

FRENCH

Paper 3015/01
Translation and Composition

General comments

Overall the Examiners were impressed by much of the work they saw and there were a number of extremely good scripts towards the top of the range. Only a relatively small number of candidates had clearly been inappropriately entered for the Examination. There were some excellent answers to the essay questions which used a wide range of lexis and syntax though frequently the writing was inaccurate. Candidates should be reminded that a broad and fluent command of the material is highly commendable and will be well rewarded, but that accuracy in writing is absolutely essential for full credit to be given. The translation into French was once again a very popular choice and many candidates are to be congratulated on the high standard they achieved in this question; they had clearly worked hard to acquire a good range of vocabulary and grammatical structures and there were many very good marks indeed which frequently mirrored, or in some cases exceeded, the marks gained for the essay. Set against this was the fact that many candidates wasted marks through failing to read the English carefully and translate exactly what is there. A small number found the demands of this question beyond them and scored poorly.

As usual, it was clear that candidates had been well prepared for this examination, but each year many still jeopardise their chances of success by ignoring the clearly stated instructions. For each essay question, candidates are instructed quite specifically and unambiguously that they must not write more than 150 words. Large numbers of candidates persist in ignoring this instruction and often exceed this number by an enormous margin – this year, it was common to find essays of anything between 200 and 500 words. It would appear either that candidates do not read the rubric or that they do not believe the Examiners will exact any penalty. Centres are therefore asked to emphasise to their candidates in the strongest possible terms that the rubric is unequivocal and that nothing whatsoever is taken into account after the 150 word limit is reached for either Language or Communication - no tolerance at all is applied. Thus, those writing at great length will certainly be penalised by losing Communication marks - indeed all 5 marks can easily be lost with very long essays which do not begin to address the required points within the first 150 words. Furthermore, by writing at excessive length, candidates clearly will not have the time to check their work as carefully as they should in order to minimise the incidence of error.

Each essay question has quite specific guidelines regarding its content – either the pictures for **Question 1** or clearly stated rubric points for the 3 options of **Question 2**. The word count will start at the beginning of the answer for **Question 1** and immediately after the given opening phrase for **Question 2**. Candidates who ignore the instruction to start their essay after the given phrase are liable to be penalised. Any material which does not clearly relate to the content guidelines for any essay will remain as part of the word count but will be treated as irrelevant and will gain no marks for either Communication or Accuracy.

A further continuing point of concern is that some candidates fail to observe the rubric by answering *three* questions instead of the *two* that are clearly required. No advantage will be gained by doing this. Indeed, a small number answered two questions from **Question 2** in clear contravention of the rubric.

Thus, Centres are strongly urged to remind their candidates that the instructions in the question paper mean precisely what they say and that marks are likely to be affected where these instructions are ignored.

The vast majority of scripts were well and neatly presented and this was, as always, much appreciated by the Examiners. However, a number of cases of poor presentation with messy and unclear handwriting were noted. Candidates should be reminded, particularly if they make alterations to their script, that, while Examiners will always try to be tolerant, illegibility and ambiguous writing are not credited.

Communication Marks (Questions 1 and 2 only): Each essay has a maximum score of 5 available for successful communication of relevant points in unambiguous, but not necessarily completely accurate French. It should be noted that, while Examiners show considerable tolerance of faulty spelling and grammatical inaccuracy when awarding Communication marks, a mark will not be given for a phrase containing a verb form which is so inaccurate that the meaning becomes unclear. Poor handling of verbs was by far the most significant factor preventing the award of Communication marks. In order to score 5 marks, candidates must make clear reference to at least five of the pictures in **Question 1** and to all the given rubric points in **Question 2**. Lengthy essays will therefore almost invariably be penalised if they fail to cover one or more of the later points or pictures.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1: Picture Story

This was a popular choice. In most cases, the story appeared to be clear, though some candidates produced overlong introductions. It was intended that the story would start with a reference to two people (probably father and son though various other interpretations were offered, and accepted). They were driving along a country road in their van in inclement weather. A certain amount of description of what had preceded this (going into town to do some shopping, having spent the day at work, etc.), is permissible but lengthy introductory material should be avoided as it will not score any extra Communication points and may be treated as irrelevant if taken to excess. On rounding a bend, they came across a branch blown down from a tree and blocking the road. They had to stop and get out of the vehicle and then debated what to do. They decided to take the branch home with them on the top of the vehicle to use as firewood. On arriving home, they were greeted by wife/mother and then cut up the branch into logs which were used to light a fire in the lounge. Most candidates started their narrative at the appropriate point, but some wrote a lengthy background scenario to explain what had happened before this, often including an account of basic morning routine (getting up and washed, having breakfast, etc. before deciding to go out in the van). As pointed out above, this is not a good technique as no Communication marks will be awarded for ideas not suggested by the pictures. The narrative was frequently competently executed but dwelling at too great a length on the earlier part of the story inevitably led to loss of the later Communication points for many candidates. This could very easily make a difference to the final grade. Those who kept within the word limit generally had no difficulty scoring the maximum of 5 for Communication.

