Common questions about National 5 Modern Languages

Assignment–writing

What is the purpose of the assignment–writing?

The assignment–writing is a formative coursework task that supports the aims and purpose of the National 5 Modern Languages course, where candidates apply knowledge and understanding of a modern language and develop their understanding of how language works. It enables candidates to sample the course more widely and increases personalisation and choice.

How do SQA ensure that all centres conduct the assignment–writing in the same way and under the same conditions?

Clear parameters are set out in the 'Course assessment structure: assignment–writing' section of the course specification to allow centres to approach this coursework task in the same way and apply the same degree of supervision.

When candidates complete the assignment–writing can they use the same topic or context in their performance–talking?

When preparing candidates for the assignment–writing, teachers and lecturers should give them opportunities to practise using ideas, vocabulary and structures from other skills and across the four contexts.

The process of completing the assignment–writing can be helpful for the performance–talking as candidates can, where appropriate, use the same topic or context covered in the assignment–writing, for example as part of the presentation section. Candidates could also use language and structures that they cover in the assignment–writing in the conversation section of the performance.

What do centres need to submit to SQA for the assignment–writing?

Candidates must submit their assignment–writing using the assignment–writing answer booklet for each Modern Languages course. SQA distribute hard copies of these answer booklets to centres as stationery in the autumn each year.

Centres are notified by SQA of the submission deadline through their SQA co-ordinator. Centres must submit one piece of writing per candidate (not the draft with any annotations). As stated in the course specification, the submitted piece of writing must be free of annotations. Any feedback or an improvement code must not be applied to a candidate's submitted version.

The 'Evidence to be gathered' section of the course specification states that the following candidate evidence is required for this assessment:

♦ one piece of writing in the modern language as a response to a stimulus provided in English, from one of the contexts of society, learning or culture

♦ candidate answer booklet signed by the candidate

Do centres have to submit the stimulus in English with a candidate's writing?

No, this is not necessary at National 5. For the purposes of external marking, two things need to be clear – the context chosen and the title of the writing – so that the relevance of the content may be considered against the marking instructions.

What is the purpose of a writing improvement code?

Using a writing improvement code helps to reduce the amount of time required by teachers and lecturers to explain the nature of errors in writing and how to correct them.

The writing improvement code is a tool that helps candidates build their self-evaluation skills. The code should highlight the types of errors they have made, and the amendments needed to improve the quality of their writing.

Teachers and lecturers must not provide the correct version in the modern language. What does that mean?

This means that the teacher or lecturer should not write the correct answer in the modern language when a candidate has made an error. Instead, they should only indicate the type of error made. The candidate should then use this feedback to make the appropriate correction. Teachers and lecturers must refer to the assessment conditions for the assignment–writing as set out in the course specification.

How much support is allowed at the draft and redraft stage?

The course specification document lists the materials that may and may not be used.

Do teachers and lecturers have to use the writing improvement code?

No, this is not mandatory but could be useful in helping candidates understand how to correct their own errors once they understand the nature of the issue.

Teachers and lecturers should use what works best for their circumstances and use a feedback system that is familiar to their candidates. This may be simply underlining areas that require attention, along with a discussion with the candidate. The writing improvement code is designed purely to help reduce the amount of time required to explain areas for improvement.

Do SQA produce a standardised improvement code or are centres free to create their own?

SQA offers an example of an improvement code in the coursework assessment task, but centres are free to create their own, use an existing one or use another method of feedback.

Can candidates choose contexts instead of the teacher or lecturer?

Candidates can choose topics or contexts for their assignment–writing based on areas of a particular interest to them. Candidates must not see the stimulus before stage 1.

How detailed do titles have to be?

There are no specific guidelines on this. A title should simply give an indication of what the writing is about.

If centres create their own stimuli, do these need to be prior verified by SQA?

No, centres can create scenarios or stimuli on any of the three contexts without the need for prior verification.

Are candidates allowed to prepare at home?

No, the whole process must be undertaken in the classroom to ensure the degree of supervision required.

Does the stimulus have to be stated by the candidate, or submitted to SQA with the assignment–writing?

No, at National 5, the candidate simply has to state the context on which the writing is based and provide an appropriate title.

Does the assignment–writing have to be produced under exam conditions?

