

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE

SEC

FRENCH

May 2012

EXAMINERS' REPORT

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

**SEC FRENCH
MAY 2012 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

1. General**1.1 Registration for examination**

One thousand and sixty-eight candidates registered for Paper A and 471 candidates registered for Paper B. This represents a drop of 25 candidates for Paper A and 99 candidates for Paper B when compared to the total number of candidates who registered in 2011.

1.2 Attendance for examination

In Paper A, 4 (out of 1068) candidates failed to sit for the examination whereas for Paper B, the number of absent candidates was 13 (out of 471). This amounts to a total of 17 candidates (1.1%) of the whole cohort who registered for the examination.

1.3 Overall performance

Grades awarded were distributed as indicated in the Table below. 2012 marks a slight increase in the number of candidates who obtained a Grade 4 (14.9% in 2011 against 17.2% in 2012).

	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Absent	Total
2012	Paper A	129	248	324	187	106	-	-	70	4	1068
	% of 1068	12.1	23.2	30.3	17.5	9.9			6.6	0.4	100.0
	Paper B	-	-	-	77	113	107	76	85	13	471
	% of 471	-	-	-	16.3	24	22.7	16.1	18	2.8	100
	Total	129	248	324	264	219	107	76	155	17	1539
	% of 1539	8.4	16.1	21.1	17.2	14.2	7	4.9	10.1	1.1	100.0

2. Analysis of tasks set**2.1 Interprétation de l'image**

A variety of photographs was selected and candidates, after being asked to choose one at random, were given some time to examine the picture carefully.

In spite of the fact that all the pictures were different, the questions themselves and the questioning techniques were uniform throughout the exercise. The examiners proceeded from objective questioning about the content of the picture towards more subjective analysis. Candidates were asked, for example, to give physical descriptions and to speak about the time and season portrayed in the picture, before being asked to comment on the mood of the image, the relationship between the persons shown or to find a commercial use for the picture.

This is a communicative exercise, the primary aim of which is not to test the range of vocabulary of each candidate, although such knowledge does help a candidate perform better, but to assess the candidate's ability to make suppositions and to give opinions. Since this

exercise is subject to interpretation, the examiner does not possess a final, correct answer. Reasonable, different opinions held by the candidate and the examiner are acceptable, but lack of basic expressions and vocabulary (colour, parts of the day, time, the weather, seasons) will make candidates lose marks in this exercise. Candidates are also encouraged to give feasible, logical answers: a picture showing a grandfather and his grandchild cannot be described as *deux amis*.

The overall result in this exercise was satisfactory.

2.2 **Jeu de rôle**

A different role play was presented for each examination session. This is a communicative exercise during which the candidate is expected to converse with the examiner according to the situation set. Since the situations presented are related to daily life, the candidate is expected to be able to cope with the situation and to express him/herself in good French. Candidates are encouraged to be argumentative: in the role play regarding buying a pair of shoes, few managed to insist that they would like their money back. The candidate is encouraged to use the preparation time wisely and to formulate sentences that allow the examiner to assess his/her competences.

3.1 **Dictation**

Five different texts were set, all taken from the same source.

Markers were instructed to correct a list of pre-selected items. An effort was made to choose more or less the same word such as *beaucoup* and *qui*, or the same part of speech throughout the five texts, while trying to represent the spectrum of grammatical knowledge expected of a candidate after five years of studying the subject. Items varied in difficulty from simple nouns to more complicated tenses. A good number of scripts showed that more preparation is required to attain the skills required by this exercise.

Analysis of errors found in the dictations leads to the same recommendations being made every year.

Words like *alors*, *parce que* and *souvent* are still being incorrectly written. Errors related to auditory discrimination, varying from the timeless *le/les copain(s)*, *grand/grande*, *en/un/une* to the incredible rendering of *gros* as *grand*, are not receiving enough attention. It came as a surprise that practically none of the candidates recognised the word *nez*. This is, however, less shocking when seen in the whole context. The vocabulary being requested is basic. So how can one justify *bein*, *cadou*, *le noire*, *souvant*, *mamman*, *frere*, *ruge*? The correct rendering of the clause *les numéros [...]brillaient dans le noir* was practically non-existent; words of this difficulty were the exception and not the rule.

