly three times as many candidates choosing to answer the question on the portrayal of the theme of madness instead. For this question, candidates were required to examine the extent to which Pushkin's portrayal of the Countess can be considered successful. The best essays consisted of a response which had a clear structure, with several separate paragraphs which looked at various aspects of the Countess's character, and how successfully Pushkin portrays them, and summing up with a clear conclusion.

Candidates often began by mentioning the Countess's past, using evidence from the passages where she is described, showing a clear understanding of her character. They often mentioned that she is living in the past, referenced where she learnt the secret of the three cards, how she lost money gambling, and explained what this tells us about her character. Candidates were

able to set out quotations which showed the Countess's personality, demonstrating that we learn this through the descriptions of the ways in which she treats Lizaveta. This, her refusal to reveal the secret, and her death of fright when Germann threatens her, were often used as evidence of a successful portrayal by Pushkin of a cantankerous old woman. Where candidates were even more successful, they structured their answers around the character traits of the Countess, rather than telling her story from start to finish, and referred back to the question as they did so, and drew conclusions that she serves as a symbolic representation of a declining aristocracy. The most sophisticated answers were able to discuss Pushkin's use of a range of literary devices, such as third person narratives, to give us a picture of a complex character who is full of contradictions, whilst supporting all their points with specific and targeted evidence from the text. Less successful essays, as always, did not use quotations, or retold the story from start to finish, with no critical or analytical approach at all.

Candidates are reminded to learn a range of quotations which tell the reader things about each of the main characters and themes of Pushkin's work. These, accompanied with appropriate essay phrases which demonstrate a range of more complex grammatical structures, will always support candidates to score higher marks.

Question 2(b) - *Пиковая дама* (Pushkin)

This was the most popular question on this year's exam paper, with a large number of both learner and non-learner candidates attempting it. Candidates were required to consider which scenes within Pushkin's story best help us to understand the theme of madness. Many answers were well constructed, with specific scenes selected and analysed using quotations from the text, but too frequently candidates simply told the story of Germann's descent into madness without ever mentioning how the writer successfully helps us to understand the theme. Such essays scored very low marks as they did not take a critical or analytical approach.

The strongest candidates planned their essays carefully, considering the specific language used in the question about how Pushkin helps us to understand the theme. They often began by talking about the signs of obsession, as a precursor to madness, that we see in the scene where Germann watches the others play cards, studying their every move. They moved on to the point when we see Germann's obsession deepen as he plots to use Lizaveta to learn the secret, abandoning those character traits which previously defined him. These candidates were able to talk about Germann's character changing and descending, referencing specific language used by the writer which helps us to see this happening. Very frequently, candidates cited Germann's dream, the scenes at the gambling table where the Queen of Spades winks at him, and his eventual incarceration as key points in the narrative that help us to understand the theme, with the best essays drawing a thread between these, and creating connections which help us to understand the descent into madness. The very best candidates were able to connect the idea of Germann's madness to other scenes and characters more precisely, for example drawing contrasts with Lizaveta's actions and explaining how this helps us to understand what happens to Germann, using evidence from the text with skill and control. They were often also able to demonstrate an awareness of literary techniques and how they are used, as well as recognising that others in the story also show signs of madness. While lots of candidates were able to give key quotations from the story, not all were able to label the techniques Pushkin uses or to analyse the significance of these quotations, and this lost weaker candidates marks.

Where quotations were used most successfully, they were incorporated into the text of the essay, with the very best candidates able to select targeted evidence and use a wider range of

grammatical structures and vocabulary. Candidates are advised to make sure that they always construct essays in paragraphs, use clear evidence for their points, and use phrases like 'this shows us that' or 'from this we can see that' to help them take an analytical approach.

Question 3(a) - *Ревизор* (Gogol)

This question, which required candidates to explain the extent to which Gogol' successfully uses comedy to help us understand the main themes in his play, was significantly more popular than 3(b). Candidates tended to argue that comedy (or more specifically, satire and farce) was a device used successfully by Gogol', and that the satirical and farcical elements of the help us to understand the corruption in the town. Many, but not all, answers were well constructed, arranged with appropriate paragraphing and clear points, and making reference to the detail of the text.

