

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION

ADVANCED LEVEL

FRENCH

MAY 2014

EXAMINERS' REPORT

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

**AM FRENCH
MAY 2014 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

Ninety-three candidates registered for the French Advanced examination. Two candidates were absent for the whole exam. One candidate was absent for Paper 3. The following Table shows the distribution of grades:

Table 1: Distribution of Grades May 2014

GRADE	A	B	C	D	E	F	Abs	Total
Number	5	15	25	24	10	12	2	93
% of Total	5.38	16.13	26.88	25.81	10.75	12.90	2.15	100

The examination consists of four written papers and an oral exam in reading, conversation and a dialogue based on *Civilisation française*.

Paper I

Analyse d'un texte littéraire (60 marks)

It is strongly recommended that candidates read the text carefully and several times before attempting its analysis. Several candidates must have attempted to analyse the text after only a first reading, for it was clear that they misunderstood the text and, as a result, were unable to retrace the main and secondary ideas of the text, as illustrated by the following examples: "*Le thème de ce texte est Crime de New York*", and "*L'idée principale est : Dans New York la pizza on mange avec les mains*".

Moreover, as can be seen from the above examples, the French language expressed in numerous scripts was not up to the standard expected of candidates sitting for French at Advanced Level. In a number of scripts, the train of thought was unintelligible and the candidates were unable to express their ideas clearly. Some lacked basic vocabulary associated with this exercise; others remembered the actual words in a parrot like way, not knowing what these words meant, as can be concluded by such comments as "*Le ton employé par l'auteur est un ton malgré et malheureusement*". Other expressions studied by heart, such as "*L'auteur va tout de suite au vif du sujet*", had spelling mistakes; others had a word or two left out or had words used out of context.

As regards functional analysis, a large number of candidates just mentioned and enlisted different verbs found in the text without analysing the author's purpose of using such tenses. Unfortunately candidates seem to be unable to distinguish between the Imperfect tense and the Conditional mood simply because the endings are the same. Some even stated that the adverb *désormais* is an example of the Imperfect tense, whilst others classified the noun *apaisement* as an adverb! These are yet other examples of the candidates' poor vocabulary and syntax.

A few candidates summarised the text instead of analysing it. Some did not even mention the main and secondary ideas. Others just wrote their personal opinion on the matter of eating pizza with or without the use of cutlery and commented about the triviality of the main theme. However, there were several candidates who performed well. Having read the text carefully, they diligently prepared a plan and made an adequate linguistic as well as functional analysis, outlining the author's aim in the use of long and short sentences and commenting effectively on the use of web terminology and that of the media. As for stylistic analysis, many candidates ably commented on the subjectivity as well as the sarcasm of the author. The majority of the candidates also examined the use of punctuation by the author well.

Candidates are encouraged to revise their scripts well as, in many cases, there were many spelling mistakes, even when a quotation was taken from the text. One cannot but repeat, as in the past, that grammatical errors, especially those relating to basic grammar rules are heavily penalised. As these errors are repeated in Paper 2, especially in the essay, they are not being indicated in this section of the report.

Paper II

This paper consisted of two exercises, an essay and a written comprehension.

Essay (100 marks)