The conventional third person narrative approach was often adopted, but many chose to write in the first person from the standpoint of one of the two people in the van. This was, of course, perfectly acceptable.

The quality of the language used was variable but many candidates showed confident use of the necessary vocabulary as well as a variety of appropriate structures. Most candidates knew the basic words required by this set of pictures, but there were a number of deficiencies. *Arbre* was frequently misspelt; *bûche*, although clearly printed on the paper as an item of vocabulary meaning *log* was far too frequently used throughout the story for the branch. “*Van*” was possibly more difficult, but *voiture* and *camion* were readily accepted where *camionnette* was not known. *Couper* was not always known but, pleasingly, among stronger candidates, *scier* and *scie* both appeared in the description for the fifth picture. In the final picture, candidates were usually able to incorporate words such as *feu*, *cheminée*, *allumer*, *s’installer*, *canapé*, and *s’endormir/dormir*. It should be noted that a good range of vocabulary will always score highly as will complex syntax – use of infinitive constructions and present and past participles, for example. However, not all candidates managed tense usage successfully and there was frequent confusion between the Imperfect and the Perfect/Past Historic. The Present, of course, was unacceptable as the narrative tense. The Pluperfect was not always handled correctly, either not being used when it was required or, occasionally, being constantly used without justification. Basic syntactical errors were common. These included inconsistency in the spelling and gender of nouns, sometimes in consecutive lines; missing agreements on adjectives; poor use of object pronouns – the wrong pronoun and/or in the wrong place – *ils lui ont mis sur le toit* (sic), *ils ont lui montré la branche* (sic); wrong agreement of verbs with their subject – *ils a ramassé la branche*, *mon père et moi sont partis* (sic). Minor common errors were confusion between *car*, *comme* and *quand*; between *très* and *trop*, *on* and *ont*, *ce* and *se* and *ces* and *ses*.

Question 2

(a) Letter

This was answered less frequently than the other two options. Most candidates understood the task and often covered the required points very well. However, a few candidates failed to follow the guidelines or wrote about the given points at excessive length. Candidates were, for example, required for the first point to mention an example of how they helped - a detailed description of all aspects of last year's visit was not required, and was deemed irrelevant. Five clear points were mentioned in the rubric and all had to be covered by a discrete statement containing a verb to qualify for the award of the five Communication marks. Candidates are reminded that for all **Question 2** essays the opening phrase is given and should be copied out before starting the main body of the essay. Candidates should not ignore this instruction and launch into a pre-learnt opening, as this will not be credited. A reference to the help given on the previous visit was required to open the letter, to be followed by a statement of what aspect of the stay the candidate had particularly enjoyed – *“I liked the scenery, the peace of the countryside, the animals; the work was interesting”*, etc.. They were then asked to talk about their plans to camp on the farm and to say when they would like to come. The final point asked for a reference to the work they could do – almost anything was accepted as long as it did not directly repeat the information given in the opening statement.

The majority dealt in a satisfactory manner with the points outlined above. Some rubric points will, of course, invite greater length than others, but a single, clear reference in an acceptable tense is sufficient for the award of a Communication mark. Candidates should avoid dwelling at excessive length on any one rubric point in order to ensure that they deal with all five before reaching the word limit.

Candidates who started with the given opening followed immediately by relevant treatment of the rubric points usually covered the material appropriately. Some, however, in spite of being given the lead-in, turned to a conventional letter opening formula, including lengthy enquiries about the health of the farmer and his family. This resulted in them quickly running out of words when trying to cover the actual rubric points. They should be encouraged to avoid doing this. The best candidates were able to express their ideas in a range of appropriate and accurate French which gained high marks for Language. Competence in handling verbs is clearly vital here if a high score is to be gained and this was not always evident. Many candidates, in particular, seem to have little appreciation of the difference between the Perfect and Imperfect tenses. It should also be noted that the Past Historic is not accepted in a letter. Correct handling of the other linguistic features mentioned in connection with **Question 1** is equally important as marks for Language are only awarded for accurate usage and not for “near-misses”.

