



Pearson

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In French (5FR04)
Paper 4: Writing in French

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GCSE French
Unit 4: Writing
Examiners Report

5FR04 GCSE French Writing Report for Centres 2017

Introduction

In this, the final year of this specification, most centres are once again to be congratulated on the way they prepared candidates for this paper. The demands of this Specification were 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 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, interestingly and coherently, and to use description, opinions and a variety of tenses, which are essential features of the mark scheme.

The topics most frequently encountered by examiners included 'Holidays', 'Work Experience', 'My town or Local Area' and 'Health'.

Probably the most 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 titles 'A disastrous holiday', 'My best holiday', 'An unexpected holiday' or 'A dream holiday' were more successful than the simple title 'Holidays'

Other successful tasks required candidates to interest or convince the reader. 'A person I admire/detest' was often successful in that candidates needed to justify their choice of person. Other successful tasks included 'Friendship', 'Mon problème', 'Ma passion' and 'Fashion'. Some candidates developed titles which were clearly of their own invention, and examples of creative writing were occasionally found, such as 'La maison hantée'.

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 routine, 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.

Very few tasks included compulsory bullet points. Centres realised that it was 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. However, it should be noted that 1FR04, the new Pearson-Edexcel examination which starts in 2018, does require responses to compulsory bullet points.

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

Certain topics had their own dangers. Candidates writing about 'My Town' frequently repeated *il y a* and *on peut*, and found 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 turned into a catalogue of unlikely or totally unrealistic episodes. 'Myself', '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 frequently led to repetition, lack of coherence and increased error.

A 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; or that the work of different candidates from a particular centre was almost identical. One can only surmise what effect such

assessment preparation had on candidates' attitude to French and language learning in general. Use of such techniques was 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 needed 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.

Administrative Matters

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

Summary

The setting of suitable tasks was at the root of candidate success in this paper. Centres had been recommended to use or adapt the tasks published by Edexcel, or to follow the pattern of title and bullet points set by these tasks, and most followed this advice. In the new Specification, which starts in 2018, most of the 1FR04 examination tasks require responding to compulsory bullet points.

In the new Specification, candidates are strongly advised to write within the word limits given; to include their own ideas and opinions; to be as relevant, interesting and convincing 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.