The candidates' ideas for the essay were generally poor; their limited vocabulary was definitely a drawback. Most candidates lack the basic knowledge of French grammar which they are expected to have mastered by the time they sit for the SEC Ordinary level examination. 53 candidates chose title (b), 23 candidates chose title (d), 8 candidates chose title (c), 6 chose title (e), while the rest chose title (a) which was the most unpopular. One can repeat previous reports in pointing out the type of grammatical errors in the candidates' scripts wherein only the examples are different. Errors include: "son religion", "son nationalité", "une âge", worse still, "son classe sociale", where the possessive adjective is in the masculine while the adjective is in the feminine. Irregular plurals are ignored, as in "droits fondamentals". At this level, there can be no excuse for such basic errors as "l'idéologies", "personnes mauvais", "les valeurs n'existe pas", "beaucoup de travaille", "cette experience ne ma pas seulement aider", "j'ai resté", "on oublié", "le racisme deviens", "au cet echelle en Malte", and others regarding the agreement of the past participle, relative pronouns, direct and indirect pronouns, prepositions and sentence structure. Orthography was poor in most scripts, while accents were thrown about indiscriminately. Interference with Maltese, English and Italian was very common, as in "les partits", "les adults", "un héro", and "quatre". In the case of some four or five scripts one could hardly guess the argument that the candidate was trying to make. The essay carries one-fourth of the total mark; the Board recommends a serious study of this problem so that the necessary steps are taken to ensure that these basic mistakes are no longer encountered in Advanced level scripts.

2. Written Comprehension

The first question was probably the most straightforward but a small number of candidates completely misunderstood the word *rapport* and, instead of explaining the professional relationship between Bill Connor and Krake and the relationship of mother and daughter between Madame Di Stasio and Maria, they reported what happened to these characters. Again, very few candidates answered question 2 with precision. The answer had to give the reason *why* there was a great quantity of treacle in the cistern, but many candidates just stated that the cisterns were huge and able to contain a considerable amount of treacle or simply that the distillery (many referred to it as "factory") was storing a great amount of *mélasse*. Just as the word *Pourquoi* was overlooked in question 2, in question 5, the word *comment* was overlooked. For, instead of explaining in what way the author rendered his account of the event dramatic, many candidates rewrote the story. Candidates are advised to read and reread the question carefully before rushing to write their answer. The third question was by far the most successful even though candidates should be encouraged to be more specific and to the point in this type of exercise. In question 3 (c) candidates were asked to find in the text an example of an enumeration; many confused this figure of speech with a numerical expression and gave as an answer *56 kilomètres*. Question (e) demanded of the candidates an example of the past participle; however, many gave a verb conjugated in the *Passé Composé*. As regards questions 4 and 6, some candidates tended to copy the exact words of the text. They were unable to rephrase the text as their vocabulary was too limited and their French expression also had its limits. This shortcoming was also evident in question 7 where candidates were specifically asked to rephrase a particular sentence from the text. While most candidates understood question 8 and wrote a comprehensible answer, their weak vocabulary and incorrect expression prevented them from obtaining full marks for their answer. Question 9 required the candidates to write two sentences to express their reaction to the story. Some did not answer this question; others retold the story.

Paper III (75 marks)

As in the past, most candidates chose to study *L'Avare* and *Le Petit Prince*; the rest, except for 19 candidates who prepared *Hiroshima mon amour*, chose *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. The other two texts in the syllabus were not prepared by any candidate.

The two questions on Molière's *L'Avare* were answered in the proportion 3 (question a):2 (question b). The Board is of the opinion that many candidates do not read the question well. As a result, they often