(b) Dialogue

This was a popular choice and was often well handled, the topic of a visit to the doctor being reasonably relevant to candidates' own experience. The best candidates dealt with the points exactly as stated and in the order in which they appeared. They were asked to state what was wrong with them. The doctor then asked them something about their daily routine, which was answered (*“Do you watch a lot of television? - No, I prefer to go out and meet my friends”*). He then gave reassurance: *“It's not serious”* and gave advice for keeping healthy: *“Eat plenty of vegetables”*.

It was felt that a conversation based on presumably well-practised topics should be within the compass of virtually all candidates and, indeed, there were some competent performances. Candidates must ensure, however, that they deal with precisely the rubric point given – many had the doctor asking about things other than the candidate's daily routine (*“How long have you had this problem”*). Candidates should also beware of over-using basic phrases – *“Ca va? - Oui, merci, ça va – et vous?” “Au revoir, docteur - Au revoir, passez une bonne journée. Et vous aussi, passez une bonne journée”*. Impression marks are likely to be lowered for material that is excessively repetitive.

It should be noted that only the actual words of the conversation should be written (with an indication, of course, of which person is speaking). Any kind of narrative introduction, interjections or description via reported speech is contrary to the rubric and will be ignored in the marking.

(c) Narrative

This was possibly the most popular of all the essays and many candidates seemed to relish the scope it gave to their imaginations. As a result of being given the opening words, there were fewer irrelevant preambles before the account of the incident concerning the injured animal – though, as with the other essay questions, some candidates dealt with the earlier points at far too great a length and thus ran out of words before completing the Communication tasks.

Candidates were required to describe their reaction on seeing the animal - what they felt (shock, horror, pity, anger, etc.) not what they did. That was needed for the second point: “*I picked up the dog*”, “*I rang my parents...*”. The third mark was given for any relevant subsequent action: “*My parents helped me tend to the animal*”. “*We called the vet*”. By definition, the rubric point “*La suite de l’incident*” must refer to the end of the account and is thus frequently lost if the story is too long. As a result, many promising candidates lost 2 vital Communication points. The better scripts gave enjoyable and often highly graphic accounts of the various misfortunes that had befallen a whole range of animals (cats and dogs, of course, being the most common) and often with bad cuts or broken bones. Many candidates were fortunate to have a friend or parent who was a vet! Those who kept within the word count generally referred successfully to the appearance on the scene of the owner but, sadly, the majority had already run out of words by that point. The minority who were able to include the final point within the word count generally mentioned a satisfied owner giving them heartfelt thanks or a reward and a number seemed to have made a new friend either in the form of the animal or its owner.

The best stories were lively and fluently written, using a range of appropriate vocabulary and structure. Tense usage was sometimes suspect with, again, confusion between the Imperfect and Perfect/Past Historic, unnecessary use of the Pluperfect and careless errors in other areas already mentioned which, of course, cost vital Language marks.

Question 3: Translation into French

This was again the most popular of all the options and often produced work of a high standard. There was frequently some level of parity between the essay mark and the one gained for the translation - though there were, of course, many exceptions – and, in a number of cases, the mark gained for the translation was higher than the essay mark. The vocabulary and grammatical structures required seemed largely to be available to many candidates though some of the structures, inevitably, proved to be more challenging. Where marks were lost, in many cases this was caused by a lack of careful reading rather than insufficient vocabulary – confusion of “the” and “a”, for example or words simply missed out. While the marking principles are identical (ticks are given for correct units of language and errors are ignored) it should be pointed out that this is a rather different exercise from the essay. The linguistic demands for the translation are very precise and, in most cases, the English will transfer directly into French without the need for paraphrase, circumlocution or drastic changes in word order. Candidates are advised always to translate exactly what the English says and not to seek to use alternative words if this is not necessary. The Examiners will not credit French which strays too far from the sense of the English original without good reason.

Although most candidates coped well, difficulties were experienced with a number of items:

Paragraph A “I don’t have much money” – “*beaucoup*” was not widely known – often translated as *trop / assez / beaucoup* (sic);
“abroad” was not well known;
“a fortnight” – often translated as “*une nuit*”;
“delighted” – frequently “(très) *content*” which did not have the force of “*ravi*”.

