



L-Università
ta' Malta

MATSEC
Examinations Board



Examiners' Report

AM French

First Session 2021

Examiners' Report (2019): AM French

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A. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Thirty-seven candidates registered for the above examination, three of whom were absent. This examination once again took place in special circumstances, namely the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The special situation accounted for some changes affecting the examination: the first session was held in June 2021. Secondly, the *Analyse d'un texte non littéraire*, considered as the most challenging component of the examination, carried 50 marks instead of the usual 60. Thirdly, the oral examination was not held. However, unlike last year, one component of Paper 4, namely the Dictation, was held as usual. The marks for the other components of Paper IV were awarded to all candidates, while the computation of marks allowed for the final result to truly reflect the grade deserved by each candidate.

GRADE	A	B	C	D	E	F	ABS	TOTAL
NUMBER	6	6	7	6	4	5	3	37
% OF TOTAL	16	16	19	16	11	14	8	100.0

Table 1: Distribution of grades for Advanced French 2021 First Session

The examination consisted of three written papers, two focusing on the French language, and the third one on French literature, apart from a dictation.

The overall performance was not discouraging, with 32% of candidates obtaining Grades A or B, although analysis of the papers shows that a significant number of candidates find difficulty writing in French, on the level of both grammar and vocabulary. Some papers contained a high number of grammatical mistakes and very basic vocabulary, which are unacceptable at this level.

B. Paper I

Analyse d'un texte non littéraire

(50 marks)

Although there was a significant number of candidates (38% of candidates) who obtained less than 50% of the marks allotted for this exercise, those who applied themselves well in it managed to obtain good marks: 27% of candidates obtained over 70% of the total mark for this paper, of whom 9% also managed to hit the 80% bar.

Most candidates identified the main idea of the text, namely the detrimental effects on the environment of used masks and other harmful Covid-related waste thrown into nature, but a considerable number of candidates failed to comment on the secondary ideas, namely: (1) The sheer amount of surgical masks thrown into nature is posing a serious risk for animals everywhere; (2) Masks and other (often plastic-based) Covid-related medical waste are also seriously threatening marine life; (3) These objects take very long to decompose and damage whole ecosystems by infiltrating the food chain. Marks are lost if the secondary ideas are not commented on, besides the fact that it is the main and secondary ideas that must guide the candidates to properly interpret the effect of all linguistic points mentioned on the text and the reader.

It was evident that almost all candidates identified the main idea of the text, that is the author's intention to express his concern about the negative consequences on the environment of masks and other pandemic-related protection items. However, a good number of candidates once again mostly limited themselves to mentioning the choice of vocabulary, the use of punctuation, sentence length and verb tenses. Candidates should reflect on what these particular linguistic choices made by the author are contributing to the message and the identified ideas.

A number of candidates simply made a summary of the text rather than analysing it in depth and giving their interpretation of the motivation behind the choice of the discursive and linguistic aspects present in the text, and how the reader perceives them. Marks were deducted for this.

Some examples, limited to the use of pronouns and possessive and demonstrative adjectives, will be given here to show the type of comments that are expected.

As regards pronouns, the repetition of the subject pronoun « ils » in the text, referring to plastic protection equipment and more especially to masks (« ils peuvent menacer l'environnement », « ils menacent la vie marine », « ils deviennent des particules de plus en plus petites ») focuses the reader's attention on the cause of this crisis, thus leading to reflection on possible solutions for this problem: « L'ONG OceansAsia a demandé aux gouvernements d'augmenter les amendes contre ceux qui jettent des ordures dans la nature et encourage le recours aux masques réutilisables. » The subject pronoun « nous » in « mais quand nous les jetons » serves to implicate the reader and author in a direct manner in this environmental crisis.

With the possessive adjective « notre » in « les animaux qui partagent notre planète », emphasis is laid on the fact that every person is responsible for the state of the planet: the possessive adjective creates a connection between humans and the environment, including animals, and solicits the responsibility of the reader who is called upon to play an active role in the preservation of biodiversity.

The frequency of the demonstrative adjectives (« Ces grandes quantités de déchets médicaux », « ces plastiques », « Ces particules ») reinforces the impression of the amount of medical waste, emphasizing that its presence in natural spaces is alarmingly widespread.