go at a tangent. One gets the impression that they have a set of prepared answers which they must include whether these fit into the question or not. In answering question (a), several candidates focused on the comical aspect of the title and ignored completely Moliere's psychological insight and his aim to criticize through his comedy the flaws of contemporary society. On the other hand, a number of attentive candidates gave a holistic answer to the question, illustrating their arguments by adequate examples of the comedy of manners, and included appropriate references to the text. Question 1 (b) was answered more satisfactorily and to the point. Candidates who tackled this question were generally well prepared and defined clearly the concern of Élise who had to concede to her tyrannical father's whims and who suffered as a result of a patriarchal society. The majority diligently outlined the complicated relationship between Harpagon and Élise and highlighted the willingness of Valère to disguise himself as a servant so as to befriend his future father-in law. Some candidates lost marks as they hardly commented on the submissive character of Élise and focused their answer on the oppressive father, giving examples of the ill-treatment of his servants. Instances where candidates go completely out of point as well as others where characters are confused, such as assigning a quality or a fault to one character rather than to another, are a clear indication that the set text is either not read at all or is completely misunderstood. Question 2 (a) on the role of the drawings in *Le Petit Prince* was not as popular as 2 (b). Several candidates who opted for the former, did not discuss the function of the drawings in the book, the symbolical message behind the pictures; they simply described the different pictures and the relative episodes from the story. Others, however, succeeded in portraying efficiently the role of such drawings by explaining the underlying message behind this original way through which the author emphasises the importance of innocence and childhood, qualities that are lost in adulthood, also as a result of the fact that adults forget to use their imagination. These drawings, apart from appealing to children and adults alike, triggered the friendship between *le petit prince* and the pilot. Although question 2(b) was very straightforward, most candidates who answered this question wrote some prepared material which was totally irrelevant to the question. It was pointless to highlight all the persons that *le petit prince* met along his way and to lose sight completely of the fact that they were required to state whether or not they agreed that the given quotation was in fact one of the most important in the text. Candidates should read the question carefully and answer accordingly! The majority of candidates answering questions on *Thérèse Desqueyroux* opted for 3 (b) on the role of the reader vis-à-vis the novel. Few really impressed, simply because for the most part it was like a fixed menu in a restaurant – a *rabâchage* of the same notes dished out to meet all imaginable eventualities. The candidates who tackled question 3 (a) on the theme of silence fared much better. Five candidates answered questions on *Thérèse Desqueyroux* in Maltese, while one answered in French. As regards question 4 (a), a very straightforward question, few succeeded to argue convincingly about the temporality of a love affair that would not make sense in circumstances other than those of a past relived because of a common upheaval shared by the protagonists. Question 4 (b), which was only attempted by one candidate, demanded an analysis of the dialogue between the protagonists from the point of view of its contradictory element. No comments are being made on questions 5 and 6 as no candidate attempted these questions.

The following are some general comments. Firstly, candidates lose marks when they include in their answers irrelevant material which they would have studied by heart. Secondly, candidates should indicate correctly the letter following the question number; there were cases where question (a) was indicated and the answer related to question (b). Carelessness was also noted in spelling mistakes made in copying the question or in including in the answer words given in the question. In this year's scripts, quotations from the texts were conspicuous by their absence; quotations are useful to prove an argument. On the other hand, a considerable number of candidates showed in their answer that they were knowledgeable about the authors' biography.

Paper IV (30 marks)

The words that presented some difficulty were the following: *familial, hauts, prenant, pompier, repéré, été, pris, indemne, déçu* and *pouvoir*. However, simple everyday vocabulary such as *domicile, rayon* and *vigiles*, the adverb *bonnement*, the possessive adjective *ses* in *ses rêves* and *charge* in the expression *pris en charge*, were often misspelt.

The Oral Examination (60 marks)

The oral examination was composed of a reading exercise (15 marks) and a dialogue made up of two parts, namely, free conversation (20 marks) and a dialogue based on a set text on French culture (25

marks). The articulation of a number of words presented some difficulty: the ending –er of *se propager*, the nasal consonants in *incendie*, *extinction*, *manquant* and *un*, the numbers in *15e* and *16e* in *Lecture 1* and similar difficulties in *s'effondrer*, *s'écrouler*, *sauver* and *se dégager*, *incendiés*, *manifestants*, *tentés*, and *moment* in *Lecture 2*. Other areas candidates must work on include intonation, *liaisons* such as *ont été* in *Lecture 1* and *des affrontements* in *Lecture 2*, and punctuation marks. With regard to the Free conversation exercise, candidates prepared themselves rather well and made some interesting conversation. The candidates' limited vocabulary together with weakness in sentence structure remain their two main challenges. On the other hand, candidates generally obtained a good mark for the Dialogue based on the *Unités* on French culture in the syllabus.

As a final general remark, the Board would like to reiterate its concern regarding the low standard of the written French of the candidates as very little improvement, if any, is registered over the past year.

Chairperson
2014 Examination Panel