

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

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 prepared candidates well for this paper. 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.

Examiners did express, however, a number of concerns. For example, a small minority of centres appeared to have encouraged their candidates to memorise work which had been taken from Internet or other sources. 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. What should have been an inspiring and creative enterprise had been reduced to a memory test.

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, 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 Holidays and Work Experience. These were used by candidates of all abilities, most of whom were able to bring an element of ownership to their work. Both topics allowed them to express their own opinions and to use a variety of language.

Other popular topics which were more successful with able candidates included school, healthy lifestyle, leisure, technology, a famous person, fashion, job applications, and film and book reviews. Less able candidates sometimes coped with these topics, but often wrote very pedestrian responses, for example, listing predictable facts about school life and routine, or enumerating things they eat or drink. 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.

Some of the most inspired answers were prompted by questions such as 'What is it like to be a teenager in Britain today?', or 'What makes a good friend?', or questions posed to an Agony Aunt.

Less successful tasks included those where the bullet points were compulsory. 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. Titles more suited to GCE students are usually inappropriate, too; one example seen was 'Discuss current environmental problems, focusing on France'.

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.

Examiners noted that the best performances involved the use of legible handwriting; evidence of planning and checking of work; and avoidance of templates, which frequently stifled 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.

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.

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.

Poor dictionary use was 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. Examiners cited many errors such as 'je testament proper' for 'I will clean' in order to emphasise this point.

Administrative Matters

Thank you to the vast majority of centres 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, a number of problems did arise, and 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 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

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