There is still an obvious lack of effort at reasoning during the transcription: *on ne le voir pas*, *je voulez*, *j'a demandé*, *je n'en avait pas besoin*, *un grande ...*, *pour achété ...*. It is sad to find that a candidate who has mastered *Je l'ai mis* correctly, writes, one line further down, *Papa la essayé*. Again, these are issues which candidates tackle in the first years of their learning of the language and may hint that they are treating the language as a string of unconnected words. This year, the haphazard use of accents, or lack thereof, has also been noticed: *vitè*, *dernière*, *pere*. Once again, *les deux points* was written in various scripts as *du pain*. However, it is a

pleasure to note that a good number of candidates wrote *nous sommes passés* correctly.

The worrying element in the quality of the dictation is that a very large number of errors committed are not related to complex content but to simple words with which the candidate is surely familiar after five years of learning French. Candidates should keep in mind that to obtain a good mark in this exercise, s/he must follow the logic of the text. The quality of the errors noted also indicates the need for more practice.

3.2 Listening Comprehension

All the listening comprehensions were identically structured: Section A consisted of a *Vrai ou Faux* exercise, Section B involved multiple choice questions and Section C presented a slightly bigger challenge, although one must admit that leaving out a *Complétez* question or an *Indiquez un aliment...* are marks lost capriciously. Also, in Section C, the answer has to be reasonable: *c'est real* is not an acceptable version of *céréales*. Besides, answers where the meaning is completely different such as writing *poisons* instead of *poissons* cannot be accepted. However, examiners are pleased to note that most candidates attempted to answer all questions and some also got full marks in this exercise.

4.1 Message à rédiger

This year's situation, taken from a French magazine aimed at young readers, was: **Je n'ai pas Internet chez moi et dès que j'en parle à mon père, il s'énerve. Au collège, je me sens différente de mes copains. Comment le convaincre ? Quels conseils donneriez-vous à cette jeune fille ?**

Candidates need to read the *consigne* well. Was this task asking participants to reassure Cécile that she is normal and that it is a feature of adolescence to think that one is different? The task mainly required giving advice on how to convince Cécile's father to have internet at home rather than giving psychotherapeutic advice to Cécile (which was not completely out of the question but was not the main issue ...).

Marks were allotted to the communicative (2/5) and linguistic (3/5) aspects. This year's performance in this exercise was extremely weak, with a large number of students not understanding the task set: some suggested that she go to the local Council or the public library, others that she find a hobby, some were even generous enough to offer Cécile the use of their own laptop. There were, however, a few good suggestions which indicated reflection, such as participating in housework and trying to please her father by cooking his favourite food.

A number of candidates either chose to leave out the message or simply copied out the task set. In many productions, candidates attempted to write one or two sentences (or rather string words together) to try and reach the 50 word limit. At times, candidates borrowed a word or phrase from the title, without even bothering to check the spelling. In some instances, candidates wrote the message in English line by line, word for word, above the text in French. One can guess what kind of syntax these factors produce. Examples of messages written are:

« Cher Cécile, Au collège est trop difficile pour trouvais la copains: just, est le sens des le copains à trop différente. Le sens de tu n'on pas Internet est un idée juste est non est un probleme, le copain n'ifluence pas tu. »

« Salut papa ! je ne suis contante pas a mon copains sont magnifique. Au collège, je me sens differente de mes copains parsque hier, nous avons partir a France. Mes copains avons partir avec nous famille que allons malade. »

« Cher Cécile, je comprends ton frustration mas as-tu parle avec ton père a un tone tranquille ou un tone ennuyeux ? Tu voudrais se convaincer allore proves avec un ton tranquille. ... »

« Chez Cécile, Je sais que tu es en train de avoir dans ta vite aujourd'hui. Ne nerveuse pas ! C'est d'accord a sens différente de tes copains mieux ne sens maiveuseé. ... »

« Salut xxx, le sens différente de tes copains est bien. Contacter dans les Internet est different quelle contacter les copains visage et visage. Me conseils est different parce que j'ai un garçon. Les copains ont tres important dans le « life » Au revoir. »

These examples are not being reproduced to inspire hilarity but should be taken as very typical productions that are being given and, as such, an indication of the alarming levels that have been reached in this written production.