The trend continues of having candidates who jump to the conclusion that the author was completely absent from his text, simply because his name was not revealed in the examination. However, there were several aspects in the text which witnessed his presence: he shows awareness of the serious threats that nature and biodiversity are facing. The choice of vocabulary brings out a certain subjectivity and reflects the seriousness of the problem which is leading to his preoccupation. However, the author uses a pragmatic, informative style to give as much information as possible, and takes care to avoid detracting the reader's attention from the global problem to what would be his personal opinion. Nevertheless, his apparent objectivity is counterbalanced by his choice of references to experts and his precise examples, to support his point of view and reveal his preoccupied state of mind.

Candidates should take advantage of the possibility to use a monolingual dictionary while working out this exercise, to help them interpret the use of particular words and expressions. Candidates are likewise reminded that a number of marks are reserved in this exercise for presentation and accuracy of expression; they therefore need to pay attention to grammar and spelling in their writing. Candidates are encouraged to prepare themselves well for this exercise by regularly reading press articles in French. Upon reading other

articles they should dedicate some time to reflect upon the author's main and secondary ideas, his aims and the linguistic techniques used, to be able to make a critical analysis of his writing techniques.

C. PAPER II

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

Essay

(100 marks)

All the titles were chosen by the candidates. Title (e) relating to the importance of the smartphone proved by far the most popular and was answered by 53% of candidates present for the examination. Titles (a) and (b), both also of the argumentative type, dealing respectively with teleworking and the benefits of having pets, were each chosen by 15% of candidates. Title (c) on violence in society proved less popular (11% of candidates). Contrary to last year's choice of title, the narrative question on the worst day of one's life (*Ecrivez une histoire qui se termine par la phrase : « Décidément, c'était le pire jour de ma vie ! »*) was the least popular, as only two candidates attempted this title.

One positive observation was thus that candidates did not shy away from choosing argumentative essays. The essays were generally well argued and to the point. Marks were lost when candidates did not conform to the word count required of them of 350-400 words. It is a pity that some good essays lost marks mainly because they exceeded the limit of 400 words and, in a few cases, because their number of words was below 350.

Reading in French on a regular basis is a must as the use of idiomatic expressions was very limited. This also led to the appearance of false friends, such as *attend* for *fréquenter*. Another observation made is that candidates often included loan translations from English to avoid gaps in their phrases. Some examples include: « c'est très **convenient** pour moi », « Cette invention a changé **drastiquement** notre façon de vivre » and « un outil très **beneficial** ». Grammatical mistakes were also common errors. These include failure to use the infinitive mood when a verb follows a preposition (« L'expérience d'avait un heureux petit chien ») or when the verb follows another verb (« on peut l'utilise avec des intentions malheurs »). On the other hand sometimes the infinitive was used instead of a conjugated verb: « Ce chien, Charlie, m'apprendre beaucoup de choses ». Errors regarding the conjugation of simple verbs such as « la personnes violentes est » and « j'adores les chien », are possibly due to negligence. The use of certain tenses like the passé composé needs to be revised (« j'ai rentrer »). Quite often, candidates mix up the gender even of common nouns, as in the examples « la racism », « une chien » and « le maison ». There were quite a few problems with contracted articles, as in « grâce à le smartphone » and « Les bienfaits de le téléphone portable ». These examples show a poor level of the language ; in fact, some essays were full of sentences that are far from reaching the desired level of the language at Advanced level: « Dans la voiture, je était dans la dernier de voiture pour le gens ne pevent pas voir moi » ; « Si je ne oublier pas mon téléportable; je peut appeller la policié à la dans la voiture et je ne reste pas et paye ce je escapé ». These essays were globally weak, with structure and word order difficulties.

It was on the other hand noted that the writing of some candidates was of quite good quality, as is required at Advanced Level. However, the average mark of the essay was 55.8%, which is quite low. It is recommended that Advanced Level candidates strive to widen their range of vocabulary and practise grammar to attain more accuracy; they should read extensively to be prepared to discuss argumentative topics in order to provide and develop interesting arguments.

Reading Comprehension

(75 marks)

The average mark for the comprehension was 44 out of 75 marks (58.6%). Twenty-four percent of candidates did not even manage to obtain 50% of the mark.

