

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION

ADVANCED LEVEL

ITALIAN

MAY 2013

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD

**AM ITALIAN
MAY 2013 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

General Performance

The number of candidates who sat for the Italian examination at Advanced Level in 2013 is shown in Table 1 below, together with the tallies of grades obtained and figures reported for the examinations held in 2011 and 2012:

Table 1: Grades obtained by candidates in 2011, 2012 and 2013

	May 2011	%	May 2012	%	May 2013	%
Candidates	266		255		198	
Grades A-E	190	71.4	176	69	150	75.6
Grades A-C	131	49.2	114	44.7	96	48.5
Grade A	21	7.9	17	6.7	16	8.1
Grade B	37	13.9	31	12.2	30	15.1
Grade C	73	27.4	66	25.9	50	25.3
Grade D	36	13.5	42	16.5	31	15.7
Grade E	23	8.6	20	7.8	23	11.6
Failed	64	24.1	63	24.7	40	20.2
Absent	12	4.5	16	6.3	8	4

The number of candidates registered in 2013 was considerably lower than that of 2012, as it dropped from 255 to 198. This significant reduction in the number of candidates is undoubtedly cause for concern, although one must also consider whether this trend will also be registered in the September session, especially in the light of the recent changes in MATSEC regulations.

A positive outcome of the May 2013 session is that the percentage of candidates who obtained grades A-C and A-E increased when compared to those registered in 2012, as illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2: Difference in grades between 2012 and 2013 (reported as percentages)

	May 2012	May 2013	Difference
Grades A-E	69	75.6	+ 6.6
Grades A-C	44.7	48.5	+ 3.8
Failed	24.7	20.2	- 4.5
Grade A	6.3	8.1	+ 1.8
Grade B	12.5	15.1	+ 2.6
Grade C	25.9	25.3	- 0.6
Grade D	16.5	15.7	- 0.8
Grade E	7.8	11.6	+ 3.8
Absent	6.3	4	- 2.3

The data reported in Table 2 indicate that, when compared to the examination held in 2012, an increase is registered in the percentage of candidates who passed the examination. The better overall performance was especially evident in some components of the examination, namely the

essay (Paper II), the reading summary (Paper III), the cultural component (*L'Europa e l'Italia*, Paper IV) and the essay-type answers to the Camilleri or Sciascia novels (Paper IV).

The oral component is the one in which candidates fare best. A low average mark was registered in the listening summary; this is somewhat disconcerting, especially when considering that the text given was straightforward and dealt with notions which students sitting for the Advanced level examination are certainly familiar with. This will be dealt with in further detail below. The average marks obtained in the other components of the paper were above 50%, with the only exception of the literature anthology. One must also point out the good standard witnessed in a number of essays, which were overall better in quality than last year, and in which students who obtained the better grades excelled.

The May 2013 examination paper

Paper I: Oral examination and listening summary

As explained above, the oral part of the exam is where candidates fared best overall. Candidates' performance in the listening comprehension was far from satisfactory, a trend also registered in last year's examination. Besides the problems that, as usual, many candidates encountered in order to write a coherent summary, one notes that a number of them missed out on some vital information included in the text. Candidates are therefore encouraged to focus more on acquiring listening skills, to help them attain the competence necessary to distinguish essential information from details, and to learn how to take brief notes as they listen to a text. Furthermore, in the case of some candidates, it seems that exposure to Italian is somewhat lacking and this led to difficulties in order to comprehend the text.

Paper II: Essay and language exercises

As in the case of the May 2012 session, the range of marks obtained in the essay in the 2013 examination was extremely wide: however, one must note with satisfaction that a number of candidates performed very well and that their level of written Italian approaches native-like competence. As repeatedly observed in the reports of the recent years, a good number of candidates would obtain a much better mark if they were to avoid elementary grammatical and spelling errors in their essay. The following list which is, by and large, very similar to the one provided in the report for the May 2012 session, includes those categories where errors which led to a substantial loss of marks were registered:

- spelling:
 - o distinction between *a/ha, o/ho, è/e, ce/c'è, ne/n'è*;
 - o use of 'h' and 'i' in syllables *chi, che, ghi, ghe, cio, cia, ciu, gio, gia, giu*;
 - o incorrect use of 'h' in words including syllables *cia* and *cio*;
 - o use of syllables *gna, gno* (often spelt incorrectly as 'nia/o', e.g. * lenio);
 - o use of accents;
 - o use of apostrophes (often used incorrectly in the case of *preposizioni articolate*).
- morphology:
 - o several errors in incorrect article-noun agreement;
 - o use of pronouns (several errors, especially in the distinction between *li/gli*);
 - o prepositions (several errors both in the choice of prepositions and in the use of *preposizioni articolate*);
 - o agreement, especially between nouns and adjectives, most notably with nouns ending in 'e' in the singular form;
 - o verbs: a number of candidates alternate use of tenses illogically; in some cases only basic verbs are used, and repeated often; incorrect alternation between

- persons, especially in the case of the letter-type essay, which required the polite form.
- syntax and vocabulary:
 - o incorrect, incomplete or incoherent syntactic order;
 - o excessive repetition of the grammatical subject, including names and other proper nouns;
 - o use of very basic vocabulary, same words repeated often;
 - o some cases of negative transfer from Maltese, although this was considerably less when compared to last year's session.
 - textuality:
 - o lack of editing;
 - o poor organization of text, especially introductions and conclusions;
 - o lack of cohesion;
 - o incorrect use of punctuation;
 - o poor (or no) use of paragraphs.

In a number of cases, candidates lost marks either because they did not plan their essay well or because they did not check their work. In some other cases, essays were either too long or too short. These aspects of writing need to be addressed besides working on language skills. Writing is a process, which involves stages of planning, drafting, execution and evaluation/editing. Once students attain autonomy in these writing skills the quality of their work improves considerably.

The following comments pertain to the language exercises' component in this paper:

Exercise 1(a) and 1(b): idioms and vocabulary

Exercise 1(a) should not have presented great difficulty, yet the performance was quite average. The item which many candidates are not familiar with is: "È una talpa". In exercise 1(b), item 'c' was the one which most candidates answered incorrectly. Overall, the performance in this exercise was not as good as one would have expected and suggests that candidates do not have enough exposure to reading.

Exercise 2: *si passivante*

This was by far the exercise which the candidates found most difficult; in fact most of them, in spite of the example given, had no clue as to what they had to do. As a result many candidates did not obtain any marks in this exercise. Many retained the verb *venire* in the sentence given or substituted it with *andare*. Candidates paid no attention to the tense of the original verb, or to the agreement between subject and verb.

Exercise 3: verbs

Candidates need to learn to manage their tenses; many failed to notice the *passato remoto* at the very beginning of the passage. The following also stood out in many candidates' answers:

- o many still fail to distinguish between *tu* and *Lei* forms, even though there was a very obvious *tu* in the first line;
- o the incorrect spelling of the familiar imperative form of 'dire': *di*, *dii*, *di* were among the forms used by some candidates;
- o the incorrect use of the *passato remoto* regular verbs in *-ire*: (*io*) *riferi* / *riferi*; (*io*) *senti* / *senti* were among forms used by some candidates;
- o accents were, as usual, often absent.

Exercise 4 – Parts of speech / metalanguage

This exercise also presented quite a challenge to a number of candidates, the most difficult being identifying the verb in the infinitive and the indirect pronoun included in the given text. On the other hand, the following proved to be quite easy: identifying the adjective from *dito*, a synonym for *crimini* and an adverb which expresses intensity. Some responses provided to this exercise suggest that Advanced level candidates are totally unfamiliar with basic grammatical terms.

Paper III: Written comprehension and written summary

The article set for the written comprehension was written by a renowned Italian author and journalist, Beppe Severgnini. It was based on issues related to current events. A good number of candidates understood the text well and obtained a satisfactory mark. Others, on the other hand, denoted a severe lack of reading and comprehension skills. The following is an analysis of candidates' answers to each question:

Q. 1 This question was answered correctly by most candidates.

Q. 2 This was one of the questions which proved most difficult for candidates. Very few connected the quoted two words to the previous reference to *uva*, despite the explanation of *viticoltori* provided at the end of the article. Very few understood the meaning of the word *sadici* in connection with the text.

Q.3 Very surprisingly, because this was a rather simple question for this level, quite a high number of candidates answered 'Pisa'.

