

Summary of SQA Course Reports for Higher Modern Languages 2018

Reading/Translation

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

In reading, candidates' performance was generally excellent, although some candidates did not include sufficient detail in their answers. There was a significant improvement in the overall purpose question this year with most candidates doing well. However, some candidates only translated parts of the text without making detailed comments and some merely restated answers to the comprehension questions with no attempt at justifying their answer.

Overall, performance in the translation was good, although some candidates lost marks because of lack of accuracy in translating articles and tenses. Some candidates did not include enough detail in their answers.

French

Overall, candidates performed well in the reading paper with most candidates gaining more than half of the available marks. The overall performance was slightly down on that of previous years. Questions that required less detailed answers or had optionality were well done by most candidates and very few were unable to answer any of the questions.

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.

The overall purpose question was not particularly well done by the vast majority 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 and there were very few poor performances. However, some candidates did not read the questions carefully or pay enough attention to detail. Most candidates performed particularly well in the translation.

German

Overall, candidates performed slightly better than expected in this paper, although some candidates failed to recognise certain words of vocabulary and phrases.

The translation proved moderately demanding for a number of candidates, particularly sense units 4 and 5 with only some candidates achieving full marks.

Italian

Overall, candidates performed very well in the reading paper.

Candidates generally found the overall purpose question more challenging and tended to write very long answers. Some candidates failed to gain both marks as they often repeated information from the comprehension questions or made an assertion but did not justify it with evidence from the text. The translation was tackled well overall, although it proved to be the most challenging aspect of this paper, although sense units 2 and 5 were very well done by most candidates.

Spanish

Candidates performed very well in the reading paper and most were able to access the more straightforward questions. The overall purpose question was well done and candidates were successful in providing an assertion and a justification.

The translation was well done by candidates, who seem to be dedicating more time to this question. Sense units 1-3 were particularly well done.

Urdu

Candidates' overall performance in the reading component was very good. Questions 2, 3, 5 and 6 were answered exceptionally well by candidates and the overall purpose question was well done, although some questions proved demanding. In some cases, candidates did not give sufficient detail or answer the question fully.

Directed Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidates generally performed very well in directed writing. However, 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 lost marks.

French

In Directed Writing, the vast majority of candidates opted for scenario 1. Those candidates who chose scenario 2 performed marginally less well than those who chose scenario 1. Candidates generally coped better with the more predictable bullet points and there were very few poor performances, but very few strong performances. The majority of candidates gained 4 or 6/10. 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.

However, a significant number of essays lacked the detailed and complex language and range of tenses required at this level to gain high marks.

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 and a few candidates gained no marks for writing totally irrelevant essays which did not address the task. There was evidence of poor dictionary use and mother tongue and Spanish interference, particularly in the unpredictable bullet points.

Gaelic

In Directed Writing, no scenario was favoured over the other. The majority of candidates performed well, but those who chose the employability scenario achieved a better mark. Most candidates addressed all the bullet points.

German

The majority of candidates chose scenario 1 in this paper and here were some outstanding performances. Most candidates used of learned material appropriately and showed good control of the perfect tense and sentence structure. However, a number of candidates failed to read bullet point 1 of scenario 1 and bullet point 4 of scenario 2 properly, and relied on learned material which was not appropriate to the content of the bullet point. In this instance, candidates scored 6/10.

Italian

In Directed Writing, most candidates opted for Scenario 2 on employability. Both scenarios were extremely well done with many candidates scoring full marks. There were some very impressive

examples of written Italian and fewer candidates lost marks due to the omission of bullet points than in previous years. Candidates are to be commended on their knowledge and application of vocabulary, tenses and complex language features.

Spanish

Candidates performed very well in Directed Writing, particularly those who chose to do scenario 2 on employability, although some struggled with the second bullet point.

Urdu

Most candidates coped very well with the Directed Writing. Scenario 2 proved to be the most popular choice, although responses tended to be slightly weaker than those candidates who opted to do scenario 1. Most candidates achieved 6/10 and those who achieved 8 or 10/10 were able to demonstrate a flair for the language and perform well in terms of content, accuracy and language resource.

