

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

ITALIAN

MAY 2015

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD

**SEC ITALIAN
MAY 2015 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

General information**1. Registrations**

Students can sit for Italian during the May session only. In the 2015 session, a total of 1839 candidates registered to sit for the Italian examination. Out of 1839, 984 candidates applied for Paper IIA (53.5%) and 855 candidates for Paper IIB (46.5%). There was a slight increase in the number of applications for Italian (2.13%) as compared to the May 2014 session.

Table 1: Registrations

Year	Total SEC registrations	Italian SEC registrations	%
2012	7295	2025	27.76
2013	6694	2026	30.27
2014	6599	1924	29.16
2015	5878	1839	31.29

2. Attendance

Out of a total of 984 candidates for Paper A, 7 candidates did not sit for any part of the examination. For Paper B, 20 candidates out of the total number of Paper B registrations (855) were absent. Tables 2, 3.1 and 3.2 below provide an overview of the grades obtained by the candidates in 2015, and a comparison of the results obtained in 2014 and 2015.

3. Overall Performance**Table 2: 2015 Grade Distribution**

GRADE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	TOTAL
PAPER A	112	208	314	199	79			65	7	984
PAPER B				171	244	166	88	166	20	855
TOTAL	112	208	314	370	323	166	88	231	27	1839
% OF TOTAL	6.09	11.31	17.07	20.12	17.56	9.03	4.79	12.56	1.47	100

Compared to 2014, in the 2015 session, there was a slight decrease in the number of candidates who obtained grade 1, however more candidates obtained grade 2 (+1.1%). Grade 4 and grade U results remained practically unchanged. The candidates who obtained grades 3 and 5 increased slightly, while the number of absent candidates decreased in 2015 (-0.9%).

Tables 3.1 and 3.2: 2014-2015: a Comparison**Table 3.1**

	2014		2015	
	Number of candidates	% of those who sat for the examination (n=1878)	Number of candidates	% of those who sat for the examination (n=1839)
Grades 1-3	639	34	634	34.5
Grades 4-5	707	37.6	693	37.7
Grades 1-5	1346	71.7	1327	72.2
Grades 6-7	290	15.4	254	13.8
Grades 1-7	1636	87.1	1581	86

Table 3.2

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Abs	Total
2014 % of Total	6.4	10.2	16.6	20	16.7	9.9	5.2	12.6	2.4	100
2015 % of Total	6.1	11.3	17.1	20.1	17.6	9.0	4.8	12.6	1.5	100

4. Comments on the Candidates' Performance

The recommendations and comments made in this report are aimed at prospective candidates and all teachers of Italian in Secondary Schools.

Paper 1 Part 1 - Oral / Aural skills

The speaking component consisted of three exercises, namely a role-play, 'extended speech' (a brief presentation of a text which candidates chose from a given list) and a free conversation about general topics.

The marking scheme used by examiners (this part of the examination is conducted by a separate set of examiners) was based on the following aspects:

- (1) the candidate's ability to interact spontaneously and autonomously in a conversation.
- (2) the candidate's ability to communicate coherently in Italian, giving priority to communicative skills and strategies.

Oral examiners commented on the fact that there were still quite a few candidates who presented themselves for this examination and could not even show knowledge of basic communication in Italian. Some candidates could not express themselves autonomously but depended on the examiner's questions and prompts to speak in Italian. For the oral component, marks were mainly determined on the basis of the candidate's ability to communicate effectively in Italian.

The Role Play

This year's role plays took the form of a conversation. Candidates needed to question the interlocutor for information or provide information themselves as happens in a normal conversation. Candidates had to take roles which included explaining a particular situation.

It is imperative that candidates are encouraged to practise speaking skills regularly before sitting for the exam. This practice should start early, as soon as the students start to learn a language. Speaking is a productive skill and like the other language skills, it should be given its due importance. Candidates should participate in meaningful, authentic speaking activities which will help them feel at ease in a conversation, both in real life and during oral examinations.

The 'Extended Speech'

A number of examiners involved in this part of the examination commented on the fact that there were candidates who presented themselves for this examination without having read any of the set texts. In a few instances, some students were not even aware that there existed a list of set books in the SEC Italian syllabus. The examination syllabus needs to be adhered to as otherwise students will be penalized and lose precious marks during the examination. The list of texts contains titles which are suitable for foreign language learning, and books are easily available in school libraries and bookstores.

The Free Conversation

Candidates were asked to talk about topics of a general nature, most of them being related to daily occurrences or to topics which candidates were familiar with. The examiners helped the students by asking questions and giving prompts. Examiners pointed out that candidates were more at ease with this exercise and performed better when compared to the role play. This implies that some candidates still have difficulty picturing themselves in a given situation and talking about it.