The best candidates were able to construct an argument which more specifically demonstrated how Gogol' uses a range of comic devices to draw attention to the low morals of the characters, for example the relevance of their names to their character, their obvious stupidity, or the fact that they treat each other so badly. They were able to explain how Gogol' creates humour in the play, and then leads us to the scene of the Mayor's final address to the audience ("who are you laughing at?") and the 'dumb scene', commenting on his despair and accusations directed towards the audience themselves. Some weaker candidates were not able to connect the dots in the play, and simply relayed the funnier scenes, describing what happens in each of them. Often, candidates did not conclude with a reference back to the question, which meant that they lost marks for Critical and Analytical Response.

Examiners would remind candidates that their essays should have a clear introduction and conclusion, and that concluded comments are most effective where they are based on the analysis in the essay, and come to a clear view which uses the specific words from the original question. Such work is a feature of essays in the highest mark band for Critical and Analytical Response.

Question 3(b) - *Ревизор* (Gogol)

There were many successful answers to question 3(b), which required candidates to examine the extent to which Gogol' portrays women negatively in his play. The fact that this question was less popular than 3(a) is perhaps because candidates felt that there was less to discuss, due to the limited number of female characters in the play.

Many candidates were able to use quite sophisticated language to discuss the detailed of Gogol''s portrayal of the Mayor's wife and daughter. They were able to talk about the specific scenes which include them, how they are invariably shown to be coquettish, rude, and stupid, and concluded that Gogol''s portrayal is indeed negative. Stronger candidates were subtler in their approach, understanding that the characters could be considered tropes that are designed to show us something about the audience's attitudes to women rather than a comment on the women themselves. The best candidates were able to use literary language to explain these concepts, making sophisticated conclusions about Gogol''s intentions as a master of the grotesque. The weakest essays tended simply to talk about the two main female characters, sometimes imprecisely, and not use any quotations or draw any thread of argument.

Candidates should ensure that they have prepared in-depth character studies of the main and perhaps less central characters in the works they have studied. They should be able to analyse the role of each character, and how they might be perceived by the audience or reader. Character studies often form the spine of questions for this paper.

Question 4(a) - *Вишнёвый сад* (Chekhov)

This question, which required candidates to examine the extent to which Chekhov successfully uses the symbol of the cherry orchard in his play, was the more popular of the two options. Candidates often knew the play very well, and were able to cite specific evidence to make a well-reasoned argument.

The best candidates wrote carefully structured responses which set out how the cherry orchard is symbolic for a range of different characters in different ways; for Ranevskaya and the family as a symbol of the family's previous status, for Lopakhin as a symbol of his family's serfdom on the estate, and for other characters as a symbol of how Russia has already changed, or needs to change further. Good candidates often argued that the argument that the cherry orchard itself is almost like an unseen character in the play, imbued with meaning caused by its different 'relationship' to each of the other characters. Where quotations were used effectively, they were carefully selected to show the candidate's command of the material. Weaker candidates tended to simply describe what the cherry orchard means to each of the characters, without constructing an overall thread of argument, or without reference to the social and cultural which is key to understanding the meaning of Chekhov's symbolism.

Centres and candidates are reminded that for all of the works on the specification, a sound knowledge of social and cultural contexts behind the works is necessary to effectively respond to most potential essay questions.

Question 4(b) - *Вишнёвый сад* (Chekhov)

This question on Chekhov's play was less popular than 4(a). It required candidates to consider which scenes best help us to understand the character of Ranevskaya. As is often the case where candidates are asked to consider which scenes best help us to understand an aspect of a text, candidates were most successful when they were able to be precise about which scenes they were discussing.

The best essays in answer to this question considered what we know about Ranevskaya both from scenes where the other characters mention her, and also from scenes where she herself reveals key aspects of her character. Many mentioned her arrival at the beginning of the play as the point at which we learn about her tendency to dwell on the past, when she mentions her dead son and the role of the cherry orchard in her family's past. Often, candidates cited the scenes with Lopakhin as important, saying that they show Ranevskaya to be volatile and failing to recognise the seriousness of her estate's financial position. The scenes where the cherry orchard is sold was often mentioned, alongside the departure scene as the point when our view that Ranevskaya's is unable to change or adapt is cemented. Weaker candidates tended not to see the contradictions and complications in her character, or simply retold her story without analysis, without a proper conclusion making reference to the question.

