



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	French
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Again this year the general consensus of the markers was that the examination as a whole was quite accessible. Candidate performance was similar to 2008. Markers again felt that there were many Good and Satisfactory candidates but fewer Very Good. There were also fewer Very Poor performances, but still quite a few candidates who struggle with the level of achievement needed.

Some instances of poor English continue to be commented on by the markers. Candidates' answers were often spoiled and occasionally incomprehensible because of poor English.

In both parts of the question papers, **Reading and Translation** and **Listening and Discursive Writing** candidates performed well in the comprehension questions. This was perhaps mainly due to the extra time allotted to Paper I which allowed candidates to complete the inferencing question more fully. However, the translation passage was once again not well done, on the whole.

The **Folios** were, on the whole, very ordinary. The discussion of a film without explicit reference to a literary text is still a worrying trend and candidates are penalised.

Speaking. As always, the Visiting Examiners praised the efforts of candidates in this most rewarding of exercises. Candidates are, for the most part, well-prepared and willing to speak and it is always a pleasure to hear what they have to say. Occasionally, rooms allocated for the speaking are not the most suited for the purposes of this exercise.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Reading and Translation

As mentioned, the passage seemed to be very accessible. Candidates managed to answer the comprehension questions better this year, with some quite detailed answers and not just wholesale translation of the text. Good questions led to good answers

Listening and Discursive Writing

The Listening questions this year were answered very well. It seems that with more availability of practice material candidates are more confident with the examination.

Folio

There were some very good folio essays showing good preparation. Again, however, the choice of topics continues to raise concern and this unnecessarily penalises the candidate. Some titles are extremely vague and others needlessly too ambitious.

There is still too much evidence of only a film being studied without an appropriate text. There continues to be a problem with quotations. Very poor spelling and quotations in English mar some essays.

This year there were many examples of inaccurate word counts. This should be avoided.

Speaking

Generally, candidates were very willing to speak and engaged very well with the exercise.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading and Translation

The Translation again caused difficulties. Careless translation and poorly expressed English spoiled many performances and it is obvious that candidates do not re-read what they have written.

Listening and Discursive Essay

The Essays were probably the part of the examination that was least well done. Once again some candidates did not read the essay titles carefully enough and wrote essays that were largely irrelevant. Over-prepared and memorised essays are still evident in many instances.

All essay titles were attempted in good numbers with “La vraie communication” and “L`égalité des sexes” being the most popular. These, however, tended to deal with (A) the virtues of the internet and not la vraie communication and (B) equality in the workplace and not in marriage

Once again some essays were marred by some very poor French. Wrong genders, wrong tenses, no accents, non-existent agreements of both verb and adjectives, poor use of dictionary were evident in these instances.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading and Translation

Answers to the comprehension questions should contain as much relevant detail as possible.

More practice is needed for the inferential question. Personal comment is appropriate as long as reference to the text is made.

More practice is needed in translation. Candidates should be aware that if the translation does not read or sound like English then it is quite likely that the translation is wrong.

Listening and Discursive Writing

Read the essay titles carefully. Pre-learned essays may not fit what is asked and therefore can be largely irrelevant and penalised as such.

Use of dictionary should be practised.

Folio

Read the folio guidelines very carefully.

Extended Reading and Viewing

Choose essay titles with great care and thought and ensure that they are within the capability of the candidates. There is also a word limit of 750 words.

A film on its own is not acceptable. The basis of preparation is a literary text. The viewing of a film may enhance the experience but on its own does not constitute a valid approach.

Ensure there is a bibliography and that it conforms with the guidelines sent to centres.

Ensure that candidates take time to reflect on what they have written and that appropriate guidance/support/redrafting takes place.

Ensure that the content is appropriate to Advanced Higher.

Language in Work

Some Language in Work Reports did not display appropriate levels of critical evaluation and analysis of the vocational areas studied. A number of candidates compiled Reports which offered little or no analysis or critical reflection.

Speaking

It is externally important to have the right equipment ready for the VE's visit and also a suitable room.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	719
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	710
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 200				
A	24.1%	24.1%	171	140
B	29.0%	53.1%	206	119
C	25.2%	78.3%	179	99
D	9.0%	87.3%	64	89
No award	12.7%	100.0%	90	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.