Examples of acceptable to very good productions are the following:

“Tu dois parler plus souvent avec ton père, et dis à lui que aujourd'hui l'Internet est très important. Ton père ne s'énervera pas et il t'écouterà. Au collège, tu peux trouver une copine ou un copain bon et passer la journée avec lui, ou trouver un bon groupe d'amis. »

« Cécile, pour convaincre ton père, c'est important de dire que l'Internet est très important et tu a le besoin. Dit que tu ne le besoin pas pour jouer mais pour utiliser pour des choses de l'école. Utiliser des chiffres de personnes qui a l'internet. Finalement dit que l'internet ne cout pas beaucoup et c'est un investment pour toute la famille. Bonne chance ! »

« Si tu veux convaincre ton père que l'Internet est bonne, tu devrais lui expliquer les points a favoir l'Internet. Tu peux lui dire que l'Internet est très bonne pour l'école et pour acheter des choses. Puis, tu peux lui dire que tu te sens différente de tes copains, parce que tu n'as pas l'Internet. »

« Chère Cécile, c'est normale de se sentir différente. Vous devez faire face à votre père, et lui montrer pourquoi, d'abord, vous voudriez Internet chez vous. Il faut parler de l'école, et lui dites comment l'utiliser est un besoin actuellement ! Pourtant, si votre père ne veut écouter pas, pourriez-vous essayer en dire à votre mère ? Essayez contacter l'administration de votre école, pour convaincre, aussi. »

Far from seeking the perfect text, any examiner would be pleased to meet this kind of production. Any experienced teacher would agree that the candidate him/herself can spot and correct a number of errors in these texts, but that the difference is in the whole text, not the individual words or phrases. One notes that sentences are woven with sense and linked with cohesive connectors (*D'abord...*, *Puis...*). Examples of this quality constituted not more than 2% of the productions examined.

4.2 Culture et civilisation

The format presented was similar to that of previous years. In this paper, open-ended questions were avoided and a lot of support was provided by the exercises themselves.

4.2.1 Specific remarks about the candidates' performance

Section II: A very good percentage of candidates obtained full marks in this exercise. Questions 7 and 8 were occasionally problematic because of the inability to distinguish between *région* and *chef-lieu du département*.

Section III: This exercise seems to have presented some difficulties to the candidates. In fact, very few got full marks. Questions 7, 8 and 9 were the ones that were most problematic.

Section IV: Performance in this exercise was average. Many got questions 5 and 12 wrong, with the latter being the most problematic. Only a few candidates got Sangatte right, which is found on p. 74 of the text book *Chez toi en France*.

Keeping in mind that candidates are now being tested on four chapters only, one expects that more importance is given to detail and that guess work is eliminated as much as possible.

5.1 Tâche à accomplir

Two identical titles were proposed for Papers 2A and 2B, with the only difference being that candidates sitting for Paper 2B were given more support to understand what was required of them and to fulfill the task set.

As in previous years, the communicative aspect was allotted 6 marks and the linguistic aspect 9 marks. A good number of examiners felt that most candidates did not deserve a pass mark in this exercise. Others were astounded by the number of candidates who left out this exercise or who simply copied the *consignes*.

Tâche 1: Le week-end dernier, vous avez passé une journée à la campagne. Racontez ce que vous avez fait. This title was the most popular, with students turning especially to the vocabulary related to time, food and leisure to describe the day.

Tâche 2: De récent, votre famille parle de plus en plus de changer de maison. Ecrivez un mél à votre meilleur(e) ami(e) dans lequel vous lui parlez de vos opinions et de vos préférences à propos de ce sujet. This title was not very popular, although those who opted for it understood the subject and made use of vocabulary related to the house, while respecting the email format.

Most of the work produced was far below the word limit set. Most used the *vous* instead of the *nous*, and basic grammatical mistakes, especially ones related to verbs, were rampant, such as *nous a* instead of *nous avons*; the *passé composé* presented a huge problem, let alone the *imparfait*: *nous avez arrivé, je suis vais, j'arrivons, mon amie a perdu sa chien..., nous avons rient...*

Vocabulary was another weak point: *Ma peur* for *mon père, ma mer* instead of *ma mère*. Influence from other languages, mainly Italian – *che, altri, indimenticabile, specialmente,*

relassant – was not rare, and whole sentences in English were also found. Among other inventions, examiners highlighted: *chaque saif, je capiche le trick de mountain biking, nous accendu une hugiga, la prosse weekend, j'ai andiamo ancora!* This level of French is simply unacceptable. When in difficulty, candidates are turning to Maltese or English and making up sentences using different languages. At times, sentences were completely illogical such as: *Bugibba is a town avec le mer dans le sole! l'ambient c'est belle...mon seur Jamie j'adore le football. Nous somme le très bien time.*

A good number of candidates did not divide their work in paragraphs whereas others lacked imagination. One wonders with what attitude some candidates are sitting for their exam. On the other hand, some made use of expressions like *avoir une peur bleu* and *donner/jeter un coup d'oeil*.

