

Summary of SQA Course Reports for Higher Modern Languages 2017

Reading/Translation

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

In reading, candidates' performance was highly satisfactory, although some candidates did not include sufficient detail in their answers. The overall purpose question was very well done, although some candidates only translated parts of the text without making comments. Some candidates lost marks in the translation because of lack of accuracy in translating articles, conjunctions and by misusing tenses. Some candidates did not include enough detail in their answers.

French

Overall, candidates performed well in the reading paper and few candidates scored less than half marks. The overall performance was down slightly from that of previous years. Some candidates lost marks by not writing enough detail in their answers or by putting correct information in the wrong question. In some instances, candidates lost marks due to poor English expression, which left the meaning of their answer unclear and difficult to understand. Questions that required less detailed answers were tackled well by the majority of candidates. Most candidates gained at least one mark in the overall purpose question, but it was not particularly well done by a number of candidates who failed to make an assertion, give a reason and back it up with relevant detail from the text. Many candidates lost marks by quoting parts of the text in French as a means of justifying their answer. The translation was generally well done and most candidates gained at least half of the available marks. However, some candidates lost marks because of lack of accuracy, omitting words, and using the dictionary incorrectly.

Gaelic

Candidates generally performed well in this paper. Most candidates gained at least one mark out of two in the overall purpose question, although some candidates did not provide enough information to achieve full marks. Most candidates performed well in the translation.

German

Overall, candidates coped well with the reading paper, although some candidates lost marks by not writing sufficient detail in their answers. In the overall purpose question, most candidates merely quoted from the text rather than looking at the question in a holistic way. The translation proved demanding for the majority of candidates, with very few gaining full marks.

Italian

Overall, candidates performed well in the reading paper. Questions that did not demand a lot of detail were better done than questions which did. However, some candidates did not provide sufficient detail or mistranslated words in their answers. In the overall purpose question, most candidates gained at least one mark, but a number failed to answer the question fully. The majority of candidates coped well with the translation, despite some of the sense units being challenging.

Spanish

Candidates performed particularly well in the reading paper, although some lost marks by not providing sufficient detail in their answers. On the whole, the overall purpose question was very well done. Candidates were successful in providing an assertion and a justification.

Those who used quotes in Spanish translated them, which meant they did not lose marks. However, a considerable number of candidates spent too much time on this and wrote lengthy answers, which meant they had less time to spend on the translation. The translation was well done by candidates.

Urdu

Candidates' overall performance in the reading component was very good, although a couple of questions proved demanding. Some candidates found the translation a little challenging.

Directed Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

A number of candidates failed to address all bullet points and some failed to address both parts of the first bullet point, for which they were penalised.

French

In Directed Writing, neither scenario was favoured over the other. Candidates generally coped better with the more predictable bullet points and there were very few poor performances, but very few strong performances.

Very few candidates failed to tackle all the bullet points. Some candidates wrote accurately, demonstrating that they could use a wide variety of structures and a range of tenses.

Although there were some good responses, a number of essays lacked detailed and complex structures, a variety of tenses and compound sentences.

Lack of accuracy in spelling, genders, plurals, accents, and adjectival agreement continues to pose problems for some candidates, as does the formation of the perfect and imperfect tenses.

In some instances, candidates incorporated irrelevant material. There was evidence of poor dictionary use particularly in the unpredictable bullet points.

Gaelic

The majority of candidates attempted to address all the bullet points, although some lost marks by omitting bullet points. Answers varied from high quality to poor. Some candidates performed very well and addressed all the bullet points accurately, using a wide variety of verbs and tenses.

However, there is still evidence of mistakes in regular and irregular verbs, prepositional phrases and adjectives. Many candidates also continue to misuse the dictionary.

German

Some candidates developed the four bullet points very well, and created and added their own ideas and knowledge about localities in German cities and culture, which gave their essays a special flair. There were some outstanding performances. However, some candidates could have provided more detail in some of the bullet points.

Most candidates showed good control of the perfect tense and German sentence structure and made good use of pre-learned material

Italian

Most candidates opted for Scenario 1 as it was on the topic of work, which is familiar to the majority of candidates. In both scenarios, many candidates provided extra detail and went beyond the minimum requirements. There were some outstanding performances. Candidates used the perfect

tense well and many included other tenses. Those who used pre-learned material did so appropriately.

Some candidates lost marks by not addressing the two details in the first bullet point.

Spanish

Candidates performed well in Directed Writing, although a considerable number of candidates struggled to use the preterite and the imperfect tenses accurately.

Urdu

The Directed writing was completed to a good standard. Most candidates covered all four bullet points. Candidates were well prepared and wrote very good essays.

