

Summary of SQA Course Reports for Advanced Higher Modern Languages 2017

Reading/Translation

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination, and there were some outstanding performances. Candidates were clearly well prepared for the exam and familiar with the format.

Candidates performed particularly well in the reading paper, although some candidates lost marks by failing to provide sufficient detail in their answers.

There was significant improvement in the overall purpose question with a number of good performances. However, some candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers in which they repeated most of the information they had given in answer to the comprehension questions, rather than addressing the question and highlighting the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the writer. Some included quotes from the text in their answer, but just repeated these in English instead of using them to develop their argument.

Although there was an improvement in translation this year, many candidates lost marks by not translating tenses accurately and failing to pay attention to detail.

French

In reading, the comprehension questions were successfully attempted by most candidates. However, the overall purpose question proved more difficult for less able candidates who were unable to draw effective inferences. Some candidates simply paraphrased the content of the passage. The translation proved challenging for some candidates.

Gaelic

Most candidate scoped very well with the reading paper and most managed to provide good answers to the overall purpose question and the translation. However, some candidates did not answer questions in sufficient detail and a number of candidates did not achieve the maximum number of marks for the overall purpose question.

German

Candidates tackled reading questions well with only a small number not attempting all questions. However, the overall purpose question and translation continue to be challenging for some candidates.

Italian

The comprehension questions in the reading paper were generally well done, although performance in the overall purpose question was inconsistent. The translation was challenging in parts and there were some instances of poor English expression.

Spanish

Candidates responded fairly well to the comprehension questions paper, but did not respond as well to the overall purpose question, as they are still not providing a sufficiently reflective or analytical response. Many wrote at length but merely recounted the facts outlined in the text. In a number of cases, the quality of the English was poor, and answers tended to lack structure. Candidates tended to find it challenging to express their ideas through the use of 'inferential' type language or to focus on the writer's techniques or issues such as tenses used, the structure of the text, the use of statistics/direct speech and real life examples. Some candidates did make use of the statistics and expert opinion but failed to mention the intended impact of these techniques on the reader. A number of candidates found some of the sense units in the translation fairly demanding.

Listening and Discursive Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidates performed very well in the listening papers, although some candidates were unable to retain sufficient details required to answer the questions accurately, often demonstrating an understanding of only part of the information. Some also misunderstood key words.

In the Discursive Writing, performance on the whole was good and there were some outstanding pieces of writing. Candidates performed well when they used learned material appropriately and essays were relevant.

However, some candidates failed to answer the question appropriately. In those instances, the content was thin and preventing them from achieving higher marks.

French

In listening, the more able candidates performed strongly.

In the discursive writing, candidates who were able to manipulate language and use a range of tenses and constructions confidently performed well.

Gaelic

Some candidates performed very well in this paper, although many candidates lost marks by not paying enough attention to detail in their answers.

In discursive writing responses were not of as high a standard as previously as the accuracy of the writing was poor.

German

In listening, some very basic errors detracted from the overall candidate performance.

Discursive writing proves challenging. Although there were fewer irrelevant essays this year, there were some instances of grammatical inaccuracy in adjective endings, verb endings and word order.

Italian

Listening seemed to pose few problems and there were some excellent performances in discursive writing. However, some candidates demonstrated weakness in grammar and failed to proofread what they had written.

Spanish

Candidates performed reasonably well in the listening component.

There were some very good essays in Discursive Writing, which demonstrated flair, appropriate use of idiomatic language and accurate expression of opinions. Most essays were fairly well structured and written in paragraphs. Candidates generally achieved good results when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer and when their essays were relevant to the question.

Candidates achieved best results when they fully addressed the titles and came up with well-structured essays, containing coherent language and interesting ideas. However, some candidates were penalised as a result of not addressing the question fully and relying instead on the reproduction of learned material or an irrelevant essay. There were issues with basic grammar such as incorrect verb endings and inaccurate or inappropriate use of the subjunctive. Misuse of the dictionary was also evident in the essays, which achieved 20 or less.