The degree of supervision set out in the course specification should be followed but the assignment–writing can be done in normal teaching time, as part of class activities.

If all the candidates choose a different topic, do we have to prepare a stimulus for each one?

Centres may offer a choice of stimuli to the candidates.

If a group of candidates attempt the same stimulus, does it matter if they write the same things?

If candidates are attempting the same stimulus, it is reasonable to expect that all the writings would follow a similar framework or pattern. Given that each candidate is working independently, it would be unlikely that all candidates attempting the same stimulus would produce the same piece of writing.

What is the expected timescale between first draft and final piece?

The course specification states that the assignment–writing is to be produced 'over time'. It is for centres to decide how much time to give to this as indicated in the 'Assessment conditions' section of the course specification.

What happens if the final draft varies greatly from the first draft, for example the candidate has prepared something else and learned it off by heart?

As the purpose of the assignment–writing is to allow candidates to improve their writing, by applying knowledge of language based on feedback given by their teacher or lecturer, this would not be appropriate. Additionally, all materials relating to the process of producing the final writing must be retained in the classroom so candidates must produce their final version based on the first draft.

Are candidates allowed to use their jotters?

If a jotter simply contains, for example vocabulary or verbs, then this is fine, but centres should bear in mind that candidates are not allowed to access banks of phrases, writing frames or preprepared materials.

Does the list of support materials apply to the first draft as well as the final version?

Yes.

Do candidates need to use a range of tenses?

A range of tenses could be used but it is possible to produce a very good piece of writing simply by using one tense. The marking instructions make reference to using a range of tenses 'if appropriate'.

Should candidates refer to the productive grammar grid?

Candidates can refer to the productive grammar grid published by SQA if they wish but teachers and lecturers can guide them to examples of detailed language at National 5.

Is there any limit on the length of vocabulary lists?

No, there is no specific length but too much detail might not be helpful to candidates.

Can candidates complete another assignment–writing on a different context if they are not happy with their final version?

No.

Is the assignment–writing to be included in overall estimate calculations?

Yes, it needs to be included in the overall estimate, but it does not require a separate estimate on its own.

Performance–talking

How many questions should teachers and lecturers ask the candidate on the topic of the presentation?

It is not mandatory to ask 'link' questions on the presentation to lead into the conversation; however, principal verifiers frequently comment on the effectiveness of this technique. If teachers or lecturers wish to put questions to the candidate on their presentation context, they could ask a few questions (perhaps two or three) to lead naturally on to asking questions on the different context in the conversation section.

Do teachers and lecturers have to state on the audio recording which contexts the candidate is covering?

No, the candidate should state the contexts for the presentation and the conversation sections on the candidate assessment record (or other document used to record the marks breakdown).

What happens if a candidate does not cover a different context in the conversation section from that used in the presentation?

External verifiers check that the general marking principles have been applied to the conversation section.

Is it acceptable for candidates to use different regional and country-specific accents and pronunciation during the performance–talking?

Candidates should be familiar with and exposed to a range of language learning opportunities from different geographic linguistic settings, as part of learning and teaching. They may develop a variety of accents, pronunciations and usages as a result of these approaches, all of which are valid for assessment purposes.

Similarly, candidates may be L1 users of a modern language. Their pronunciation and usage are equally valid for assessment purposes.

The detailed marking instructions for the performance–talking outline that candidates can use pronunciation (and intonation) which can be understood by a speaker of the language.

General questions

Why are there scaled marks in the National 5 Modern Languages course?

The scaling of marks in National 5 Modern Languages means the four skills assessed (reading, listening, talking, writing) are equally weighted. The scaling of marks is not specific to Modern Languages.

What advice is there on the use of gender-neutral language?

A candidate can choose to use masculine, feminine or gender-neutral adjective agreements throughout their Modern Languages writing and performance–talking assessments, where appropriate to the language. Candidates must use their pronouns and adjectives consistently and adhere to associated conventions of adjectival agreement, where appropriate.

What support is available to teachers and lecturers?

Please refer to the National 5 Modern Languages web page.

Teachers and lecturers can refer to the 'Assessment resource summary' document, which summarises many of the available resources. This can be located under the 'Course support' tab on the National 5 Modern Language web page.

You will find general questions and answers about National Qualifications on our website at www.sqa.org.uk/faq.