Q.4 Many candidates did not take into consideration the *ha dovuto* included in the question and hence did not get all three marks. Such a slip, repeated also in other questions, is indicative of poor reading skills.

Q.5 This question was answered incorrectly by many candidates. Quite a lot answered: *Torino, Trieste, Trento, Towns*; others wrote *tempo, tempesta, talpa, turbine, tonno, tartaruga, tavolo, topo*, and several other nouns one would never have expected.

Q.6. This question was answered incorrectly by many candidates. This provides further indication that the level of reading skills of some candidates leaves much to be desired.

Q.7 This question was answered correctly by most candidates.

Q.8 The twenty-five words allowed were exceeded in several cases. Quite a few candidates also merely copied parts of the given text.

Q.9 Most candidates understood the metaphor and answered correctly.

Q.10 Many gave an incorrect answer inasmuch as they thought that the *noi* referred just to the university students and the *loro* to the professors.

Q.11 Candidates had to explain four of the six underlined sentences/phrases. They encountered most difficulties in order to explain the last four sentences/phrases.

Q.12 Most candidates got the first two right and the last two wrong.

Q.13 (a) and (b) were generally answered correctly, but in (c) marks were lost by some candidates.

The above comments denote that several candidates are not exposed enough to reading, particularly to intensive reading. Many of them also do not read the questions carefully enough.

The article chosen for the written summary was taken from an online newspaper (www.corriere.it). Overall, the performance of candidates in this exercise was very similar to that registered in the written comprehension. The following shortcomings were evident: some candidates had difficulty in the organization of their work and seemed undecided as to whether to follow the chronological order of the events or do otherwise; others did not understand parts of the article and therefore missed out on some essential parts of it in their summary; there is still too much copying from the original text, although the instructions given in the paper state clearly that such instances would be penalized; several candidates did not plan their summary adequately, nor did they edit their work; in several cases marks were lost because of grammatical and spelling errors and incorrect use of punctuation.

Paper IV: Culture, anthology and the novel

In the candidates' performance in the part of the examination dedicated to culture (based on the *Europa e Italia* text), there was an improvement when compared to recent examination sessions. Albeit, candidates are yet again advised to relate the contents of the text to recent cultural, economic, social etc. developments in Italy.

On the other hand, the performance registered in the section dedicated to the literature anthology was rather disappointing. The texts on which questions were set, namely a sonnet by Petrarca and a short extract from Verga's *Malavoglia*, were chosen from two very distinct eras and therefore offered a fair choice to students. In both cases, however, several marks were lost especially when candidates were required to go beyond a descriptive account of the content of these texts. In the case of the sonnet (Petrarca), this was especially the case in answers to questions 2, 3 and 8. Many candidates have a poor knowledge of metrical structures and figures of speech, as marks were also lost in questions 6 and 7. In the case of prose (Verga), marks were mainly lost in answers to questions 3, 6 and 7.

The performance in the literary essay was much more satisfying, with most candidates demonstrating an adequate knowledge of the texts.

Conclusion

As repeatedly stated in past Advanced level Italian reports, in order to pass this examination language errors must be avoided. Furthermore, one must demonstrate that s/he possesses satisfactory communicative skills at recognition and productive levels. In numerous parts of this year's examination, there is clear evidence that students' reading and writing skills need to be more developed. It is especially important that students learn to make a distinction between the style used for writing for everyday communicative purposes (e.g. SMSs and social networks) and writing in a more formal style. This is not difficult to learn, considering the age of students who normally sit for this examination, but it must be strongly suggested to focus more frequently on such skills.

Overall, some candidates possess an excellent command of Italian to the extent that it can easily be associated with high levels of language acquisition (e.g. the C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Others possess a satisfactory level and communicate clearly: it is a pity that some of these candidates do not obtain a higher grade because of marks they lose due to elementary errors.

On a more negative note, one cannot help but remark on the downward trend of the number of candidates who sit for Italian at Advanced level. Although this is not an unpredicted feature, as exposure to Italian in Malta is on the decline among the younger generations, one augurs that

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more effort is made to promote Italian locally, especially when one considers its usefulness in commercial, legal and artistic sectors of Maltese society, among others.

*Chairperson
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