Portfolio

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidates generally performed better in the portfolio than previously, although selecting an appropriate essay title remains problematic for many candidates. Some candidates offered little in the way of analysis and simply retold the story of the text/film they had chosen to study. The weaker performances were those where candidates were descriptive, rather than critical and analytical. This was often the result of a poor choice of essay title.

French

Candidates who addressed an appropriate essay title in the portfolio performed best. Performance was not so good where candidates attempted to compare two films that had little relation to each other or where essay titles were unnecessarily complex. Careless, informal language and incorrect quotations detracted from some performances in this component.

Gaelic

The standard of the portfolio was not as high as in previous years. Most were of a good standard but many of the portfolio essays did not contain sufficient analysis.

German

Candidates performed slightly better in the portfolio than previously. There was an increasing number of different pieces of work this year, but an inappropriate essay title can disadvantage some candidates.

Italian

The portfolio was of a good standard and some exceeded the level expected at Advanced Higher, although some essay titles were poorly phrased or too general.

Spanish

Presentation of portfolio work was good overall. The most successful essays were those that had a question/title which genuinely led candidates to adopt an analytical approach or allowed for two sides of an argument to be developed. Essays also often worked better when there was an element of comparing and contrasting,

Essays that stood out were well structured, displayed a good level of English, and provided accurate and justified quotation from the text/screenplay which supported the arguments being presented. Few candidates incurred a penalty for exceeding the word limit or failing to produce a bibliography. Many candidates had essay titles that were too vague, wordy or over-complicated.

Portfolios in which candidates attempted a comparison between a literary text and its film adaptation were generally poorly done as the film tended to be treated more superficially and less critically.

A large number of candidate do not proof-read their work or use appropriate, formal English.

Talking

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

In the performance of talking, performance was mostly excellent with many candidates achieving full marks. The majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. However, some conversations were over-prepared.

French

In the performance of talking, the majority of candidates had been well prepared with some outstanding performances where candidates were well prepared. They often performed strongly where an informative STL form had been received by the Visiting Assessor, and less well where centres had attempted to script the conversation on the STL form or where it contained sparse information.

Gaelic

In talking, most candidates did well and there were examples of candidates who were able to sustain detailed discussions using complex and sophisticated language. However, some candidates were unable to sustain conversation and, in some instances, relied too much on pre-learned material.

German

In talking, candidates were well prepared and confident. Candidates should understand that they cannot just be allowed to repeat learned material.

Italian

Performance in talking was very good and the majority of candidates were well prepared. In some cases, candidates were not able to improvise and did not seem to have undertaken thorough and detailed enough preparation.

Spanish

Most candidates were comfortable and confident in the language. Fluency and readily taking the initiative were features of good performances.

The vast majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many appeared motivated to do well, made good use of learned material, were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses, and also incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation. However, some candidates still have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material to cope with questions they are asked.

Advice to Centres

General

- Centres should encourage teachers to work with other Modern Languages colleagues/ departments to share best practice
- Centres are encouraged to share detailed marking instructions, pegged-mark and performance descriptors, and course reports with candidates, including Understanding Standards and Professional Development Workshop materials.
- Access to a suitable dictionary for this level is crucial.
- Candidates should be reminded that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure they do not lose marks.

Reading/Translation

- Candidates should be advised to answer the questions in the order in which they come and should not be tempted to start with the translation or the overall purpose question.
- Candidates should divide time equally between the comprehension questions, the overall purpose question and the translation.
- Candidates should be reminded of the importance of how they express answers in English for the comprehension and overall purpose question.
- Centres should ensure candidates develop dictionary skills, particularly for translation, to ensure they choose the meaning that best fits the context.
- Candidates should ensure that they answer the comprehension questions succinctly with relevant detail, avoiding the temptation to translate chunks of language.
- For the overall purpose question, centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the text and not just provide factual information or repeat the answers to their comprehension questions.
- Answers to the overall purpose question should provide a balance between identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques used. Answers should be well structured and quotations should be appropriate and relevant.
- More attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, care should be taken with recognising and accurately translating tenses.
- Candidates should be reminded that information from the translation section should not be included in answers to the comprehension questions.
- In the translation, candidates should also check carefully for accuracy and possible omissions, especially of single words, as these can often incur a penalty.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read and review their translation when they complete it, to ensure it makes sense in English.

