

Summary of SQA Course Reports for Advanced Higher Modern Languages 2016

Reading/Translation

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination, and there were some outstanding performances, although some candidates lost marks for not providing enough detail in their answers.

The overall purpose question continues to be challenging for candidates. Many simply recounted the content of the passage. A few 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.

In the translation many candidates lost marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles and tenses.

French

Performance in reading was strong overall, although the overall purpose question and the translation were not so well done.

Performance in the comprehension questions was very strong, with only a minority of candidates failing to understand finer points or omitting essential detail to obtain full marks. All candidates managed to answer the comprehension questions satisfactorily within the time set for the exam but a small number of candidates had difficulty in completing the whole paper and did not attempt the overall purpose question.

In answering the overall purpose question, a significant number of candidates tended to produce unnecessarily long answers that were not critical and did not draw on inferences from the text.

The translation proved to be particularly challenging for a significant number of candidates.

Often, candidates did not manage to convey sufficient understanding of the sense units to gain the marks. Some answers were characterised by lack of detail or basic mistakes in tenses, and poor dictionary use.

Gaelic

Candidates coped well and provided good answers to the overall purpose question, having been prepared well for it by centres. They displayed good time management skills, and effectively analysed comprehension questions, distinguishing between relevant and redundant vocabulary. Candidates coped well with the translation question. A number of candidates did not achieve the marks available for question 6 as they did not provide sufficient detail.

German

Candidates tackled all questions well. There were very few who did not attempt all questions. However, the overall purpose question is the question that poses most problems for candidates.

While a number of candidates tackled the question well, a number struggled with the concept of the question, failing to comment on the article as a whole and back up their opinion with specific reference to the text.

For some candidates, translation is a problem area with poor renderings in English.

Italian

There was a wide spread of marks in the comprehension questions. The overall purpose question and translation were poorly done by a few candidates who were obviously short of time, having spent too long on the comprehension questions. There were also some instances of poor English in the translation.

Spanish

Candidates responded fairly well to this paper, especially when answering the comprehension questions. Candidates did not respond well to the overall purpose question, and a number of candidates found some of the sense units in the translation fairly demanding.

Candidates, on the whole, are still not providing a sufficiently reflective or analytical response to this overall purpose question. 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.

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. The most popular choice was the essay on employability.

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

French

Performance was strong overall. Candidates were able to answer factual questions accurately, while often giving enough detail to gain full marks. Candidates found Part B of the listening more demanding and did not write enough detail in their answers.

In the discursive writing, some candidates did not answer the question appropriately or did not demonstrate sufficient control of language structures to express ideas accurately.

The essays titles on multi-cultural society and education were especially popular. Candidates who answered the essay in a structured fashion using language with a degree of sophistication were able to gain very high, if not full marks. Ability to show a control of tenses and express ideas was frequently encountered in strong performances.

Gaelic

Many candidates did not perform as well as would be expected. Centres should ensure that candidates are regularly hearing Gaelic spoken and focus on this area in preparing candidates. Candidates found the language demanding in some of the questions, very few recognised 'foghlam' or 'cànan'.

Discursive writing was of a high standard. However, there were occasions where candidates had not engaged with the questions and produced an essay which had not addressed any of the statements in the exam paper.

German

All questions were tackled by the vast majority of candidates and there were very few irrelevant essays. There were however, a surprising number of very basic errors made. Discursive Writing is demanding of candidates. Although this year saw far fewer irrelevant essays, a small group of candidates continue to attempt to incorporate a pre-learned essay into a given title, often with limited success.

Italian

There were a range of performances in both listening texts and candidates continue to show good skills in note-taking and accurately transcribing their final answers.

In discursive writing, the essay relating to the context of learning was the most popular and there were some very good performances. However, some candidates demonstrated weaknesses in grammar and a lack of effective checking and proof-reading.

Spanish

Candidates performed reasonably well in the listening component.

In discursive writing, the most popular choice was the question on learning. There were some very good essays 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 24 or 20 or less. Essays that were repetitive rarely did better than 24 or 20, and those that did not fully address the question may have only achieved 16 or 12 if it was felt that more than half of the essay was irrelevant.

Portfolio

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Performance in the portfolio was the weakest of all the examination components.

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.

Some candidates merely retold the story, and did not include any critical reflection. Those candidates who chose the Language in Work option often wrote their essay as a work report or diary without analysis, which resulted in a very low mark. Some candidates had very limited references and bibliographies and others were penalised for failing to include a bibliography.

French

The majority of candidates were well prepared, more notably when analysing literary texts. Candidate performance was overall not as strong when analysing a media text, and there was variation to a greater degree in the Language in Work Portfolio. Submissions which took literary texts as their focus produced particularly strong performances. Candidates performed well when they had an opportunity to demonstrate an analytical approach through the choice of an appropriate question; use of English was formal; guidance regarding word limit and bibliography was observed; SQA Guidance was used effectively. Some candidates were penalised for exceeding the word limit or failing to include a bibliography. On occasion, it was also unclear whether the sources accessed had been in the target language.

German

Some titles were a bit too obscure, too general or not personal to the candidate which posed some difficulties for candidates.

Gaelic

Most candidates performed well in the portfolio, using a good range of topics, including some on Media and Language in Work. Candidates from some centres produced portfolios that shared a common theme, each candidate ought to select their individual focus. In cases where an appropriate bibliography had not been included, candidates could not be awarded the upper pegged marks. Some candidates did not clearly state the aim of their study.

