

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

GCSE French (5FR04) Paper 01

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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 even fine work.

Among the topics noted by examiners were the following:

- Media and Culture
- Film review
- A person who has inspired me
- Sport and leisure
- My leisure time
- Travel and Tourism
- A holiday
- A disastrous holiday
- Description of a town
- Business, Work and Employment
- Work experience
- Centre-devised Options
- My school
- My family and daily routine
- Healthy living
- My life as an addict
- The environment

There had to be a stimulus, but it could consist of just a title or heading. The best included four to six bullet points in English 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 leaflets, diaries and blogs, where there was no scope for the candidates to use linking. 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.

Candidates were often 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 (as in past years) 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 more focused and varied accounts 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 sometimes penalised themselves for doing this. This was because the work lacked a coherent shape, and the incidence of error often 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. Evidence for this was work where key words had been omitted, or sentences had not been finished off. The best candidates wrote relevantly; they structured their work well, using paragraphs and correct punctuation; and their presentation and handwriting were neat.

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 (other than simple use of *parce que*)
- 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. Centres are to be thanked for their appropriate use of the Administrative Support Guide (ICE), 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 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 (ICE) to check that all procedures are carried out meticulously
- Refrain from writing projected marks and grades on scripts
- Use the Edexcel online Ask the Expert facility to make enquiries and request advice on Controlled Assessments

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