Candidates show a serious lack of practice when it comes to sentence writing, which is making them lose a lot of marks in this exercise.

5.2 Compréhension de l'écrit

The same text was proposed for Papers 2A and B, with the questions for Paper B adapted to the level of difficulty expected for this paper.

In feedback where they were asked to rate the candidates' performance, markers indicated *Good* for Paper A and *Good /Weak* for Paper B, indicating an extreme difference in the marks obtained (2 being the lowest against 17.5 being the highest). Almost all markers were of the opinion that “*candidates understood the text globally*” but were impressed by the fact that candidates are making a huge amount of mistakes, even when copying from the text itself, and are finding it extremely difficult to write sentences.

Paper 2A

Question A: A good performance overall. Question 5 was the most problematic with candidates required to give *ensemble* as the synonym of *avec les autres*.

Question B: A good performance overall. Most candidates got all the answers correct. The NM section seemed to create most problems.

Question C: Few candidates gave the right answer to question iii. The preposition *à* in its different forms is still proving to be a problem: *à le* and *à les* were often encountered. In other cases, *à* was completely omitted.

Question D: A lot of candidates did not understand **en utilisant vos propres mots**. They either rewrote the sentence or left it out.

Questions E: A number of candidates confused the answer which just needed to be extrapolated with that of question H.

Question F: This question proved to be problematic, as were all questions needing to be paraphrased. *Mettre du sien* was often given again in the answer.

Question G: Some candidates did not understand that *Citez* means *quote*.

Question H: Some candidates mixed this question with question E.

Question I: A good performance.

Question J: Markers were asked to reproduce a good/unacceptable title. An example of a good title is *L'émission Street life et ses sujets différents*. A title which was not accepted was *David et Karine*.

Paper 2B

Question A: A good performance overall. Question 1 proved to be problematic, with candidates giving *casque* as a synonym for *programme*.

Question B: An average performance.

Question C: Question iv proved to create difficulties. Candidates are still not aware that in these answers, they need to use the preposition *à*, in its different forms.

Question D: An overall excellent performance.

Question E: An average performance.

Question F: Some candidates answered *des chiens interdits*, mistaking *cette semaine* for *la semaine prochaine*.

Question G: A lot of candidates answered question iii wrongly: *L'âge de la jeune invitée à l'émission* and iv: *L'âge moyen des présentateurs*.

Question H: Candidates found question iii – *chiffre* – difficult.

Question I: Markers were asked to reproduce a good/unacceptable title. Examples of a good title are: *Street Life: le programme des jeunes / Les jeunes discutent sur Street Life*. Unacceptable ones are *Les jeunes parler sont pays / Les ville de emission*.

5.3 Language exercises

In both Paper 2A and Paper 2B, candidates were given two exercises: the first exercise was an **Associez** whereas in the second exercise, candidates had to either formulate whole questions (Paper A) or give the question words (Paper B).

Paper 2A

Exercise 3 required candidates to associate a question with its logical answer. With only one answer fitting each question, the candidate had to rely on linguistic and pragmatic skills to make the correct association. Markers commented that general performance in this exercise ranged from fair to good.

Exercise 4 required questions to the answers given. This exercise proved to be more difficult: at times, the question word was wrong. It is discouraging to note that candidates do not write *pourquoi* or *combien* correctly. In the second part of the sentence, some left out the hyphen between the inversion or did not show any knowledge whatsoever of the question technique.

Paper 2B

As for Paper 2A, exercise 3 required candidates to associate a question with its logical answer. Number 8 and 9 proved to be difficult. With only one answer fitting each question, the candidate had to rely on linguistic and pragmatic skills to make the correct association. Markers stated that the general performance in this exercise was fair and that performance could be better if more thought is given to this exercise.

Exercise 4 required a question word to complete the question given. Some candidates answered *Qu'est-ce que* to all questions; others wrote the question word incorrectly and thus lost the mark as this was a grammar exercise; others gave answers in Italian such as *dove*, *quanto*, *chi*, showing that they knew the word but did not know its equivalent in French.

6 General Comment

Candidates are doing well in the oral section of the examination whereas the overall performance in the *message, tâche* and open-ended comprehension questions is becoming poorer. More practice is required by candidates to strengthen their linguistic acquisition.

Chairperson
Board of Examiners

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