



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In French (4FR1)

Paper 02: Reading and Writing

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Introduction

The 2025 French International GCSE examination series revealed a range of performance across the cohort. Many candidates demonstrated solid linguistic ability, particularly in reading comprehension tasks and in structured writing. However, more demanding areas, especially those requiring grammatical accuracy and independent written expression, continued to present difficulties for some candidates.

Some recurring patterns were evident. Tasks involving straightforward information retrieval from texts were generally approached with confidence, indicating that candidates are typically well-prepared in foundational language skills. In contrast, questions that called for more flexible use of grammar or the ability to construct original responses often exposed gaps in both accuracy and fluency. This points to the need for greater emphasis on developing candidates' confidence and competence in manipulating language at a more advanced level.

This report outlines the main performance trends observed in this examination series, highlighting consistent strengths as well as areas where further improvement would be beneficial.

Question 1

Overall, candidates performed well in this section, with a significant number achieving full marks. Their responses suggested a secure grasp of core comprehension skills, particularly when identifying the correct option among several similar ones - a task requiring careful attention to detail. That said, a few candidates found certain vocabulary items challenging, and in these cases, subtle distinctions between answer choices were sometimes missed, leading to occasional errors.

Recommendations: It remains important for teaching to focus on expanding candidates' vocabulary and reinforcing techniques that help them distinguish between closely related words and expressions. Targeted practice in these areas can support greater accuracy and confidence in future assessments.

Question 2

Whilst a number of candidates approached this task with confidence, overall performance was slightly less secure than in Question 1. The requirement to select words that were both grammatically accurate and contextually appropriate proved more challenging for some. Particular difficulty was noted with words such as *figurine*, *rarement*, and *contents*, where misunderstanding of meaning or usage led to incorrect choices.

Those candidates who were successful tended to show a clear awareness of how vocabulary interacts with context, demonstrating not only knowledge of word meaning but also how it fits syntactically within the sentence.

Recommendations: Continued emphasis on context-based vocabulary learning is essential. Exposure to a wide range of lexical items in meaningful settings, alongside practice in identifying grammatical cues within sentences, will help candidates make more accurate selections in this type of task.

Question 3

This task was generally handled with confidence, and it was encouraging to see that very few candidates exceeded the maximum of eight crosses, a clear indication that many Centres are preparing their candidates well. That said, a small number of candidates still lost marks by not reading the instructions carefully enough. In some cases, they overlooked the possibility that certain statements might require a response, which led to incomplete or inaccurate answers despite a sound grasp of the content.

Recommendations: Whilst task awareness remains essential, candidates should also be supported in developing a wide-ranging, topic-specific vocabulary, as this will enable them to pick up on subtle clues embedded in the text. Teachers should continue to emphasise careful reading of instructions.

Question 4

Candidate performance on this question was mixed, though most approached the more straightforward sub-questions, particularly 4a, 4b, and 4g, with a good level of confidence. These items, which focused on direct retrieval of factual information and recognition of basic past-tense vocabulary, were generally well handled. Responses here were typically brief and accurate, reflecting secure familiarity with the format of short-answer comprehension tasks.

However, the more complex sub-questions, especially 4c, 4d, and 4e, exposed areas of difficulty for some candidates. These questions demanded either inferential understanding or grammatically complete responses, both of which proved challenging. In 4c and 4d, candidates frequently failed to include a clear verb in their answer or offered phrases copied directly from the text without adapting for subject or tense. There was a consistent issue with the interpretation of the idiomatic expression 'donner à manger aux poules', which was sometimes misrendered as 'elle a mangé aux poules', demonstrating a lack of control over grammatical relationships and meaning. Additionally, the phrase 'sans oublier' de was often misunderstood, with candidates missing or reversing its intended meaning.

One of the most common misconceptions appeared in 4e, where le temps was misread by many candidates as 'time' rather than 'weather.' This kind of vocabulary error, while minor on the surface, significantly affected the accuracy of responses and was consistently noted by examiners as a point of weakness.

Another recurring issue across the question was the overuse of direct lifting from the text. Weaker candidates often copied full phrases without adapting for grammatical accuracy or coherence. This was particularly problematic when tense or person needed to be adjusted to match the question prompt. In contrast, stronger candidates were more able to rephrase information effectively, using the correct verb form and integrating their answers into well-structured sentences.

