

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel GCSE  
in French (5FR04/01)  
Paper 1: Writing in French

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**GCSE French**  
**Unit 4: Writing**  
**Examiner Report**

**Introduction**

Most centres are once again to be congratulated on the way they prepare candidates for this paper. The demands of this Specification are now well known. Most candidates successfully produced two tasks which were at least relevant, coherent and comprehensible overall, which used basic French soundly and which at least attempted to use more complex structures and vocabulary. There were very few poor performances, while many candidates produced work which was sophisticated, interesting and a pleasure to read.

**Tasks**

The majority of centres prepared their candidates very much in the spirit of the assessment. They produced tasks which were tailored to the needs of the candidates, enabling them to demonstrate what they had learned and could do. Many used the Pearson Edexcel-produced tasks, or adapted these effectively for their own students. The best tasks contained a clear title and four to six linked bullet points, the purpose of which was to direct the candidates to write individually, personally, creatively and coherently, and to use description, opinions and a variety of tenses, which are essential features of the mark scheme.

Probably the most popular and successful topics were ones which allowed candidates to express their personalities. Often, these topics took a particular angle on a well-known theme. For example, the title 'Holidays' was less successful than 'A disastrous holiday', 'My best holiday', 'An unexpected holiday' or 'A dream holiday'.

Other examples included 'The importance of school' rather than just 'School', 'New Year resolutions to live more healthily' rather than 'Healthy lifestyle' and 'City of culture' rather than 'My town'.

Other successful tasks required candidates to interest or convince the reader. 'A person I admire' was often successful in that candidates needed to justify their choice of person. Other successful tasks included 'Write a letter in support of your local library which is about to be closed', 'Write a letter to convince your Head Teacher to retain work experience' and 'Jeune apprenti', where candidates had to justify their continued involvement in an 'Apprentice'-style show.

Other popular topics which were successful with more able candidates included school, leisure, technology, media, the environment, and film, television and concert reviews. Many of these, by their very nature, require more sophisticated ideas, vocabulary and structures. Less able candidates seldom coped well with these topics, and often wrote very pedestrian responses. For example, they

listed predictable facts about school life and routines, or enumerated things they own, or repeated descriptions of people. Occasionally the task was quite beyond them; it is particularly hard for a less able candidate to apply for a job more suited to someone much older than themselves, for example, or to explain coherently the plot of a film or book.

Work Experience featured rarely this year; this may reflect the fact that few students are able to do this before the Controlled Assessment is completed.

Very few tasks included compulsory bullet points. Centres now realise that it is far better to offer the rubric 'you may include the following...' rather than 'you must include the following...' since the Communication and content mark grid specifically refers to omissions.

Candidates are not helped when the bullet points are too numerous or too disparate, since they are assessed partly on how well linked and coherent their work is. Vague titles such as 'Talk about your eating habits' or 'Sport, free time and healthy lifestyle' are not helpful, especially when there are no accompanying bullet points.

Certain topics have their own dangers. Candidates writing about 'My Town' frequently repeat *il y a* and *on peut*, and find it hard to include a variety of tenses. A letter of complaint to a hotel is so far removed from most candidates' experience that it often turns into a catalogue of unlikely or totally unrealistic episodes. 'My Family' and 'My Daily Routine' were commonly seldom more than repetitive descriptions involving very little variety of language. Diaries and interviews often lacked the key element of linking; they would have been better written as continuous reports. Brochure format is quite unsuited to the concept of linking.

Examiners noted that the best performances involved the use of legible handwriting; use of black or blue pen rather than red or green; evidence of planning and checking of work; and, above all, the setting of tasks which permitted candidates to express their individuality. Candidates who wrote close to 200 words tended to be more successful than those who exceeded this amount, since quality is more important than quantity, and excessive length can lead to repetition, lack of coherence and increased error.