Candidates should note that, whatever gender they ascribe to the narrator via the agreement shown for *ravi*, must be maintained consistently for any agreements later in the piece – i.e. the agreement on “*inquiète*” in paragraph 5 must be the same as the first usage or it will be penalised.

Paragraph B The tenses were not always well handled, particularly the conditionals “would help him” and “I would have ...”.

Very few candidates knew that “holiday” is plural in French – “*des vacances gratuites*”. The adjective was not well known, frequently becoming “*libres*”

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- Paragraph C “in the country” – “*campagne*” was not always known, often becoming “*dans le pays*”. “pretty little town” – the adjective “pretty” was often carelessly omitted or read as “beautiful”, which is not the same.
“local attractions” – two easy words but frequently errors were seen in lack of any agreement on the adjective.
“interesting villages” – “*intéressants*” was both frequently misspelled and also lacked the agreement.
- Paragraph D This paragraph was probably the most successful of all and was often virtually error-free in the first half. However, the participle “While walking...” was often poorly handled.

“In the street” too often became “*sur la rue*” which was not acceptable.
- Paragraph E By contrast, this was the most difficult paragraph. Only the best candidates successfully coped with the first two sentences. The Pluperfects were missed, the reflexive pronoun “s” became the meaningless “c” and the pronoun “Had I left IT” was misplaced.

“*Sur*” was not accepted for “on the train”.
“I would have to sleep” – the Conditional of the modal verb proved too difficult for most.
“*Station*” was the wrong word – it should have been “*gare*”.
“After getting into” – the past infinitive “*Après être monté...*” was not widely known but should be within the compass of a good O Level candidate.
“on the floor” – few candidates knew the basic term “*par terre*”.
Conversely, and pleasingly, many had the correct “*Quel soulagement*” for the final point.

FRENCH

Paper 3015/02
Reading Comprehension

General comments

In general, candidates seemed appropriately prepared for this paper and the greater majority of them performed very well. Presentation was good, although handwriting was occasionally very small making it difficult to read.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercice 1

Many candidates did extremely well in this first exercise, although occasional gaps in vocabulary could be detected. Candidates sometimes had difficulty with the following questions:

Question 2 Some candidates did not seem to understand *equitation*.

Question 5 A number of candidates selected **D** in answer to this question, as they either did not understand *patinoire* or guessed that the *100m* given in the question referred to running a hundred metres.

Exercice 2

This exercise was done very well by the majority of candidates.

Exercice 3

Although many candidates performed well in this exercise it was clear that some lacked the vocabulary or failed to read carefully enough to make correct choices. **Questions 11** and **14** were sometimes answered incorrectly.

Section 2

Exercice 1

Many candidates performed very well on this exercise. Problems sometimes arose with the following questions:

Question 19 Some candidates answered this question by saying that H el ene now had some new friends, rather than saying that she was now enjoying herself.

Question 22 Some candidates wrote that the choice of the beach was because it was a place others did not frequent.

Exercice 2

In general, candidates performed well in this exercise, producing very good responses.

Problems sometimes arose with the following questions:

Question 25 was generally answered appropriately, although some candidates clearly did not understand *m etier* as they wrote that Marcello was Italian/came from Italy as a response.

Question 26 was often answered correctly. A few candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers, which sometimes unfortunately conveyed the idea that Marcello found it difficult to accept the villagers rather than vice versa.

Question 29 Candidates sometimes suggested that the purpose of the meeting was to go on a picnic.

Question 30 A number of incorrect responses were given.

Question 31 posed no real problems, although a few candidates only wrote that *he* had died, when they ought to have named *Marcello*.

Question 32 Some candidates failed to convey the idea that the association was created to remember/not forget Marcello.

Question 35 Some candidates gave only a partial answer e.g. that the money was for cookery lessons, without saying for whom or that they were to be held outdoors.

Section 3

Responses to this exercise were mixed. Many candidates performed very well, but a minority of candidates did not seem to understand what was required and produced responses which seemed to be arbitrary.

The most frequent errors occurred in the following questions:

Question 40 Relatively few candidates supplied *où*; the greater majority supplied either *quand* or *qu'*.

Question 47 Very few candidates supplied *aux*. The most frequent answers were *au*, *les* and *leur(s)*.

Question 48 Many wrote *lui*, *leurs* or *les*.

Question 51 Few candidates supplied *eu*. Most wrote *fait* or *faire*.