Recommendations: It is essential that candidates are taught to identify grammatical cues in the question, such as tense and pronoun, and mirror them accurately in their answers. Centres should prioritise contextual vocabulary learning, especially with polysemous words like temps, ensuring that students can distinguish meaning based on context. Additionally, explicit teaching around negative constructions and idiomatic phrases will support more precise comprehension and expression. Ultimately, candidates who approach the task with grammatical awareness and attention to linguistic detail are best placed to succeed in this type of comprehension exercise.

Question 5

offering candidates the opportunity to engage more deeply with the language and demonstrate their ability to interpret and adapt meaning. Many candidates responded well to the more accessible items, especially those that required straightforward factual retrieval. These were handled with confidence, suggesting secure understanding of key vocabulary and the ability to locate relevant information with precision.

Where the question required a higher degree of language manipulation, such as adapting tense or formulating suggestions, performance was more mixed. In particular, some candidates showed uncertainty when grammatical adjustment was needed to align with the phrasing of the question. These instances highlighted the importance of grammatical awareness, especially when responding to prompts that involve modal or conditional forms.

Nevertheless, a number of candidates demonstrated impressive control in their handling of more complex items, producing thoughtful, grammatically accurate responses. These candidates approached the task analytically, paying attention to the demands of each question and tailoring their answers accordingly.

Recommendations: It would be beneficial for candidates to engage in regular practice that strengthens their ability to move between tenses and respond in a grammatically appropriate form. Developing strategies for paraphrasing information from a text, rather than relying solely on direct lifting, will also enhance both clarity and accuracy. In addition, practising how to interpret common question stems will ensure that candidates are better equipped to all questions. With consistent attention to these areas, candidates will be well placed to approach this style of comprehension with growing confidence and precision.

Question 6

This question was generally well handled, and many candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of the task requirements. Most were able to produce coherent, relevant responses on the theme of school life, successfully incorporating the four stimulus words into their writing. Where candidates approached the task with careful planning and a good sense of structure, the quality of the writing was often high. Stronger responses were not only accurate but showed a confident use of tenses, typically past and present, and incorporated the stimulus words in a natural and meaningful way.

A number of candidates produced lively and personal accounts of their school experiences, with some using idiomatic language or well-chosen vocabulary to add flair to their writing. Nonetheless, a few recurring issues affected performance across the cohort. A key area of concern was the alteration or incorrect use of the stimulus words. For example, 'professeur' was frequently shortened to 'prof', and 'matières' was sometimes written in the singular. There were also instances of misused words, such as 'l'année dernière est un professeur', suggesting confusion around meaning and sentence structure.

Spelling errors were also common and occasionally, candidates used anglicised spellings (e.g. modern), which detracted from the overall accuracy of the piece. A small number of responses misinterpreted l'année dernière, using it to refer to the future rather than the past, which affected tense consistency throughout their work.

Whilst most candidates kept broadly within the 70-word guideline, some exceeded it significantly, which often led to unnecessary repetition or a drop in grammatical accuracy. Others wrote very little, producing responses that, although relevant, lacked sufficient development to score highly.

Recommendations: To support future candidates, it is important that Centres continue to emphasise the importance of using the stimulus words exactly as given, without altering their spelling, gender, or number. Regular vocabulary and spelling practice, especially of high-frequency topic words, will strengthen candidates' ability to meet this requirement. Centres should also encourage candidates to plan their responses with a clear structure in mind, integrating the stimulus words purposefully and maintaining grammatical accuracy. Reinforcement of tense–time phrase agreement, for example, using the perfect tense with l'année dernière, will also help candidates write with greater precision. One practical approach used successfully by some Centres was to have candidates underline or tick off each stimulus word in their draft, ensuring that all were included correctly before submission. With continued attention to these areas, candidates will be well positioned to achieve success in this writing task.

Question 7

This long writing task gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate both their linguistic range and their ability to communicate effectively and creatively in French. Many candidates rose to the challenge, producing well-structured responses that were rich in detail, grammatically controlled, and confidently addressed all four bullet points. High-scoring responses typically showed clear paragraphing, a secure grasp of a range of tenses, and thoughtful engagement with the topic. Where candidates had planned carefully, their writing often reflected coherence, variety and a personal voice.

