

**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA**  
**THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION**

**ADVANCED LEVEL**

**ITALIAN**

**MAY 2014**

**EXAMINERS' REPORT**

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE**  
**EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

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

**General Performance**

The number of candidates who sat for Italian at Advanced Level in 2014 is shown in Table 1 below, together with the tallies of grades obtained and figures reported for the examinations held in 2012 and 2013:

Table 1: Grades obtained by candidates in 2012, 2013 and 2014

	<b>May 2012</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>May 2013</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>May 2014</b>	<b>%</b>
Candidates	255		198		190	
Grades A-E	176	69	150	75.6	137	72.1
Grades A-C	114	44.7	96	48.5	91	47.9
Failed	63	24.7	40	20.2	38	20
Grade A	16	6.3	16	8.1	12	6.3
Grade B	32	12.5	30	15.1	23	12.1
Grade C	66	25.9	50	25.3	56	29.5
Grade D	42	16.5	31	15.7	27	14.2
Grade E	20	7.8	23	11.6	19	10
Absent	16	6.3	8	4	15	7.9

The drop in the number of candidates sitting for the Italian AM examination, registered between 2012 and 2013, was not reversed in 2014: 190 candidates registered for the examination this year, 15 of whom were absent. This sustained reduction in the number of candidates is cause for concern, and could be due to the fact that Italian is not considered to be an entry requirement for university courses, bar those which lead to a degree in Italian offered by the Faculties of Education and Arts.

The overall level of candidates who sat for the May 2014 session was quite similar to that of those who sat for the exam a year earlier, as displayed by the figures included in Table 1. A rather significant drop (4.8%) was registered in candidates who obtained Grades A and B, when compared to the May 2013 session. One must note, however, that in May 2012 the percentage of those who obtained the highest grades was very similar to the one registered this year.

As far as the different sections of the examination are concerned, the oral component, as was the case in recent Italian AM examinations, was the one in which candidates fared best. Once again a very low average mark was registered in the listening summary: this is a negative trend indeed, especially when one considers the importance of listening and understanding skills in second and foreign language learning. Low marks were also registered in the reading summary and in the culture (*L'Europa e l'Italia*) and literature anthology sections. This indicates that students need to work more on summary writing and that they ought to prepare themselves more thoroughly on the set textbooks.

On the other hand, some candidates demonstrated an excellent competence especially evident in the comprehension and through their writing skills: in fact a number of essays approached written native-like competence.

**The May 2014 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 summary was far from satisfactory, a trend also registered in 2012 and 2013. This may also be the result of the fact (as confirmed by the statistics published by the Malta Broadcasting Authority) that television viewing in Italian has decreased significantly, especially among the younger generations, when compared to the recent past. Opportunities to be exposed to the language in Malta are somewhat more limited when compared to some years ago, possibly affecting aural competences. This indicates that candidates following Advanced level courses in Italian need to provide themselves with regular opportunities to listen to Italian as spoken by native-speakers.

#### Paper II: Essay and language exercises

As in the case of the past two examination sessions, the range of marks obtained in the essays was extremely wide. Since the main objective of this part of the examination is to assess correct writing and appropriate application of grammatical rules, language errors lead to a considerable loss of marks. Recommendations made in these reports in 2012 and 2013 were, by and large, ignored by several candidates as errors in the following aspects of Italian grammar and textuality surfaced repeatedly in a number of scripts:

- spelling:
  - o distinction between *a/ha, o/ho, è/e, ce/c'è, ne/n'è/né*;
  - o use of 'h' and 'i' in syllables *chi, che, ghi, ghe, ciò, cia, ciu, gio, gia, giu*;
  - o incorrect insertion of 'h' in words, including syllables *cia* and *ciò*;
  - o use of accents and apostrophes (the former were practically non-existent in some scripts).
- morphology:
  - o use of direct and indirect pronouns, including agreement with the past participle;
  - o prepositions (several errors both in the choice of prepositions and in the use of *preposizioni articolate*);
  - o agreement, especially between nouns and adjectives;
  - o verbs: in many cases only basic verb tenses (e.g. the present indicative) were used throughout the whole essay; many candidates 'played safe', resorting to repetitive use of the same set of verbs.
- 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, with the same words repeated often.
- textuality and pragmatics:
  - o poor organization of text, especially introductions and conclusions;
  - o lack of editing. Most candidates did not bother to plan and check their work;
  - o lack of cohesion;
  - o incorrect use of punctuation: in some cases this reaches alarming levels with an almost total disregard of most punctuation marks, especially commas and capital letters;
  - o poor (or no) use of paragraphs;
  - o a lack of ability to write one's work according to the addressee (e.g. using a more formal style, when necessary).

In this year's session a number of candidates also encountered difficulties in sentence structure: this is quite alarming, especially when one considers that most candidates sitting for the Advanced level session would have studied Italian for at least five years at school. Needless to say, if sentence structure used by candidates is incoherent, it makes it difficult to understand what one writes. This inevitably leads to a substantial loss of marks.

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

Exercise 1 (pronouns): most common mistakes included the use of *c'è* (number 7: instead of *ce*) and the use of *quale / che* (number 8: instead of *cui*). In number 4 and number 9 some candidates used the masculine forms *melo* and *glielo*, instead of the feminine. Overall, the performance of candidates in this exercise was quite satisfactory.

Exercise 2 (verbs): A number of candidates found the choice of verb tenses to be rather problematic because of the sequence they had to follow. The overall performance was fairly satisfactory, but lower marks were achieved when compared to the first exercise.

Exercise 3 (syntax): Generally most candidates fared well in this exercise. Still, as far as punctuation is concerned, one notes that many candidates do not use a capital letter after opening inverted commas and close the sentence with the inverted commas, not with the full stop.

Exercise 4 (metalanguage): This is the exercise in which the candidates fared worst. Most mistakes concerned identifying the *coniunzione*, *avverbio* and *gerundio*.

#### Paper III: Written comprehension and written summary

The article set for the written comprehension was an extract from a short story (*La velocità degli angeli*) by the Italian author Gianrico Carofiglio. Many candidates understood the text well and obtained a satisfactory mark. In fact, besides the oral component, this was the exercise in which the candidates obtained the highest marks. A few candidates, on the other hand, denoted a severe lack of reading and comprehension skills.

The article chosen for the written summary was taken from an online newspaper (*www.corriere.it*). In this exercise the overall candidates' performance was much poorer than in the written comprehension: this was mainly due to the fact that, as already observed with regard to the essay, the average writing skills of many candidates are rather poor. Coherence and cohesion, two fundamental concepts in order to write correctly, seem to be alien to many.

These shortcomings are evident from the way their summaries were written with several candidates juxtaposing two sentences which had nothing to do with each other, repeating ideas and including details while omitting important points. In some cases it was clear that candidates did not understand the text well.

Marks were also lost for the usual basic errors in spelling, use of punctuation, use of articles (definite and indefinite) and the *preposizioni articolate*. Other shortcomings included the incorrect use of different tenses in the same sentence and agreement between adjectives and nouns.

As already pointed out when referring to the essays, this year's examination was characterised, in many cases, by poor sentence structure: there were too many short simple sentences, placed one after the other, which gave the passage a stuttering effect of fits and starts. In some cases, when candidates attempted a more complex structure, problems included illogical sequence of tenses, poor cohesion and unnecessary extensions to the opening clause.

Very few candidates rethink the passage and practically all of them just follow the sequence of the original. This shows that they are not aware that a newspaper's article may have a very different structure to that of a summary of one which, for example, could begin with the last idea of the article and work down from it in a logical, well-knit passage, avoiding the various repetitions that newspaper articles, almost invariably, contain.