Some examiners communicated a number of concerns. A small minority of centres appeared to have encouraged their candidates to memorise work, all or some of which had been taken from the Internet or other sources such as templates or writing frames. The evidence for this was that candidates sometimes omitted key words or whole sentences, rendering the work ambiguous or incoherent; or they had written passages of their own among the borrowed material, such that the quality of the French fluctuated wildly throughout the piece of work. One can only surmise what effect such assessment preparation had on candidates' attitude to French and language

learning in general. Use of such techniques is not in the spirit of Controlled Assessment.

### **Quality of Language**

Examiners were struck by the fact that most candidates seemed aware of the desirability of using a variety of structures and relevant vocabulary, making use of more than one tense and employing more complex grammar appropriately. The best candidates confidently and relevantly used tenses such as the conditional and pluperfect; the subjunctive mood (even though this is beyond the requirements of the GCSE Specification); past infinitives; present participles; infinitive constructions; passive constructions; pronouns; adverbial phrases; comparatives and superlatives; idiomatic expressions; and other structures listed in the Specification in the Higher Tier grammar list. Sometimes these were used rather more successfully than more basic structures; in order to achieve a mark of seven or more for Knowledge and application of language, the basic language does need to be secure as well as there being attempts at a range of more complex and varied language.

The best work was also characterised by the use of adventurous, varied and correctly spelled vocabulary. This was more prevalent in work written on more ambitious topics. The poor spelling of basic words, such as *cependant*, *parce que*, *et*, *est*, *ennuyeux* and *beaucoup* was noted by many examiners.

Centres should be aware that, when a mark of up to six is awarded for Knowledge and application of language, then the mark for Accuracy can be no more than three. This is because a mark of four or more for Accuracy implies the use of more complex structures.

It is very important for candidates to be aware of the importance of linking their work, both between and within paragraphs. Those who have a repertoire of suitable words (time phrases, conjunctions, adverbial expressions and so on) were more successful than those who did not.

It is also vital to note the importance of tenses. Much ambiguity can arise from misspelled verbs, and this can affect all three of the marks awarded to each piece of work. Weaker candidates frequently used infinitives instead of the present tense, or formed the past participle of –er verbs without using an acute accent. More able candidates often confused the conditional and future tenses, or the conditional and past imperfect.

Many examiners commented on poor use of punctuation. Candidates are advised to ensure that punctuation is appropriate and unambiguous.

Poor dictionary use was still an issue for some centres. Candidates need to be carefully advised on how to benefit from the dictionary which they are allowed. In some cases, it might even be better for the book to remain closed.

## **Administrative Matters**

Examiners warmly thank those centres – the vast majority – who carry out all the necessary administrative tasks conscientiously and punctually. This means that the marking process can proceed without any delay or inaccuracy.

Unfortunately, the number of administrative problems arising appeared to have increased. Centres are reminded of the following:

- Work from the centre should be submitted in candidate number order
- Each candidate's work should be securely stapled together
- Use of plastic pockets for individual pages of candidates' work should be avoided
- Each page should have some identifying mark, lest it go astray
- CM4 forms should be completed accurately and signed by both candidate and teacher
- Tasks (titles and bullet points) should be included within the submission
- Candidates' work should be submitted in the order in which it is listed on the CM4 sheet
- The Attendance Register should be completed accurately and included with the submission
- Candidate work should not be annotated, corrected or marked by teachers
- Candidate CA4 forms, when used, should contain no more than 30 words and five small pictures

## **Summary**

The setting of suitable tasks is at the root of candidate success in this paper. Centres are recommended to use or adapt the tasks published by Pearson Edexcel, or to follow the pattern of title and bullet points set by these tasks.

Candidates should be advised to use the CA4 form wisely; to write not much more than 200 words per task; to use their own ideas and opinions as much as possible; to ensure that their basic language is secure, while at least attempting to use more complex and varied structures and vocabulary; and to plan and check their work to ensure its coherence and accuracy.

Centres are urged to ensure that all administrative tasks are carried out correctly and by the deadline.

## **Grade Boundaries**

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>