Questions a), b), c) d) e), f) and g) focused on the content of the text, which dealt with the way beauty affects people's behaviour. These questions were answered correctly by the majority of candidates. With regard to question b), which required candidates to explain an expression taken from the text, most candidates understood the expression but found difficulty to express themselves correctly without copying the text. In fact, the main difficulty encountered by the candidates in this exercise was, as far as the writing goes, their limited vocabulary and their lack of application or knowledge of grammar rules, often displaying difficulty in sentence construction.

The performance of some candidates shows that learners need to read much more than they do, to widen their vocabulary. In some scripts, there was not even one correct word with an equivalent meaning found in the text for the six terms proposed in question (i). Thus, for instance, for the prompt « ont constaté », terms like « a déterminé » were provided, as well as « considérables » for the prompt « c'est pareil ». In spite of the relative simplicity of metalinguistic terms proposed in question (j), some candidates had difficulties finding the required items in the text. All six items were mistaken in a few scripts. Lack of basic metalinguistic terms was thus frequently evident in candidates' attempts. To give one example for each subcomponent of this question, « luxe » was proposed as a past participle with the value of an adjective, the infinitive « posséder » was given as a verb in the past conditional, the adjective « charmants » as a reflexive verb, the noun « reflet » as an adverb of time, the noun « cible » as a comparative adjective and the adverb « c'est-à-dire » as the required verb in the present subjunctive.

One positive observation that was made is that candidates wrote their answers in full and took care to include details, depending on the marks allocated for each question.

As regards question (k), although the act of speech that candidates had to find was simply a sentence that is an exclamation, some failed to choose the right sentence, and ended up proposing a neutral declarative sentence. The exclamation mark could have been a great help in finding a correct sentence. Quite a number of candidates did not get full marks because they only gave the noun phrase « antirides destinés aux 8-12 ans » instead of the whole sentence « En 2011, la chaîne de supermarchés américaine Walmart a lancé des produits de maquillage anti-oxydants et antirides destinés aux 8-12 ans! ». It could be that some candidates were not aware that « phrase » in French means sentence, and not "phrase".

Candidates are once again reminded to always include the line number when quoting from the comprehension text, so as to ensure the validity and reliability of the answers provided. The line number gives the examiner a greater opportunity to consider the given terms and expressions in context.

D. Paper III

This paper required that candidates study three French literary works. It comprised two sections. Section A was compulsory and required candidates to answer a number of questions by choosing from two sets of questions in French. In Section B, candidates had to choose two questions on two different texts, out of a total of four possible literary works. Section B could be answered in French, Maltese or English. Very few candidates answered Section B in Maltese and expressed themselves well in this language. Very few candidates answered Section B in French and performed extremely well in both essay content and form. On the contrary there were candidates who performed poorly while answering in English. Four candidates were absent for this paper, one more than for the language papers.

Each of the three questions the candidates had to answer carried 25 marks, for a total of 75 marks.

Section A

(25marks)

The set of questions (1) in the compulsory Section A on Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire* was chosen by 85% of candidates, while only 15% chose the set of questions (2). A considerable number of candidates could not place the extract in the scene or act where it appears. There were also many inaccuracies regarding the plot, for instance, the statements that Cléante and Angélique were secretly married as from the beginning of the play, or that Cléante was truly in love with Toinette, or still that Thomas Doifoirus was a wise person. Not less than 61% of the candidates who sat for the paper failed to obtain at least 50% of the mark for this question. Moreover, in a significant number of cases, the marks obtained were extremely low.

One major problem for candidates in replying to this question was in expressing themselves in French. This happened in spite of the fact that the language didn't need to be complex. The following sentences taken from different scripts testify to the poor level of expression and the lack of depth in ideas apparent in the work of some candidates, to the point that candidates' statements were even incoherent at times: « En outre, le phrase l'emploi de comique de mas" et la sagesse de Thomas. »; « ... En outre son bon sens et évidante car il veut à la déguisement comme un maitre de musique. »

There were also frequent grammatical errors and difficulties with vocabulary, such as in: « Béralde est un bon homme qui veut le meilleur pour son famille. Il sait que son frère n'était pas malade et ne veulent pas que son nipote termine dans un couvent car son pere avait une malade imaginaire. »

Section B

While all candidates present for the examination attempted Section A, few candidates left out both essays in Section B and very few answered two questions about Pagnol's play, so they were only awarded marks for the better of the two essays. Performance in Section B was substantially better than in Section A. Only 6 essays out of a total of 63 essays in Section B obtained marks lower than 50%. Thus, performance was comparable to last year in this section.

