

Examiners' Report January 2013

GCSE French 5FR04 01

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Introduction

Candidates are required to submit two pieces of work for the Writing Controlled Assessment. Each task must be produced in one session of up to 60 minutes under controlled conditions. All candidates should have written at least 100 words for each task; those aiming for grade C or above should aim to write at least 200 words. Tasks of fewer than 100 words are capped at a mark of 6 for Communication and content.

The two pieces have to differ in content and purpose. They also have to differ from the Speaking Controlled Assessment. The specification allows weaker candidates to be set two shorter tasks, such as a postcard or an email, to replace one longer one; very few centres, if any, took advantage of this option.

Tasks could be based on one or two of the themes offered in the specification, or they could be based on a centre-devised theme.

The vast majority of centres complied with these requirements, and their candidates produced much appropriate and even excellent work.

Tasks

Among the topics noted by examiners were the following:

Media and Culture

- Film review
- Book review
- Interview with a celebrity

Sport and Leisure

- My leisure time

Travel and Tourism

- A holiday
- My town

Business, Work and Employment

- Work experience

Centre-devised options

- My school
- My family
- Healthy living
- The environment

The most popular tasks were also the most successful, largely because candidates were able to engage with the task in a personal way, expressing their own thoughts, experiences and opinions. They included work experience, holidays and school life.

There had to be a stimulus, but it could consist of just a title or heading. The best included 4–6 bullet points in English that 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/could mention* rather than *You must mention*. The latter formulation was seldom, if ever, used by centres; where it was, examiners were instructed to note any omissions when assessing the mark for Communication and content.

Setting a task that enabled candidates to access the higher mark bands was crucial, and the majority of centres achieved this. Examples of less successful stimuli included interviews, where there was little scope for the candidates to use linking, and where candidates had difficulty in formulating questions in French. More successful formats included letters and articles, where candidates could write at length and maintain a logical thread throughout their work.

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. Candidates invited to write about their family in one task and their leisure activities in the other sometimes found themselves using the same material for both tasks.

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 producing film and book reviews often found it harder to narrate the storyline than to express opinions about the film or book. The topic *My family* sometimes led to rather simple and unsophisticated language and opinions.

Form CA4 and dictionaries

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. Finite verb forms are permitted, and short phrases, but not whole sentences. Some centres made better use of this form than others; the most useful forms contained a selection of more ambitious vocabulary and structures, correctly spelled.

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.

Assessment

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 Communication and content and for Knowledge and application of language. When candidates wrote many more than 200 words, examiners were instructed to mark the whole of the task, but many reported that candidates very often penalised themselves by 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 in which key words had been omitted, or sentences had not been finished off, or words were written phonetically. 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
- Passive verbs
- 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

Administration

Examiners were extremely grateful to those centres that 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*, which gives instructions for the conduct of controlled assessments.

Among the problems encountered by examiners were the following:

- Signatures omitted from the *Candidate Mark Sheet*, CM4
- Failure to include or sign the attendance register
- Failure to notify Edexcel when candidates were withdrawn
- Failure to include a copy of any stimulus material
- Work not in candidate number order
- Tasks not in the order as stated on form CM4
- Work despatched to the Speaking Moderator, to the Spanish examiner, or after the deadline

Summary

Centres may find the following advice useful for the Writing Controlled Assessment:

- Ensure that the title and stimulus are appropriate for the candidates.
- Choose topics of which candidates have some personal experience.
- Give 4–6 bullet points focusing on description, opinions and variety of tenses.
- Say *You may/could mention* rather than *You must mention*.
- Avoid formats that do not allow candidates to use linking and try to encourage linking between paragraphs as well as within paragraphs.
- Ensure that the two tasks enable candidates to demonstrate the use of language for different purposes.
- Discourage the writing of many 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.
- Encourage use of a wide range of more complex vocabulary and structures.
- Use the *Administrative Support Guide* to check that all procedures are carried out correctly.
- Staple each candidate's work together in the correct order.
- Use the Edexcel online Ask the Expert facility to make enquiries and request advice on the Writing Controlled Assessment.

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