

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCSE French (5FR04) Paper 1

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June 2011

Publications Code UG027946

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Information for Centres

Candidates had to write two pieces of written work under controlled conditions. All candidates should have written at least 100 words for each task; those aiming for grade C or above had to write at least 200 words. The two pieces had to differ in content and purpose. They also had to differ from the speaking assessments. They could be on one or two of the themes offered in the Specification; or they could be on a Centre-devised theme. The vast majority of Centres complied with these requirements, and their candidates produced much appropriate and fine work.

Among the topics noted by examiners were the following:

Media and Culture

- A media celebrity
- Film review
- Book review
- Television review
- Fashion and lifestyle
- Problems faced by teenagers

Sport and leisure

- My leisure time
- A sports event
- A sports celebrity
- A party or a recent meal
- A disastrous day

Travel and Tourism

- A holiday
- Description of a town
- A school trip
- Restaurant review
- Hotel complaint letter

Business, Work and Employment

- Work experience
- A job application
- Organising a visit for a client

Centre-devised Options

- My school, or my ideal school, or my school in 2050
- My family
- My house and daily routine
- Healthy living
- The environment
- An unexpected week off school
- My future plans
- Marriage and honeymoons

- Response to an Agony Aunt
- Write a story or poem in the style of a named French writer

There had to be a stimulus, but it could consist of just a title or heading. It was normally written in English, but was very occasionally in French. The best included four to six bullet points which pointed candidates in the direction of giving descriptions and opinions, and using a variety of tenses; they allowed candidates some flexibility by using the rubric 'you may mention' rather than 'you must mention'. Examiners were instructed to take note of omissions by candidates when the latter formulation was used in assessing the mark for Content and communication.

Setting a task which enabled candidates to access the higher mark bands was crucial, and the majority of centres achieved this. Examples of less successful stimulus included diaries, web pages and interviews where there was no scope for the candidates to use linking, and tasks such as hotel reservation letters which did not promote the use of opinions or a variety of tenses. More successful tasks included letters and articles, where candidates could write at length and maintain a logical thread throughout their work.

The Specification allowed weaker candidates to be set two shorter tasks, such as a postcard or an email, to replace one longer one; very few centres took advantage of this option. There were a few examples of template use, where candidates had to fill in missing words; this is also permitted by the Specification, but clearly candidates cannot gain credit for anything other than what they wrote themselves, and so their marks were very restricted. Examiners sometimes noted a disparity in quality between the two tasks submitted; they surmised that one piece had been completed in Year 10, the other in Year 11.

Candidates were more successful when presented with two quite different topics and question types than when they undertook two tasks on the same topic.

Any topic has the potential to allow candidates to produce high-quality work. Those candidates who were not given adequate guidance sometimes failed to reach their potential. For example, work on the topic 'My town' was often characterised by repetitious use of structures such as *il y a* and *on peut*, and by lists of buildings. Other, more successful, candidates gave a more focused and varied account which included personal reactions and opinions.

Candidates were allowed to take notes, preferably on a CA4 form, into the Controlled assessment session. The use of this was not compulsory. They were permitted to include on it no more than 30 words and five small pictures. Some Centres made better use of this form than others.

The use of a dictionary was also allowed, but regrettably many candidates who had access to one were not able to employ it effectively, and there were many errors attributable to poor dictionary use.

Most candidates achieved the goal of writing 200 words for each task. Where they failed to do so, the length was taken into account when awarding marks both for Content and communication and for Knowledge and application of language. When candidates wrote a lot more than 200 words, examiners were instructed to mark the whole of the task, but many reported that candidates very often penalised themselves for doing this. The work frequently lacked shape, and the incidence of error usually increased the more they wrote.

The best submissions contained an element of individuality and creativity. When different candidates from the same Centre produced very similar work, examiners surmised that too much pre-teaching and rote learning had taken place. Sometimes a piece of work began well, but deteriorated into incomprehensibility; this suggested that the candidate had tried to memorise an essay, but had met with limited success. The best candidates wrote relevantly; they structured their work well, using paragraphs and correct punctuation; their presentation and handwriting were neat; and they did not include extraneous matter such as pictures or photographs.

From the point of view of language, examiners noted how crucial the correct formation of verbs was. Accents were seldom used correctly, and this was especially important when candidates were distinguishing between the present and the past perfect tenses. Many candidates appeared to have trouble with gender and agreements, although this did not always interfere too much with communication. In order to access the higher mark bands, candidates had to use a greater variety of more complex language. Many candidates did this successfully. Among the examples of such language, examiners noted the following:

- Subordination
- Variety of tenses, including pluperfect
- Past infinitives
- Present participles
- Present subjunctive
- Negative and interrogative forms
- Use of *depuis*
- Direct and indirect object pronouns
- Adverbial phrases
- Connectives and linking words
- *Si* clauses
- Comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs

Examiners were extremely grateful to those Centres who carried out administrative matters satisfactorily. This meant that the marking process was not delayed and the publication of results was not compromised. A worrying number of Centres, however, appeared not to have used the Administrative Support Guide which gives instructions for the conduct of Controlled assessments. Among the problems encountered by examiners were the following:

- Use of the old-style Candidate Mark Sheet instead of the up-to-date one

- Failure to include or sign the Attendance Register
- Failure to include a copy of any stimulus material
- Work not in candidate number order
- Work not in the order as stated on the Candidate Mark Sheet
- Inclusion of drafts and of work that had been marked by the Centre
- Work despatched to the Oral Moderator or after the deadline

Advice to Centres

- Ensure that the title and stimulus are appropriate for the candidates
- Give four to six bullet points focusing on description, opinions and variety of tenses
- Say 'you could mention' rather than 'you must mention'
- Encourage creativity rather than rote learning
- Avoid formats which do not allow candidates to use linking
- Ensure that the two tasks enable candidates to demonstrate the use of language for different purposes
- Discourage the writing of much more than 200 words per task
- Give advice on use of the CA4 form
- Promote good presentation and legible handwriting
- Teach candidates dictionary skills
- Suggest to candidates that more adventurous language, even with some errors, is more profitable than very basic language, even if perfectly correct
- Use the Administrative Support Guide to check that all procedures are carried out meticulously
- Use the Edexcel online Ask the Expert facility to make enquiries and request advice on Controlled Assessments

Grade Boundaries

The modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, but the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across these specifications are comparable at specification level.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link: <http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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Order Code UG027946 June 2011

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