This year, there were four candidates who answered the questions on Victor Hugo's novel *Le dernier jour d'un condamné*. Two answered Question B1 on the interplay of fiction and realism in the novel, while the other two answered Question B2 on the theme of justice. The answers presented good knowledge of the author and provided a detailed interpretation of the novel and the issues in question, giving convincing arguments accompanied by good quotations.

Once again, *Concerto à la mémoire d'un ange* proved to be the most popular text; in fact, all candidates who attempted two essays in Section B answered either question B3, on how the short stories engage the reader (12 out of 31 essays on Schmitt's work), or question B4, on life-changing encounters that one experiences (19 essays). This year, one mitigation measure due to the Covid-19 situation allowed candidates to refer to only two short stories from the collection of short stories. The most common short stories referred to were *Le Retour*, *Concerto à la mémoire d'un ange* and *L'empoisonneuse*, with less candidates choosing *Un amour à l'Elysée*.

Joseph Joffo's novel *La jeune fille au pair* was chosen by 17 (52% of) candidates. These essays were at times superficial, so much so that there was a marked distinction between candidates who obtained quite good marks and those whose performance was only fair. A few answers even obtained very low marks. Question B5, asking about the motivations behind Wanda's solitary escapes, was answered by 10 candidates, while question B6, on the effects on Wanda of her father's suicide, was chosen by 7 candidates. Some answers required more depth and coherence, providing the necessary detail.

There were in all 10 candidates who provided answers to questions B7 (7 candidates) and B8 (3 candidates) on Marcel Pagnol's *La femme du Boulanger*. Question B7 concerned the themes of disagreement and reconciliation while Question B8 examined candidates on the protagonist's character. Most of these answers obtained average marks, as the arguments presented were not sufficiently insightful but were once again somewhat unnecessarily lengthened. There were however a few essays which scored rather high marks.

It is once again strongly recommended by the examining panel that candidates prepare themselves for all three questions in a balanced manner. In any one question, only a maximum of 25 marks can be obtained, and this will not make up for the marks lost from the remaining question/s.

While some quotations were used well and were pertinent and accurate, some answers were short of quotations, or contained irrelevant ones that were out of context.

E. Paper IV

Dictation

While only few candidates did not manage to obtain at least 50% of the mark in this exercise, it is worrying to notice that candidates' dictation texts are very often simply riddled with mistakes. Many candidates do not make the phonetic association between the pronunciation of consonants and especially of vowels and their written form. Thus « courageux » ended up being written as « courages », « vitrine de présentation » as « vitrine d'une présentation », « serait un jeune homme » as « se rétein jamais », « l'un des deux » as « l'an de deux », « fuite » as « foute », « la jambe » as « le jambe », etc.

Candidates are not reflecting on grammatical points, especially subject-verb and noun-adjective-determinant agreements while writing their dictation. Thus the feminine plural « animées » was given for the masculine singular noun « un après-midi », the singular noun « force » at times followed the plural determinant « des », the singular, feminine noun « rue » was qualified by the masculine plural adjective « commerçants ». Even pronunciation can help here: the required feminine form « commerçante » is pronounced with a 't' in the end; whereas in the masculine form the 't' is silent.

Candidates must reflect upon the sense that the phrases and sentences should be making. From the context of the content of the text, it is difficult to understand how « Je n'ai pas eu peur. » ended up transformed into « Je n'est pas super. » and « je me suis dit » into « je me soudit ».

It is recommended that candidates follow media in French to get better accustomed to French pronunciation. Reading will also help them get used to morphological agreements.

F. Conclusion

Unfortunately, the special circumstances determining examination conditions this year meant once again that candidates could not be assessed for their competence in spoken French. Consequently, evaluation of the culture component of the syllabus, which is assessed orally, was also foregone.

As regards writing in French, it was this year again observed that many morphological and syntactic errors found in the candidates' analyses, essays and comprehensions are basic mistakes which Advanced Level learners of French should not be making. Most candidates need to be able to handle a much wider range of vocabulary. In order to accomplish the requirements on these two levels, the Examining panel cannot stress enough the importance of reading, and in today's world, of following other media in French. In order to be successful at this examination, candidates need to practise the language assiduously, following ideal native models, which are nowadays very easily accessible to them.

Chairperson
Examination Panel 2021