The following recommendations are being put forward in order to help candidates address summary writing:

- learn how to write summaries which do not merely include bits and pieces of information mainly copied from the original;
- introductory sentences are to be straight to the point;
- the summary must indicate that the candidate has made the effort to produce a coherent text, with evidence of cohesion between one sentence and another;
- refrain from including personal comments in the text;
- summaries need not necessarily follow the original article step by step;
- repetition is to be avoided.

#### Paper IV: Culture, literature anthology and the novel

The candidates' performance in the part of the examination on culture (based on the *Europa e Italia* text) was poor. Many candidates showed a very superficial knowledge of the text as they did not prepare themselves adequately for this part of the examination. A sizeable amount of candidates barely obtained any marks in this section, although most of them have followed a two-year course on these texts. Many provided very shallow answers and were unable to comment at a deeper level. Several candidates omitted a considerable number of answers in the questions based on the reference to the context.

As far as the section based on the literature anthology was concerned, candidates who prepared themselves appropriately identified the passage and dealt with the questions well, providing adequate detail and demonstrating a good knowledge of the author and the work concerned. On the other hand, however, a considerable number of candidates were utterly unprepared in this area, showing they have no idea whatsoever about the passage and its author, and inevitably obtaining very low marks, if any at all. Surprisingly, quite a few candidates decided to not study at all for such an important section of Paper IV. The two passages, one on Dante's *Inferno, Canto I*, and the other on Pirandello's *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, were chosen approximately in equal measure. The questions that proved to be more challenging were: *Descrivi la struttura tematica dell'opera e le suddivisioni principali della prima parte* as regards Dante, and *Qual è il tema generale dell'opera? Come si collega alla vicenda del protagonista?* for Pirandello. Candidates should not just focus on the specific passage, but also on the general characteristics of the literary work it belongs to.

The performance in the literary essay was somewhat better and candidates' performance generally confirmed the trend noted in recent years. Candidates generally had an adequate knowledge of the chosen novel, although a worrying number clearly showed they have not read it or have just limited themselves to teacher's notes. As regards *La voce del violino* especially, some candidates provided out-of-point answers, possibly because they memorized an essay prepared beforehand and wrote it down irrespectively of what was asked of them. In general, in this section, the main problem was the lack of organisation in the literary essay, with arguments thrown in haphazardly without any attempt at logical sequence. Moreover, the level of written Italian was generally low, showing that candidates were mostly concerned with the content and did not pay enough attention to linguistic expression.

From a more positive point of view, there were a few candidates who fared very well in Paper IV and showed that their knowledge of the area was very extensive indeed. In some of these cases, answers were exhaustive and well-articulated and showed that these candidates had developed a genuine interest in these areas.

Conclusion

In order to address the shortcomings outlined above, it is useful to remind candidates of the following extract taken from the syllabus (2014):

*Advanced specifications should require candidates to:*

- *understand and study in greater depth aspects of the contemporary society, cultural background, literature (prescribed texts) and heritage of Italy, demonstrating a high level of critical awareness;*
- *use the target language to analyze, hypothesize, evaluate, argue a case, justify, persuade, rebut, develop arguments and present viewpoints, in speech and writing;*
- *demonstrate their capacity for critical thinking, to see relationships between different aspects of the subject and to perceive their field of study in a broader context;*
- *understand and apply grammar and syntax;*
- *apply a considerable enlargement of vocabulary expressing specific notions in the thematic areas specified for SEC and be sensitive to shades of meaning, implications and overtones in speech and writing;*
- *show knowledge of meta-language.*

As indicated in the above, learning Italian at this level does not merely involve a mechanistic task of studying the culture and literary texts, while cruising on the competence attained at SEC level. The process involved regards both improving one's standard as far as content is concerned, refining one's linguistic abilities and also developing critical awareness and thinking. This is especially important in order to write essays which denote a certain level of maturity, to summarize a text while reflecting on its content (and not merely "piecing" it together) and to address and study the culture and literature texts in a manner which will lead to appreciation of their content. Regrettably, these features were lacking in candidates' scripts in the May 2014 session, bar a few notable exceptions.

*Chairperson  
2014 Examination Panel*