Italian

Performance in the Portfolio was generally good. Some essays were very well written, and care was taken to provide frequent footnotes, endnotes and bibliographies. The word-limit appears to have given candidates a good opportunity to express themselves fully.

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. However, some candidates struggled with having to use two sources and approached the task by choosing titles that made unnatural links or encompassed two widely differing and often incompatible sources.

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. Historical essays were inclined to be more informative and less investigative.

Talking

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

The performance of candidates in this component was highly pleasing. Most candidates scored very highly, and the majority were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many candidates made good use of learned material and were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses. They also incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation.

French

Candidates on the whole were well prepared, with some excellent performances and very few very poor performances. Candidates showed a significant degree of confidence overall when discussing areas of interest. The language accuracy, as well as discussion techniques, demonstrated by candidates allowed for the majority of performances to run smoothly.

Candidates performed well when they had chosen themes that allowed for discussion that would provide both breadth and depth, and were also prepared to use a variety of discussion techniques to cope with unexpected language. Where poor performance was encountered, it tended to be that a candidate had either focused on a topic that was too prescriptive to allow for development of discussion or focused on a topic that was too broad in scope.

Some candidates were not able to discuss a theme constructively during the performance and lost marks as a result.

Gaelic

Most candidates performed well. They were able to sustain discussions and demonstrate a high level of accuracy while using complex and sophisticated language. Centres should provide candidates with regular opportunities for talking activities, to build confidence in this area.

German

Most candidates were well prepared and confident. Some did, however, lack depth in conversation. Success in this component demands practice throughout the session, building on the good practice of previous years of language learning.

All areas detailed on Form STL/AH should be open for a comfortable conversation between the Visiting Assessor and the candidate.

Italian

Most candidates were very well prepared for this component and were often able to sustain long and varied stretches of conversation. Several candidates attained full marks. However, some candidates relied too much on pre-learned material and got into difficulty when asked to digress or expand on this.

Spanish

Candidates did very well in this area and managed to achieve very encouraging marks. Most candidates were comfortable and confident in the language, with the majority scoring 30 or more out of 50. 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 with the Visiting Assessor. 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 share course reports, marking instructions, general assessment information, and pegged-mark descriptors with candidates.
- Candidates should be reminded that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure they do not lose marks

Reading/Translation

- Candidates should divide their time appropriately between the comprehension questions, the overall purpose question and the passage for translation.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read the text globally to gain an overall understanding, so that they will be able to answer the questions accurately. Answers to the comprehension questions should contain as much relevant detail as possible.
- 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.
- Candidates should give a broad statement at the start of their answer to the overall purpose question and then structure their response appropriately. They should draw on evidence from the text to substantiate their opinion, providing key information from the text AND linking it to specific rhetorical techniques used by the author. It is important for candidates to summarise all their points in a brief concluding statement bringing to a close a concise but sophisticated answer.
- 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 also ensure that they read all the comprehension questions carefully and attempt to answer them precisely, avoiding the temptation to translate chunks of language. They should not include information from the translation section in these answers.
- 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 ensure they have sufficient time to complete the overall purpose and translation 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.
- Practising specimen/exemplar/past papers under exam conditions would give candidates greater insight into exam time management, which is of particular importance when tackling the translation.
- Translation practice would ensure greater familiarity with dictionary use and give candidates the opportunity to trust their own judgement when deciding on the meaning of a particular word or sense unit.

Listening and Discursive Writing

- Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible. They should try to avoid prejudging the content.
- Teachers could advise candidates on how they should use the time they have when looking at questions before they hear the recording.
- 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 which 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.
- More detailed and frequent grammar input and practice is recommended for the discursive writing. Many basic errors could be avoided by the careful checking of verb tenses and endings, adjectival agreements, genders, spellings and accents.
- In discursive writing planning of the essay is as crucial as relevance to the title. Candidates should be reminded that a well-planned essay goes a long way towards success.
- Candidates should be encouraged to practise exam papers in order to familiarise themselves with time management techniques
- Candidates should be discouraged from planning or writing an essay in English first and then attempting to translate it,
- Centres should advise candidates to structure their work and provide short appropriate statements in their introduction and conclusion.
- Centres should share pegged marks criteria with candidates.

Portfolio

- Candidates should read the portfolio guidelines carefully. The selection of essays could be wider, and a title or essay question which generates debate or critical analysis is crucial.
- The title selected by the candidate is of paramount importance. Candidates must be comfortable with the title they select to work towards. Centres should not impose the same title for all candidates.
- Centres should encourage candidates to choose more varied topics. They should try to make the title as specific as possible, and to research the area as deeply as possible
- 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.
- When choosing essay titles, care should be taken to avoid those that are too contrived, vague, over-ambitious or incapable of being properly addressed within the prescribed word-limit.
- Care should be taken over the selection of sources. More detailed bibliographies are needed. Essays on literary texts should clearly demonstrate that the candidate has read the original text and not the English translation. If possible, centres should try to select literary texts whose intellectual content and length are most suitable for S6 pupils.
- 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. The quality of English in the portfolio is of paramount importance and an appreciation of how to structure an essay is essential.

- Candidates should be reminded to use an appropriate register in their essays and to avoid abbreviating the names of authors or film directors.

Talking

- Centres should continue to train candidates in discussion techniques in the language to enable them to deal with questions that go beyond learned material.
- Candidates should incorporate any pre-learned material naturally and avoid any 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.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have opportunities to practice talking throughout the session to develop confidence and go some way to dispelling nerves.
- Candidates must be fully aware they will be expected to cover all areas of the Form STL/AH which they have signed and submitted to SQA prior to the visit of the visiting assessor.