Examiners would remind candidates that their essays should have a clear introduction and conclusion, and that concluded comments are most effective where they are based on the analysis in the essay, and come to a clear view which uses the specific words from the original question. Such work is a feature of essays in the highest mark band for Critical and Analytical Response.

Question 5(a) - *Один день Ивана Денисовича* (Solzhenitsyn)

This question, which was significantly less popular than 5(b), was answered by very few candidates. Candidates were asked to discuss the extent to which the theme of ‘hope’ is the most important theme in the novella. The strongest candidates were able to explain how the writer gives us a sense of hope through the idea of very small victories (such as a small amount of extra food), and hopelessness through the use of the diary structure which represents just one day of thousands. As is often the case in successful essays, candidates considered other themes which could be important, and made a clear statement about their thoughts in a conclusion. Less successful essays tended to be too general, and not focus on evidence from the text which helps us to understand the theme.

Question 5(b) - *Один день Ивана Денисовича* (Solzhenitsyn)

This question, which was the more popular of the two on Solzhenitsyn’s novella, required candidates to consider how the writer uses the character of Shukhov to portray the difficulties of everyday life in the Gulag. Those answers that were most successful took an approach which focused on several of the difficulties, and gave evidence as to how we see them through Shukhov’s character, such as the struggle for food, the struggle against the cold, the need to protect oneself from the guards and other prisoners, the requirement to meet work targets or face punishment, and the lack of privacy. Less successful essays retold the story from start to finish, mentioning the difficulties along the way, but not taking an analytical approach.

Question 6(a) - *Неделя как неделя* (Baranskaya)

Baranskaya’s novella once again attracted a range of answers, from some very strong, to some weaker. This question, which required candidates to consider which scenes help us to understand the idea of Ol’ga as a symbol of a ‘real Soviet woman’, was by far the most popular of the two options. Very many candidates had a clear knowledge of the text, and were able to mention specific scenes with evidence in the form of quotations, often mentioning scenes with Dima and the children which illustrate the ‘double burden’, scenes at the institute which show Ol’ga’s ambition for success, and scenes where Ol’ga’s struggles with shopping and transport. Weaker candidates tended not to recognise the tension between Ol’ga and her colleagues in the competition to be a ‘real Soviet woman’, or missed some of the subtleties of Baranskaya’s points about the struggles that women, who on the face of things were equal to men, faced in the Soviet Union in the 1960s.

Question 6(b) - *Неделя как неделя* (Baranskaya)

This question, the least popular of the two options on Baranskaya, required candidates to consider whether the theme of the raising of children in the 1960s is the most important theme in the novella. Where candidates were successful, they were able to make reference to what we learn in the text about infrastructure for childcare, about abortion as form of birth control, about the state’s concern about the birthrate, and about the differing expectations of men and women

when it comes to raising children. The strongest candidates considered this theme alongside others (often mentioning that the themes are interrelated) and came to a clear conclusion. Weaker essays did not show an understanding of some of the key points in the text relating to childcare, or lacked the social and cultural knowledge of the Soviet Union.

Question 7(a) – *Сонечка* (Ulitskaya)

There were once again very few answers on Ulitskaya's novella. This question, on whether the writer successfully depicts the importance of family life in the story, was the more popular of the two options. The best essays were able to isolate aspects of the idea of family (such as stability, trust, emotional support, morality, financial stability) and then consider how these concepts are portrayed in the text. Sonechka's own personal sacrifices to keep the family together were often mentioned, and candidates frequently concluded that family is an important theme. Weaker essays tended to tell Sonechka's family's story, rather than treat the task as a discussion of a theme.

Question 7(b) – *Сонечка* (Ulitskaya)

This question, on whether Sonechka's ideas and thoughts change throughout the novella, was less popular than 7(a). There tended to be more weaker essays than in some of the other questions, perhaps because candidates tended to go for a chronological approach which seemed to increase the likelihood of them retelling the story rather than discussing what we learn about the character. Stronger answers always considered Sonechka's life as a child and her employment in the library, and the impact key moment when she meets Robert Viktorovich. Often, candidates concluded that there is a cyclical nature to Sonechka's ideas and thoughts, which leads her back to her books when her family responsibilities have ended.