Listening/Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

There were some outstanding performances in this paper. However, some candidates often understood only parts of the information and were unable to retain sufficient details to answer the questions accurately.

There were many outstanding performances in the writing section. Some very able candidates successfully adapted learned language and 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 dialogue was better tackled than the monologue. There were very few instances where candidates failed to answer 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 lost marks by guessing answers or not writing enough detail in their answers.

In the writing section of the paper, performance was slightly better than the previous year with most candidates gaining 4 or 6/10, although there were 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.

Gaelic

Most candidates performed better in the dialogue than in the monologue which they found challenging. Many candidates tended to guess answers rather than listening to the text. This resulted in a significant range of marks.

In the literature section of the paper, all candidates opted to write a short story or poem. Most candidates performed well, which compensated for underperformance in the listening section.

German

Most candidates coped well with the demands of this paper with some outstanding performances. However, the topic areas of selective schools and school exchanges appeared to be concepts with which a number of candidates were not familiar.

In listening, some candidates lost marks by misunderstanding some of the vocabulary or by not writing enough detail in their answers.

In writing, performance was satisfactory with most candidates addressing the stimulus questions well. Some 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 successfully. Some candidates made good use of pre-learned material to express their opinion.

Italian

Overall, candidates performed well in this paper. In listening, the monologue proved to be very accessible to most candidates, but the dialogue proved more challenging. Some candidates lost marks by not giving sufficient in their answers.

In writing, there were some outstanding performances, which addressed the stimulus questions well and contained a wide range of tenses and language structures.

Spanish

Overall, candidates performed very well in this paper. They tended to find the monologue more challenging, as they did not provide accurate enough answers.

In writing, most candidates did well, but in some instances, the language was not appropriate to Higher level. The majority of candidates scored 6/10. Those who demonstrated flair for the language scored higher marks.

Urdu

Most candidates performed well in this paper. The dialogue proved to be slightly more accessible than the monologue. Some questions were very well done, but in some instances, candidates did not give sufficient detail in their answers.

Most candidates coped well with the writing and there were some examples of outstanding performances, although spelling errors detracted from performances in some cases.

Talking

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidate performance in both the presentation and conversation was high. Candidates used detailed and complex language to cover relevant and well-organised content. In the conversation, candidates were able to understand questions and interact well with assessors. Pronunciation was good and candidates were able to use tones well. However, some candidates found it challenging to use colloquial spoken Chinese and measure words.

French

Overall, candidates performed very well in the performance of talking. Most candidates sampled gained 8 or 10/10 in the presentation and 9 or above in the conversation. However, very few candidates achieved 15/15. Most gained 3/5 in the sustaining the conversation element. A small number of candidates struggled with the complexity of the language of the topic chosen and poor pronunciation often impeded communication. Some candidates used language and structures that went beyond the level of demand. The language used by some candidates was not detailed and complex enough, which meant that candidates were unable to demonstrate a variety of structures, verb tenses and vocabulary required at this level.

Gaelic

Candidates performed well in the presentation and were well prepared, displaying a range of vocabulary, tenses and language structures. However, candidates tended to find the conversation more demanding than the presentation. Candidates who achieved high marks were able to cope with the conversation much more effectively.

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 were well prepared and responded well to encouraging assessors. Most candidates achieved 8 or 10/10 in the presentation and 12 or 15/15 in the conversation and 3 or 5/5 for sustaining the conversation. However, in some cases, candidates used a rather limited range of tenses and structures. Instead of the wide range of detailed and complex language required at this level.

Spanish

The overall quality of candidate performance was high. Candidates performed very well in the presentation section of the performance with most scoring 8 or 10. In the conversation, the majority were awarded pegged marks of 12 or 15 and 3 or 5 in the sustaining the conversation aspect. Level of grammatical accuracy was a feature of weaker performances and this detracted from the overall impression.