However, some candidates encountered difficulties in fully meeting the demands of the task. One of the most common issues was the omission or underdevelopment of one or more bullet points, which inevitably limited the marks available. In several cases, prompts were misunderstood or interpreted too loosely. For example, responses to the second bullet point sometimes lacked the required shift in tense, particularly when the candidate failed to distinguish between past and present use of technology. Elsewhere, confusion between time indicators such as 'dernier' and 'prochain' occasionally led to errors in tense that affected overall accuracy.

Some candidates relied heavily on pre-learnt material, which, while sometimes grammatically sound, did not always address the task in a meaningful way. Repeated use of set phrases, especially when not clearly linked to the bullet points, made responses feel formulaic and reduced opportunities for genuine communication. Similarly, limited use of connectives and subordination sometimes led to list-like writing, where ideas were presented in a sequence without development or justification.

Recommendations: To support candidates in achieving their full potential in this task, it is important that Centres continue to provide regular, focused practice in extended writing. Students should be encouraged to plan their responses carefully, giving equal attention to all four bullet points and ensuring that each is developed with clarity and purpose. Allocating a paragraph to each prompt is a helpful strategy that supports both organisation and coherence. Teaching should reinforce the accurate use of a range of time frames, with particular attention paid to tense consistency and the interpretation of time markers. Candidates should also be guided in how to express opinions and justify their ideas, using a variety of structures that go beyond memorised phrases. Exposure to model responses, alongside discussion of assessment criteria, will help candidates understand what a high-level response looks like and how to approach this task with confidence and creativity. With careful preparation, a secure grasp of grammatical structures, and clear organisation, candidates are well positioned to succeed in this extended writing task.

Question 8

This final question, which assessed candidates' grammatical control through a contextual gap-fill, proved effective in distinguishing between different levels of linguistic competence. The task

required candidates to demonstrate accurate command of tense, conjugation, agreement, and vocabulary in a short narrative passage. While many approached the first few items with confidence, particularly those focused on present-tense forms and basic adjective–noun agreement, sustained accuracy across all ten gaps was less commonly achieved.

The majority of candidates responded well to early items such as 8a through 8d, where the required forms drew on familiar structures and well-practised grammatical patterns. These responses suggest that the present tense and basic agreements are well established for many candidates. However, as the exercise progressed, particularly from item 8f onwards, errors became more frequent and pointed to weaker understanding of compound tenses, irregular verbs, and more complex constructions.

A recurring issue was the incorrect use of infinitives in place of conjugated forms following a subject pronoun, as in *il manger* instead of *il mange*. This suggests some candidates had difficulty moving from verb recognition to correct application within a sentence structure. Errors were also noted in the use of the *passé composé*, where the auxiliary verb was occasionally omitted or incorrectly chosen. A typical example was ‘*nous allé*’ in place of ‘*nous sommes allés*’, with candidates either overlooking the auxiliary *être* or forgetting the necessary agreement in gender and number. The importance of these finer grammatical details was particularly evident in items 8i and 8j, which proved the most challenging. These required manipulation of the simple future and conditional tenses, including irregular verb forms, and often exposed uncertainty around stem changes, endings, and modal constructions.

Recommendations: To support candidates in developing the skills needed for this task, it is recommended that Centres integrate regular grammar revision into their teaching, with particular focus on tense formation, verb conjugation, and auxiliary usage. Attention should be given to recognising and applying time markers, such as ‘*hier*’, ‘*souvent*’, and ‘*demain*’, to guide tense selection. Candidates should also have frequent opportunities to practise grammar in context, through tasks like gap-fills and sentence transformation, so they can learn to apply rules accurately within realistic narrative frameworks.

Summary

The 2025 paper offered candidates a broad range of tasks requiring comprehension, language manipulation, and extended writing. Many candidates demonstrated sound understanding of familiar topics, with confident responses to factual comprehension questions and effective integration of vocabulary into short written tasks. Where responses were well planned and clearly structured, candidates communicated with clarity and purpose.

Questions requiring grammatical control or accurate manipulation of tense and verb forms proved more demanding. Issues commonly observed included incorrect verb conjugation, inconsistent use of time frames, and reliance on lifts from the text. In the extended writing task,

performance was strongest where candidates addressed all bullet points, maintained tense accuracy, and supported their ideas with opinions and justifications. The grammar-based gap-fill revealed weaker understanding of irregular verbs and compound tenses.

Ongoing attention to grammatical accuracy, question interpretation, and structured response planning remains key. Regular practice with verb forms, tense recognition, and rephrasing strategies will help candidates meet the linguistic and communicative demands of the paper with greater confidence and precision.