Question 8(a) – *Крылья* (Shepit'ko)

Shepit'ko's film was again studied by a very small number of candidates this year. This first question, the least popular of the two, required them to what extent the theme of the attitude of the Soviet people to the Great Patriotic War is the most important theme in the film. Candidates were usually able to discuss the theme through the lens of Nadezhda Stepanovna's sense of duty and nostalgia for her glory days, alongside the dismissive attitude of her daughter Tania and her friends. The best essays were able to show an understanding of the social and cultural background to the film, relating it to wider changing attitudes in society under Khrushchev. Weaker examples tended to simply talk about the main character, but not draw the necessary comparisons, or did not come to a clear conclusion about the importance of the theme.

Question 8(b) – *Крылья* (Shepit'ko)

This question on whether Tania can be considered a significant character in the film was well answered by many candidates. They were able to consider how the character is used to draw a contrast to Nadezhda Stepanovna on a range of issues, such as attitudes to duty, to the past, and to marriage. Candidates often mentioned that although Tania herself does not feature often in the film, her character is mentioned by Nadezhda Stepanovna more frequently. The most common conclusion was that Tania is indeed a significant character, although weaker essays tended not to give clear evidence for this, but rather simply say what Tania does in the film.

Question 9(a) - *Утомлённые солнцем* (Mikhalkov)

Both questions on Mikhalkov's film attracted roughly the same number of answers this year. This essay question, requiring candidates to analyse the extent to which the relationship between Kotov and Mitia might be the most important relationship in the film, was well answered by many candidates. Where candidates were well prepared, they recognised that they needed to consider different relationships in the film to help them come to a conclusion about which might be the most important.

Candidates tended to take an approach where they considered two or three relationships – those between Mitia and Kotov, Kotov and Nadia, and Mitia and Marusia being the most common. This approach was usually successful, especially when candidates were able to select clear evidence from the film as to why each relationship could be considered crucial to the narrative, and then weighed this up in a conclusion. Weaker candidates tended simply to explain the relationship between Kotov and Mitia, often retelling the backstory, but failing to consider how the relationship is used to underline the key themes of the film, such as betrayal or 'blind belief' in the Soviet system. Where candidates selected to discuss other relationships as a means of evaluating the importance of the one mentioned in the question, they did this most successfully where they considered them against some key themes. The best candidates approached the task with originality, perhaps selecting key themes as a backdrop to the discussion, but also considering the concept of the 'most important relationship' in the film in a less obvious way. They often concluded that the key relationship is in fact between Stalin and Kotov, or even between Stalin and the Soviet people, because this is where we see the ultimate betrayal which is the cornerstone of the film's narrative.

Candidates are reminded by the examining team to ensure that they have the vocabulary that they need to make sophisticated analytical points in their essays, particularly terms appropriate for literary and cinematic analysis, such as 'character', 'plot', 'metaphor', 'simile', 'camera technique' and 'first person narrative',

Question 9(b) - *Утомлённые солнцем* (Mikhalkov)

This question, which invited candidates to consider which scenes help us to understand the theme of 'blind belief' in the Soviet system, was well answered by many candidates. The requirement in the question to consider specific scenes helped many to structure their answer more successfully, with clear paragraphs in which the separate scenes were considered.

The best candidates tended to select three or perhaps four scenes which clearly demonstrate the theme to the audience, often using specific quotations to demonstrate their knowledge of the film. Most commonly, candidates began by discussing Kotov's scene with Nadia in the boat, where we see Kotov's own idealism and unwavering faith in the system, and Nadia's belief in a benign state developing. The 'football' scene with Mitia in the forest was often mentioned as showing Kotov's belief that he has the power of the state behind him. More often than not, candidates concluded that the scene in which we see 'blind belief' illustrated most starkly is when Kotov is arrested and continues to state that Stalin will save him, despite the audience's knowledge that this is not true. The very best candidates were able to consider how Mikhalkov uses dramatic irony to help us understand the theme of 'blind belief', as well as mentioning less obvious scenes or those heavy with symbolism, such as the frequent imagery of the burning sun. Weaker candidates tended not to understand the fact that much of our understanding of

the film comes from what we now know about Stalin's purges, showing a weaker grasp of the film's social and cultural setting.

Candidates are reminded that planning essays before beginning them will nearly always lead to better performance. Where the examining team saw that plans had clearly been made on candidate's papers, with notes about which evidence they had decided to use to back up their points, there was a correlation with higher marks for the essays presented.