Listening

This component consisted of three exercises. In the first exercise, candidates were required to match comic strips to phrases, whereas in the second and third exercises, they were required to listen to a short text and answer questions in writing on it. The questions assessed a number of enabling skills, including listening for gist, listening for detail, working out the meaning from the context, and inferring. The format of the questions was varied and included:

- reference questions
- fill in the blanks
- matching
- true or false (with reasons for answers given)

Paper 1 Part 2 - Language Use

Candidates are allowed one hour and a quarter to complete this paper, the last component of Paper 1 which is common to all candidates. It requires metalinguistic and analytical skills. The tasks set in Section A examine the candidates' accurate use of the language, covering knowledge of spelling, morphology, vocabulary, syntax, structures and sociolinguistic competence, whereas Section B examines Culture.

In Section A, most of the exercises are placed in a context and also require reading and understanding. There were four exercises which proved to be the most difficult for candidates, namely exercises 6, 7, 8 and 9. This shows that candidates need to improve in vocabulary building, consolidate the use of verbs and pronouns, and observe language in context.

Section B - Culture

As in Section A, candidates needed to read and understand the context to answer the questions correctly. Exercise 2 was in the cloze format and included options to choose from. The candidates fared quite well in this section.

Comprehensions

The candidates' reading skills were tested by means of two texts for each Paper (A & B) on which questions were asked. The reading skills tested in the IIA and IIB papers are largely similar as are the question formats. The difference lies in the difficulty level of the texts, the amount of reading required, and the level of reading skills required. The question formats in both papers included short answer questions, reference questions, true or false questions requiring candidates to give a reason for their answers, and eliciting the meaning of words or phrases. This format was very similar to the one adopted in previous years, with questions set to test a varied amount of skills including skimming, scanning, inference and vocabulary. The two texts in each paper varied in topic and in type thus allowing the examiners to achieve a more accurate picture of the candidates' reading abilities.

The markers of this part of the paper commented that both comprehension texts were well within the candidates' language competency and the topics discussed were particularly suited to the candidates' age group. Candidates particularly struggled in questions where they needed to provide other words in Italian (Paper A *Branco* 1 question 6, *Branco* 2 question 6) and where they had to answer questions which required knowledge and understanding of specific parts of the text (Paper A *Branco* 1 question 7, *Branco* 2 question 7, Paper B *Branco* 1 question 10). The candidates also demonstrated difficulty with questions which required summary skills (Paper A *Branco* 1 question 8, Paper B *Branco* 2 question 10). While the majority of the candidates attempted the question, most failed to mention the points which summarized the text or did not use their own words while doing so. This emphasises the importance of reading and of building a sound vocabulary base. In Paper B, candidates were not required to summarize the text but needed to read a series of phrases and put them in order according to the storyline. This task required logical thinking skills and proved to be difficult for candidates. Candidates need to practise further the skills of reading and understanding a text in Italian.

Writing Tasks

The tasks in paper A are essay/short message titles which the candidates need to write about without any prompts. For Paper B, the writing tasks are guided and there is a clear outline of how the candidates can develop the task. Notwithstanding this fact, some candidates do not even attempt the tasks or write short paragraphs which contain more words in Maltese and English than in Italian; some fail to understand the title and guidelines provided.

In Paper A, the candidates' effort to write a coherent text was noticeable. Most candidates used punctuation marks well and divided their ideas in paragraphs. This showed that they took time to plan their work. Some candidates tended to write well over the established number of words. It is important to highlight the need to abide by the established guidelines because very often longer texts lead to more mistakes. The majority of candidates stayed well within the parameters of the word count required.

There were some shortcomings when it came to fluency in writing. Often the sentence structure needed to be changed and while some candidates clearly did revise their work and correct the texts, many did not reread their work or make any changes. Candidates need to be reminded to use the tenses according to the needs of the text. It is very common to see past and present tenses in the same sentence which inevitably leads to confusion in understanding. Candidates also need to have a good grasp of basic grammatical concepts, such as the use of the article and prepositions (*preposizioni articolate*).

In Paper B, little or no punctuation was used, and the texts produced by the candidates were very often difficult to understand. Some texts did not even demonstrate a basic notion of continuity; instead, they consisted of a series of disjointed words on paper. Many wrote words in English or Maltese instead of using Italian. Some even mixed three languages together resulting in a completely incoherent and unintelligible text. Candidates need to read more so that they can enhance their ideas, write better, more structured sentences, and use punctuation marks as necessary.

Spelling mistakes were evident in the work of both Paper A and Paper B candidates, however the latter usually also demonstrated limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. As already outlined in previous years, there is room for improvement.

5. Conclusion

A good number of candidates who sat for the examination reached the standards required. Performance is very similar to previous years, but it can improve. There needs to be more emphasis on the productive skills. It is evident that with regard to listening skills, the trend is for candidates to fare better. As regards writing and speaking skills, candidates need to read and practise further in order to learn vocabulary, improve their confidence and improve their use of tenses and sentence structure.

*Chairperson
2015 Examination Panel*