

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCSE French Unit 4
5FR04

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Information for Centres

Students had to write two pieces of written work under controlled conditions. All students 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 students produced much appropriate and commendable work.

Among the topics noted by examiners were the following:

Media and Culture

- Film review
- New technology
- 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 shopping trip
- A disastrous weekend

Travel and Tourism

- A holiday
- A disastrous holiday
- Description of a town
- A hotel complaint letter
- Booking accommodation
- My best meal ever

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
- Planning a charity event
- Healthy living
- Agony Aunt
- The environment
- The world I live in

- The weather
- Creative and imaginary tasks
- Tasks relating to a work of French literature

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 students in the direction of giving descriptions and opinions, and using a variety of tenses; they allowed students some flexibility by using the rubric 'you may mention' rather than 'you must mention'. Examiners were instructed to take note of omissions by students when the latter formulation was used in assessing the mark for Content and communication. Weaker students 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 students to gain access to the higher mark bands was crucial, and the majority of centres achieved this. Examples of less successful stimulus included leaflets, diaries, interviews and blogs, where there was no scope for the students to use linking; and tasks whose subject matter was unlikely to produce interesting or detailed work. More successful tasks included letters and articles, where students 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 students 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 students' experience and so tended to be unconvincing.

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

- Attending a school of magic (inspired by *Harry Potter*)
- Imagine you are a shoe – write about yourself and your adventures
- Tourist advice about your area for a French penfriend
- Imagine you are in a specific historical situation
- Legacy of the Olympic Games
- Writing to a fashion magazine describing your family's lack of fashion sense in an attempt to win a complete family make-over.

The Specification allowed weaker students to be set two shorter tasks, such as a postcard or an email, to replace one longer one; hardly any centres took advantage of this option.

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

One examiner came across a refreshingly appropriate task designed for lower ability students, and which gave them an opportunity to produce a piece of work which made sense and to which they could add if they felt able or inclined to. The task was to prepare a holiday brochure with a colour

picture of a Cornish beach in the top right corner, and the sheet was divided into sections to make the task look more achievable.

Any topic or title has the potential to allow students to produce high quality work. Those students who were not given adequate guidance sometimes failed to reach their potential. For example, work on the topic 'Health' was often characterised by repetitious use of simple verbs such as *je bois* and *je mange*, and by lists of food items. Other, more successful, students gave more focused and varied accounts which included personal reactions and opinions.

Students 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. Although conjugated verbs are allowed, full sentences and codes are not. Some Centres made better use of this form than others.

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

Most students 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 students wrote a lot more than 200 words, examiners were instructed to mark the whole of the task, but many reported that students very often 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.

Examiners were concerned about the number of students whose two pieces of work differed enormously in quality. One can only speculate as to the reason for this, but it might be advisable for some centres to carry out the first Controlled assessment task a little later than they currently do, to allow students to develop their language more.

The best submissions contained an element of individuality and creativity. When different students 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 student 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 students 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 students were distinguishing between the present and the past perfect tenses. The poor handwriting of many students was noted by a large number of examiners. Many students 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, students had to use a greater variety of more complex language. Many students 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, students 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
- Est
- Et
- Exemple
- J'ai
- Je suis

- Je vais
- Magasin
- Rencontrer
- Travailler
- Très
- Trop
- Vieux/vieille

Examiners were extremely grateful to those centres who carried out administrative matters satisfactorily; there appeared to be more of these this year. This meant that the marking process was not delayed and the publication of results was not compromised. 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 Student Mark Sheet instead of the up-to-date one (CM4)
- Failure to sign the Student 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 student number order
- Tasks not in the order listed on the Student Mark Sheet (CM4)
- 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

Advice to Centres

- Ensure that the title and stimulus are appropriate for each one of the students
- 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 students to give their own, genuine, opinions, rather than ones which they imagine will be pleasing to the examiner
- Avoid formats which do not allow students to use linking
- Encourage use of linking between paragraphs, as well as within them
- Ensure that the two tasks enable students to demonstrate the use of language for different purposes
- Discourage the writing of much more than 200 words per task
- Give an accurate word count at the end of each piece of work
- Give advice on use of the CA4 form
- Promote good presentation, accurate punctuation, paragraphing and legible handwriting

- Teach students dictionary skills
- Suggest to students 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 staples or treasury tags to fasten each student's work
- Use the Edexcel online Ask the Expert facility to make enquiries and request advice on Controlled Assessments

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

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