Urdu

Most candidates sampled did well, particularly in the presentation. Pronunciation was better in the presentation than in the conversation. In some cases, candidates went beyond the demand required at Higher level. Some performances were too short and others were unnecessarily long.

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 exam papers. and understand how to approach the exam
- Candidates should read questions carefully in the reading and listening papers and ensure they answer questions in sufficient detail
- 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 take the time to read the questions carefully to ensure they understand what they are being asked. They should include sufficient details in their answers.
- Candidates should ensure they pay careful attention to the numbering of the questions, particularly where a question has several parts, as marks are not transferrable across questions
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of basic grammar and structures covered in National 4/5, especially numbers, plurals, qualifiers and comparatives,
- Candidates should know the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation.
- Candidates should be encouraged to focus on key words in questions and distinguish between relevant and redundant vocabulary
- Centres should encourage candidates to approach the reading passage holistically rather than reading it sentence by sentence
- Candidates should ensure that what they have written makes sense and answers the question they have been asked to answer.
- In the overall purpose question, candidates should make an assertion, give a reason for that assertion and justify their answer by choosing relevant detail from the text to gain both points. No credit will be given for simply quoting chunks of text in the target language.
- Candidates should be trained to write succinctly in answering the overall purpose question. They should be discouraged from writing lengthy responses which merely regurgitate answers to the comprehension questions
- Centre should ensure that candidates have as much opportunity as possible to practice translation.
- Candidates should focus on tense recognition and attention to detail in the translation, ensuring that their translation makes sense in English. They 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 given the opportunity to write in the target language from an early stage
- Candidates should be reminded to check that they have addressed all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points. They should be encouraged to underline key words in the stimulus before writing in order to address bullet points appropriately.
- Candidates should be encouraged to be more accurate in verb tenses, verb endings, 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 detailed and complex language appropriate to Higher and a variety of tenses and structures, if they wish to achieve high marks.

Listening/Writing

- Candidates should be encouraged to study the heading and questions and the marks allocated to them before listening to the recording to anticipate the kind of information required
- Candidates should focus on the listening text and be discouraged from using their general knowledge to answer the questions.
- Candidates should try to give as much detail as possible in the answers to the comprehension questions
- Candidates should be given the opportunity to practice listening as often as possible and teachers are encouraged to use the target language to help develop listening skills
- In writing, candidates should ensure that they understand the questions. There is no need to write an equal number of words for each question, as they are there as prompts.
- Candidates should be discouraged from translating directly from English. They should be encouraged to select, manipulate and recombine appropriate learned material and not use the dictionary to invent new sentences
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of verbs and verb tenses, especially the present tense
- Candidates should pay careful attention to numbers, gender, spelling and adjectival agreement and the use of the dictionary
- 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, so that they can be understood by those who are not their class teachers. It is good practice to have performances verified by another assessor or centre.
- Centres should ensure that candidates use detailed and complex language in order to access the upper marks
- Candidates should be encouraged to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate, ensuring genders, verb endings and adjectival agreement are accurate
- Candidates should avoid giving mini presentations in the conversation. Assessors are encouraged to ask a variety of questions, including open-ended questions to elicit detailed and complex language.
- 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 candidates should ensure comprehension of their presentation in preparation for delivering it.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a variety of strategies for asking for questions to be repeated, or language structures and phrases to use when they have not understood
- 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. Assessors should ensure that they do not ask questions which lead to the candidate repeating parts of their presentation in their answers.
- Centres should provide candidates with every opportunity for personalisation and choice and ask a range of questions adapted to the responses of each candidate, rather than asking all candidates the same questions
- Centres should not be overly prescriptive in preparing candidates for the conversation. Conversations should be as spontaneous as possible

- Centres are encouraged to prepare candidates to use relevant interjections, ask relevant questions and use idiomatic phrases in order to sustain the conversation
- Assessors should give candidates the appropriate response or thinking time. Where candidates struggle to answer questions, assessors should rephrase, ask another question or change the topic