Listening and Discursive Writing

- Candidates should be encouraged to develop and practice listening skills by accessing materials on-line, especially short news items, and by being given opportunities to practice listening in class.
- Teachers are advised to use the target language in the classroom as much as possible
- Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible. They should try to avoid prejudging the content. They should pay close attention to the number of marks for each question
- Teachers could advise candidates on how they should use the time they have when looking at questions before they hear the recording and discuss strategies for note-taking
- Centres should encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully and to construct a relevant and personal response in which they may draw upon learned material that must be relevant to the essay title.
- Candidates should be encouraged to avoid high-frequency language and to adopt a strategy to incorporate sophisticated language appropriate to Advanced Higher level and to the subject matter of the essay.
- Candidates should be encouraged to build up word banks of phrases for use in their essays.
- Candidates should be reminded that accuracy is important in discursive writing. Candidates should proof read essays to check for basic errors in verb tenses and endings, adjectival agreement, genders, spelling and accents. Teachers should ensure that candidates have more detailed and frequent grammar input.
- In discursive writing, candidates should focus on structure and reveal their conclusions and personal opinions at the end of the essay and not the start of the essay.

Portfolio

- Candidates should write the title of their essay at the top of the first page to ensure it is more visible
- The selection of essay titles is of crucial importance and should generate a discursive, evaluative approach.
- Essay titles should not be too contrived, vague, over-ambitious or incapable of being properly addressed within the prescribed word-limit.
- Centres should negotiate appropriate essay titles, not impose the same title for all candidates.
- Candidates should try to make their essay title as specific as possible and to research the area as deeply as possible. They should avoid choosing two very similar pieces of literature as that will limit their ability to compare and contrast.
- Centres should share with candidates the assessment criteria for portfolio writing so that they know what is expected in terms of content, analytical approach and structure.
- Bibliographies should be of an appropriate level. There is too much reliance on Wikipedia, which is not always the most accurate of sources.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have read the original text and not the English translation. Literary texts chosen must have been written for native speakers of the language studied.
- Candidates should stick to the word-count, as they otherwise risk incurring a penalty.
- The quality of many of the portfolio pieces would benefit from the inclusion of more quotations in the target language to support the arguments being developed. Translating these quotes into English should be avoided. Quotations from a literary text or film or any other source which is solely in English could detract from the content and may even lead to the candidate being awarded 0.
- Centres should discuss the use of critical terminology with their students to enable them to improve the quality of their expression in English.
- Candidates should be reminded to use formal and accurate in their essays. Careful attention should be paid to spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quoting from literary texts.
- Candidates should be reminded to refer back to the essay title in their conclusion.

Talking

- Centre should ensure that candidates have completed the STL form appropriately to allow Visiting Assessors to prepare well in advance of the assessment
- Centres are reminded that the STL form must not be used to present a suggested scripted conversation
- Centres should continue to train candidates in discussion techniques in the language to enable them to deal with questions that go beyond learned material.
- Centres should ensure that candidates do not rely too much on pre-learned material to avoid a tendency to deliver mini-speeches.
- Centres should sustain the good work in preparing candidates for this assessment, but should focus on grammatical accuracy, particularly with regard to use of verbs (especially the preterite and the perfect), gender of nouns, adjectival agreements and the subjunctive.
- Candidates should be encouraged to build up banks of phrases for use in their Talking assessment
- Centres should ensure that candidates have opportunities to practice talking to develop the natural element of interaction.