

Examiners' Report /
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

GCSE French (5FR04) Paper 01

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Examiner Report

Candidates are required to write two pieces of written work under controlled conditions of at least 100 words each. Those aiming for grade C or above should be aiming to write at least 200 words. The two pieces have to differ in content and purpose, which, in turn, have to differ from the speaking assessments. Tasks could be on one or two of the themes offered in the specification or could be on one devised by the centre.

Among the topics noted by examiners were the following:

Media and Culture

- Film review
- A person who has inspired me
- A visit of a celebrity to my school
- An interview with a famous person
- A cultural event, such as a wedding

Sport and leisure

- My leisure time
- A disastrous weekend

Travel and Tourism

- A holiday
- A disastrous holiday
- Description of a town
- A hotel complaint letter
- Booking accommodation
- A restaurant review

Business, Work and Employment

- Work experience
- A job application
- Future plans

Centre-devised options

- My school
- My school uniform
- My family and daily routine
- My home
- My room
- Healthy living
- Agony Aunt

- Being a teenager today
- The environment
- The weather
- Creative and imaginary tasks
- Tasks which creatively combined two themes or topics

It is required to provide a stimulus, but this can consist of just a title or heading. Better stimuli 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 a restrictive '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. Weaker candidates especially seemed to need the support of bullet points; without them, they omitted potentially important material, or simply wrote too little.

Setting a task which enabled candidates to gain access to the higher mark bands was crucial and the majority of centres were successful in doing so. Examples of less successful stimuli included leaflets, diaries, interviews and blogs, where there was no scope for the candidates to use linking and tasks whose subject matter was unlikely to produce interesting or detailed work. More successful tasks included letters and articles, where candidates could write at length and maintain a logical thread throughout their work.

The best tasks were those which were tailored to the abilities, needs and interests of the various students in the cohort. Using an identical task for all candidates in submission sometimes disadvantaged those both at the top and at the bottom of the ability range. Tasks involving formal letters were often out of the scope of the candidates' experience and so tended to be unconvincing.

Titles which outlined a very specific scenario often worked well. Examples included:

- A summer holiday where everyone went away except for the candidate
- A promotion article about a newly-refurbished hotel
- Imagine you are an athlete – talk about yourself, and explain how you keep fit
- Tourist advice about your area for a French penfriend
- Imagine you are in a specific historical situation
- Advantages and disadvantages of having a large family
- A letter to a person who has shown interest in the advertisement which you placed in order to sell your house

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 or title 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. 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 the CA4 is not compulsory. They are permitted to include on it no more than 30 words and five small pictures. Although conjugated verbs are allowed, full sentences and codes are not permitted. Some centres made better use of this form than others. A worrying number of centres appeared to have allowed candidates to write and draw more than the specification permitted.

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 managed to write 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 in doing so. 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 in which 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 gain access to the higher mark bands, candidates had to use a greater variety of more complex language. Many candidates did this successfully.

Among examples of such language, examiners noted the following:

- Subordination (other than simple use of *parce que*)
- Variety of tenses, including pluperfect
- Modal verbs and expressions using the infinitive
- Past infinitives
- Present participles
- Present subjunctive
- Negative and interrogative forms
- *Venir de*
- Use of *depuis*
- Direct and indirect object pronouns
- Preceding direct object agreement
- Adverbial phrases
- Connectives and linking words
- *Si* clauses
- Comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs
- Idiomatic words and phrases
- Words specifically related to the topic under discussion – particularly in the fields of health and the environment

It should be noted that, in order to gain access to the highest marks for Knowledge and Application of Language, candidates need to use a range and variety of such structures as these, but in a comfortable and natural manner. Simply using them for the sake of it can lead to an artificial and pedestrian piece of work.

As for accuracy, examiners reported many examples of poor spellings, even of common words. Centres are asked to note the following (the list is far from exhaustive):

- Angleterre
- Année
- Appelle
- Beaucoup
- Bien
- Ennuyeux
- Exemple
- J'ai
- Je suis
- Magasin
- Rencontrer
- Travailler
- Très
- Trop
- Vieille

Examiners were extremely grateful to those centres, which carried out administrative matters satisfactorily. Centres are to be thanked for their appropriate use of 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 version (CM4)
- Failure to sign the Candidate Mark Sheet (CM4)
- Failure to include or sign the Attendance Register
- Failure to include a copy of any stimulus material
- The stimulus material not relating to the work submitted
- Work not in candidate number order
- Tasks not in the order listed on the Candidate Mark Sheet
- Extra tasks – not part of the assessment - being submitted
- Work marked or corrected by the teacher
- Work despatched to the Oral Moderator or after the deadline
- Candidates writing their contact details on letters (this is potentially a Child Protection issue)

Advice to Centres

- Ensure that the title and stimulus are appropriate for each one of 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
- Encourage candidates to give their own, genuine opinions, rather than ones which they imagine will be pleasing to the examiner
- 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 the use of the CA4 form
- Promote good presentation, accurate punctuation, paragraphing 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
- 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

Grade Boundaries

Much work has taken place on the comparability of the writing units for French, German and Spanish. The senior examiners have worked closely together to ensure their application of the common marking criteria is consistently applied across these three languages. This has been in response to queries from centres about the results at unit level on the writing controlled assessment.

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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