Some candidates were able to demonstrate accuracy and detail in addressing all the bullet points, and many candidates were able to use memorised material correctly when addressing the predictable bullet points.

Listening/Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

The topic of mobile phones in the listening was a familiar one, and there were some outstanding performances. However, some candidates relied on predicting answers and guesswork, and some lost marks by not including enough detail in their answers

There were many outstanding performances in the writing section. Some very able candidates produced well-structured and accurate pieces of writing containing an excellent range and variety of language structures.

In some instances, candidates appeared to be translating directly from English or over-relied on the dictionary to help them create new sentences, which was often unsuccessful.

French

In general, the monologue was better tackled than the dialogue. There were very few instances where candidates failed to respond to questions, and most candidates gained at least half marks. Questions, which required little detail, or where there was optionality, were particularly well done. However, many candidates used their general knowledge to answer questions rather than focusing on what was being said in the text, particularly in the dialogue. Many candidates also lost marks by not writing enough detail in their answers.

In the Writing section of the paper, there were more poor performances than in previous years and few very good performances. There is still evidence of dictionary misuse and mother tongue and Spanish interference. In a number of cases, writing is still characterised by poor use of tenses, spelling, accents and adjectival agreement. In a number of cases, candidates wrote an essay, which was more appropriate to directed writing rather than expressing their opinion on the types of holidays they preferred and why. Some candidates included irrelevant material, which did not address the task.

Gaelic

There was a wide range of performances in the listening, which is the skill that challenges most candidates.

In writing, there were a number of outstanding performances, in which candidates were able to justify their personal response by using critical terminology effectively.

Overall, candidates generally performed adequately with the set questions, but some essays were too short and general and did not focus on the specific requirements of the question.

German

The topic areas of ageing population and the advantages of being part of the EU appeared to be concepts with which a number of candidates were not familiar.

Candidates lost marks by misunderstanding some of the vocabulary or by not writing enough detail in their answers.

There were some excellent and very good performances in both parts of the listening, but some candidates appeared to be guessing rather than understanding.

Some candidates lost marks in the listening questions as they did not recognise numbers and tenses correctly.

In writing, many candidates produced some good and very good responses demonstrating correct use of present tense, future tense and/or conditional tense, using detailed and complex language very successfully. There were some outstanding performances where candidates made good use of pre-learned material to express their opinion and to include some very authentic German phrases.

Italian

Overall, candidates performed well in this paper. In listening, the dialogue prove to be quite straightforward, but the monologue proved challenging. Questions that were worth one mark were done exceptionally well by the vast majority of candidates, but many lost marks by not paying sufficient attention to detail in other questions.

In writing, there were examples of outstanding performances, many of which went beyond Higher level. However, a few candidates misunderstood the subject of the essay and wrote an essay on marriage.

Spanish

Candidates performed particularly well in the Listening paper. They tended to find the monologue more challenging than the dialogue. Not providing enough information and lack of detail let some candidates down.

In writing, those candidates who engaged in the topic with the level of language accuracy and resource expected at Higher level, did very well, and those candidates who were less secure in writing still gained enough marks to pass. Some candidates, however, seem to find it difficult to conjugated the present tense of verbs.

Urdu

Most candidates performed well in the listening paper and many attempted to give the appropriate level of detail. Some candidates underlined key words in the questions and took notes rather than trying to write full answers, which helped them.

In writing, there was evidence of a good range of vocabulary and structures and some very complex language showing a good degree of accuracy and fluency.

Talking

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidate performance overall was very high. Candidates had the ability to make presentations that were strong in terms of content, accuracy and language resource. They demonstrated a good grasp of Chinese grammar. Comprehension and pronunciation were good which allowed candidates to communicate effectively. However, some candidates found it challenging to use colloquial spoken Chinese.

French

Candidates performed very well in the presentation section, often better or much better than in the presentation. Some candidates used language and structures that went beyond the level of demand.

The language used by some candidates at Higher was not detailed and complex enough, including in the presentation section. Overall, the conversation section was less successful and some conversations were significantly shorter than expected. This meant candidates were unable to demonstrate a variety of structures, verb tenses and vocabulary. Pronunciation often impeded communication.

Gaelic

Candidates performed well in the presentation and were well prepared, displaying a range of vocabulary, tenses and language structures. However, candidates tend to find the conversation more demanding than the presentation.

German

Overall, candidates performed well, with most performing better in the presentation than in the conversation. Many presentations were well structured and fluent, but in some instances candidates struggled to cope with the complexity of the language of the topic they had chosen. A few presentations were too short or too long which also affected candidates' performance. Where interlocutors used a wide variety of questions in the conversation section, this often helped candidates avoid repeating what they had already said in their presentation.