Question 10(a) - *Кавказский пленник* (Bodrov)

Of the two questions this year on Bodrov's film, this one was the most popular. Candidates were invited to explain which scenes best help us to understand the relationship between Vania and Dina in the film. There were many strong answers which showed detailed knowledge of film and the relationship between the two characters.

Successful essays tended to mention three or four key scenes in which we see the relationship between Vania and Dina develop, and explain using evidence what we learn in these specific scenes. The early scenes, where Dina brings the prisoners food, and exchanges glances with Vania, were used to illustrate the relationship's infancy. Candidates often mentioned how we see Vania's kindness when he makes the model bird for Dina, and most frequently what we learn about how their relationship has developed when she brings him the key. The strongest answers were able to explain how Bodrov uses the character of Dina to help us understand Vania, to see his acts of kindness, his humane values and also his aversion to bloodshed, more clearly. Many candidates concluded that the relationship is important as we see it featured in a number of key scenes, but weaker candidates were not able to connect it to the wider message within the film. Sometimes, candidates simply retold the story of Vania and Dina, but did not mention what we learn about them or the key themes in the film, and therefore scored lower marks for Critical and Analytical Response.

Centres are reminded to ensure that when studying films, candidates are equipped with enough detailed knowledge of what the characters say, such that they can use targeted quotations and evidence in their analytical essays.

Question 10(b) - *Кавказский пленник* (Bodrov)

This question, requiring candidates to analyse how Bodrov uses the location of the film to help us to understand its key themes, was answered by significantly fewer candidates than 10(a). Essays tended to focus on the Chechens themselves, rather than the idea of the location, but overall there were many successful answers.

The best essays tended to consider the main themes of Bodrov's film (e.g. relationships in times of conflict, the futility of war, and cultural divides) and explain how the location is used to help illustrate these themes for the audience. Candidates were often able to explain how the images of the frequent natural surroundings, and the panning of the camera across the mountains, act as a haunting backdrop to the film's narrative, as well as a clear indication of the difficulties that the prisoners face in escaping. Some candidates were able to explain how the geographical setting allows Bodrov to illustrate the contrast between 'Russian' culture and the way of life in the Caucasus, or the advantage that the Chechens have over the Russians as they know the terrain. Weaker essays tended to miss the idea of the location as playing a role in the film, and instead described the Chechens themselves and their actions, falling into a retelling of the plot.

Question 11(a) - *Левуафан* (Zvyagintsev)

This first question on Zvyagintsev's film proved significantly more popular than the second one. Candidates were asked to examine which scenes in the film help us to understand the theme of the 'little person' standing up to power. There were very many strong answers, with learner candidates in particular having a detailed knowledge of the film and its wider significance.

Candidates often began their essays by discussing the scenes at the start of the film where we see that the mayor has issued a court order for compulsory purchase of Kolia's land, and we understand the inevitable outcome of the power struggle between them. The scenes in the courtroom were often used to illustrate the futility of expecting the judicial process to work in favour of ordinary people, as well as the scenes between Dima and the mayor. The final scenes, where we see that Kolia has been unable to stop the building of the church on his land, were often mentioned as the culmination of the lack of power that Kolia has to stand up against the corruption and collusion amongst those in positions of power. The strongest candidates were also able to consider Bodrov's use of symbolism in key scenes in the film, such as the Kolya's house standing against the landscape, the portraits of Putin, the skeleton of the whale (as a symbol of the indefatigable Leviathan), and the title of the film itself. Occasionally, candidates made reference to the idea of the 'little man' being a common trope in Russian literature throughout the ages, and were able to connect this to the film's themes. There were also a number of very successful candidates who were able to explain how Zvyagintsev uses cinematic and camera techniques to underline the theme of the 'little man'. Weaker candidates occasionally failed to recognise the concept of 'little man' and instead simply retold the story, rather than writing analytically.

Candidates are reminded that a knowledge of the literary, dramatic or cinematic techniques that writers have used in the various texts on the specification could be required in order for candidates to answer some of the questions on this paper.

Question 11(b) - *Левуафан* (Zvyagintsev)

The second question on this film was very successfully answered by many candidates. They were invited to consider whether Dima can be considered an important character in the film. Learner candidates who have studied this film were often able to structure their responses coherently, with clear plans for their essays leading to answers which considered the role of Dima as a contrast to Kolia.

Candidates often argued that Dima is a key character because he is used to draw further attention to the bureaucracy and corruption that Kolia has encountered when he in effect fails to stop the land being purchased despite his experience as a lawyer and the compromising information that he has about the Mayor. Many mentioned that Dima seems to make things worse, both through the fact that he fails, and also that he sleeps with Lilia. Stronger candidates tended also to consider why Dima might not be an important character, suggesting that his impact on the narrative could be considered inconsequential. Most concluded that the reason Dima is important is because of the contrast that he represents between life in the provinces and life in Moscow, and the way that this contrast helps us to understand Kolia. They also often mentioned the idea that Dima's personal betrayal of Kolya through his affair with Lilia mirrors the broader societal and institutional betrayals portrayed in the film. Where essays were less successful, they retold the plot of the film, from Dima's arrival until his departure, but did not

take an analytical approach. This often meant the mark for Critical and Analytical Response was much lower.

Paper Summary

Advice to centres

All centres and candidates are reminded that there is no penalty applied for essays that are overlong. Although teachers and candidates are encouraged to produce essays that fall within the suggested 250-word limit, candidates should not stop abruptly at 250 words and therefore perhaps fail to offer a conclusion or answer to the chosen essay question. Part of the skill at this level is to marshal material appropriately and be selective about what to include and what not to include, and to reach approximately 250 words. Quotations from texts or films are not counted as part of any word count.

Centres are advised to ensure that they choose works for examination carefully. Candidates should be well prepared for both their chosen works. This includes studying features such as characterisation, the form and the technique of presentation, key concepts and issues, and the social and cultural context, as appropriate to the work studied. Candidates must have a critical and analytical appreciation of the works. This means they must be able to offer points of view and support them with evidence from the text or film. Knowing the plot and retelling it will not score highly, and neither will irrelevant information or points of view offered without evidence.

Candidates are also reminded to ensure that they write in black ink and write their answers in the correct place in the answer booklet. Once again, a comparatively large number of candidates wrote both essays in the first answer space, causing difficulties in assigning marks correctly.

Based on their performance in this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Ensure that you prepare thoroughly for the translation task by studying the prescribed grammar list on page 52 of the specification.
- Divide your time carefully and do not spend too much time on the translation task.
- Check that you have not omitted any word from the translation task.
- Learn your grammatical endings carefully, focusing particularly on the cases required after prepositions and some common verbs.
- Ensure you know a range of essay phrases that will help you to write a critical response to the work you have studied.
- Ensure that you have a range of words and structures that are considered terminology appropriate for literary or cinematic analysis, such as ‘plot’, ‘metaphor’, ‘first person narrative’, ‘the reader is given the impression that’ or ‘the audience can see that’.
- Seek to use more complex grammatical structures in your essay, such as passives, conditionals, relative pronouns in cases other than the nominative, extended sentences to express abstract ideas (e.g. sentences requiring conjunctions and pronouns),

synonyms for more common vocabulary, correct use of verbal aspects, correct use of verbs of motion, use of the subjunctive with verbs of commanding, etc.

- Ensure that you know your text or film well and have a good range of quotations or evidence to back up your points, and ensure you do not make points without reference to the text or film.
- Plan your essay carefully, thinking about what your conclusion will be and ensuring that your points lead up to it – decide what you want to say before you say it.
- Use a 'Point, Evidence, Explain, Link' approach to writing your essay, ensuring that you make a critical point and then back it up using evidence, explain your point in more depth and then link it to your overall argument.
- Write your essay in paragraphs with a logical structure so that the examiner can follow your points.
- Keep to the suggested word limit and select your material carefully.
- Ensure that your handwriting is legible.

The examining team for this paper would like to once again express their sincere thanks to teachers of Russian in schools. It is pleasing to see a stable, if not increasing, number of candidates who have learnt Russian as part of their curriculum being presented for examination. Their teachers had ensured that they had been taught carefully about their chosen works, and they had had extensive practice in writing critical and analytical essays of the type which gain credit in this paper. Their grammatical knowledge and range of structures was impressive. There is a clear commitment to the study of Russian by so many candidates, which is very pleasing to the team, and is thanks to the dedicated work of their teachers.