Italian

Candidates demonstrated accurate handling of detailed and complex language and a range of tenses appropriate to Higher. They responded effectively to a supportive interlocutor. Overall, conversations were interactive, which allowed candidates to demonstrate their ability to sustain a conversation.

Spanish

The overall quality of candidate performance was high. Candidates performed very well in the presentation section of the performance. In most of the evidence sampled, candidates were awarded the upper pegged marks (8 or 10). In the conversation section and sustaining the conversation, candidates coped well, with the majority being awarded pegged marks of 12 or 15. With regards to the 'sustaining the conversation' aspect, most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite any errors, and were awarded 5 marks for this aspect.

Urdu

Only a small number of centres were sampled. Therefore, there is no report for this component.

Advice to Centres

General

- Centres should share course reports with candidates, along with the Marking Instructions, to reiterate the level of detail required at Higher level in all papers.
- Candidates who are native speakers of the language should be aware of the structure of the paper and understand the approaches of the exam.
- Candidates should ensure handwriting is legible, as poor handwriting can lead to marks being lost.
- Candidates should be encouraged to leave sufficient time to check their answers at the end of the exam.

Reading/Translation

- Candidates should ensure they pay careful attention to the numbering of the questions, particularly where a question has several parts.
- Centres should ensure that candidates are well prepared to answer the reading questions, and know the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation.
- Centres should encourage candidates to read the passage globally rather than sentence by sentence, in order to gain the full understanding of the whole passage.
- Centres should discourage candidates from doing the translation part of the paper first.
- Candidates should ensure that what they have written makes sense and answers the question they have been asked to answer.
- Candidates should be trained to make an assertion and justify their answer by choosing relevant detail from the passage to gain both points in the overall purpose question. No credit will be given for simply quoting chunks of text in the target language. Candidates should be trained to write succinctly in answering this question. They must draw the meaning from their understanding of the text rather than translating the text.
- Centre should ensure that candidates have as much opportunity as possible to practice translation.
- Candidates should pay particular attention to the articles and tenses used in the translation. They should be reminded not to include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers.

Directed Writing

- Candidates should be reminded to check that they have addressed all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points. They should use learned material that is both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point. They should not rely on the dictionary to invent new sentences but should select, manipulate and recombine learned material.
- Candidates should be encouraged to be more accurate in number, gender, spelling, adjectival agreement and the use of the dictionary.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of past tense verbs, in particular how to conjugate the perfect and imperfect tenses, and when to use these tenses.
- Candidates should be given the opportunity to practise more unpredictable bullet points in class and to be given techniques on how to deal with these bullet points.
- Candidates should be encouraged to address all bullet points in a balanced way, using a variety of tenses and structures, if they wish to achieve high marks.
- In German, centres are encouraged to give candidates writing opportunities from an early stage and to keep consolidating German sentence structure especially regarding the position of the verb.

Listening/Writing

- Candidates should be encouraged to study the heading and questions and the marks allocated to them before listening to the recording.
- Candidates should be discouraged from using their general knowledge to answer the questions.

- Candidates should try to give as much detail as possible in their answers so as not lose marks through lack of accuracy and inaccurate information.
- In writing, candidates should ensure that they understand the questions. There is no need to write an equal number of words for each question.
- Candidates should be discouraged from translating directly from English.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of the present tense and candidates should pay careful attention to number, gender, spelling and adjectival agreement
- Candidates should ensure their essay is relevant. They should express opinions and give reasons for these opinions

Talking

- Candidates should be encouraged to work on their pronunciation, particularly in French and Spanish, so that they can be understood by those who are not their class teachers.
- Centres should ensure that candidates use detailed and complex language at Higher in most parts of the performance.
- Candidates should avoid long lists of more than two or three items (e.g. places in town, school subjects) or repetition of straightforward descriptions (e.g. hair and eyes) are unlikely to allow candidates to use a suitable range of structures and vocabulary.
- In the presentation, candidates should not struggle with the complexity of the language of the topic they have chosen. Centres should provide advice to candidates as to what level of language they should be able to cope with, and should ensure comprehension of their presentation in preparation for delivering it.
- Interlocutors should try to avoid asking closed questions, especially for more able candidates as these are likely to invite very short answers and prevent candidates from demonstrating their full ability.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a variety of strategies for asking questions to be repeated.
- Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and the conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability. Unnecessarily prolonged or significantly short conversations can affect the candidates' performances.
- Centres should ask questions which follow on naturally from the presentation topic chosen by candidates. Where candidates are asked questions about the same topic/context as in their presentation, they are often limited to repeating parts of their presentation in their answers
- Centres should not be overly prescriptive in preparing candidates for the conversation. Conversations should be as spontaneous as possible and should not sound excessively rehearsed.