



Course report 2019

Subject	French
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper: Reading and Translation

The question paper, in the context of culture, proved to be appropriately challenging, resulting in candidates achieving a wide range of marks. The comprehension questions proved accessible to the majority of candidates, while the overall purpose question and elements of the translation proved challenging. More able candidates coped well with these elements of the question paper, and consequently achieved high marks.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

The theme of technology for the listening stimulus was familiar to the vast majority of candidates, yet required quite specific responses and therefore provided an appropriate level of challenge to all candidates. Candidate responses came from all four essay options indicating that this section of the paper was accessible to all candidates.

Portfolio

Most candidates' portfolios focused on literature or media, covering a wide range of works. Candidate performance indicated that, where a suitable essay title had been attempted, a successful performance was more likely, allowing for a critical and analytical approach, and minimising the occurrence of a narrative approach. Very few language in work portfolios were submitted.

Performance–talking

Where candidates were well prepared and had completed an informative Subject Topic List (STL) form, the performance allowed for a genuine conversation and candidates could demonstrate their skills and subject knowledge.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Candidates performed well with the more straightforward comprehension questions. Most candidates showed an ability to extract the appropriate information from the text and give appropriate answers, while ensuring that they were giving sufficient information in their answers to obtain all the marks available.

Question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates responded well to the listening stimulus. The discursive writing section showed that candidates' skills in writing accurately were effective, as there was less reliance on prepared material in their responses. Candidates were able to use the titles as a springboard to express their ideas and opinions. Many candidates were able to incorporate discursive phrases and language structures into their writing.

Portfolio

Where candidates had a clear, specific focus for their essay, and ensured that it remained relevant to this focus, their portfolios attracted the higher marks available. The adoption of a critical and genuinely analytical – rather than narrative- approach throughout, allowed candidates to gain high marks.

Performance–talking

This element of course assessment offers candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in maintaining and sustaining a conversation in the target language with a visiting assessor. Most candidates were able to participate in interesting and relevant conversations. The more confident candidates demonstrated a good level in use of language and structures, while most demonstrated good pronunciation and intonation. Many candidates showed an ability to adapt learned material in order to respond to unexpected questions and demonstrate real conversational skills.

The choice of subjects for discussion had an impact on candidate performance. Those opting to speak about immigration, racism, gender equality and the role of women, family and marriage, the environment and new technology were able to engage in meaningful, in-depth conversation at an appropriate level. Candidates were generally comfortable talking about their chosen topic for the Specialist Study and many showed enthusiasm for the literature or film(s) studied, expressing strong opinions and an ability to justify these.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Some candidates lost marks by not accurately checking the number of marks available for each answer. Translating chunks of text instead of extracting the appropriate information to answer each question proved time-consuming for some, resulting in them being unable to finish the paper.

Many candidates struggled with the technique of answering the overall purpose question, supporting their answer merely with lists of quotations, or examples of the author's word choice and little else. In some instances, candidates answered the overall purpose question merely by repeating answers already given in response to the comprehension questions, or retelling the article.

Candidates had some difficulty with accurately translating tenses, in particular choosing the most appropriate way of translating the imperfect tense. There was some evidence of dictionary misuse (*travailler* = *to travel*, *arriver* = *only to arrive*) and an inability to distinguish between nouns and verbs, for example *montrer/montre*, *regarder/regard*. Awkward English expression cost some candidates marks in the translation as well as in other parts of the question paper.

Question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Clumsy expression in English penalised some candidates, who were unable to make it clear that they had understood the text.

In discursive writing, some candidates were let down by inaccuracies in grammar, particularly when attempting to use a variety of tenses, while on occasion the use of word-for-word translation from English to French was apparent, resulting in serious distortion of meaning.

Portfolio

Where candidates chose essay titles comparing works not bearing any realistic comparison, they tended to do less well. Similarly where candidates chose titles which did not require candidates to make any real analysis. Candidates who exceeded the maximum word count, or whose bibliographies did not contain at least two sources in the modern language, were unavoidably penalised. Clumsy English expression or inappropriate register detracted from the quality of some candidates' work.

Performance–talking

Where candidates' STL forms were thin on detail, or where topic areas did not lend themselves to complex and sophisticated discussion, candidate performances were less secure or could not meet the criteria for the higher marks available for the performance. Topics such as travel, future plans, gap year, learning languages or healthy living tended to produce conversations which were limited in scope and made it difficult for candidates to sustain a conversation at an appropriate level.

Where STL forms had been over-populated, candidates tended to have a hazy or superficial knowledge of the many topics listed and were equally unable to maintain an appropriate level of conversation.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Candidates would benefit from as much practice as possible in answering exam-type questions, particularly the overall purpose question. The use of past papers is useful.

Centres should encourage candidates to explore more than simply word choice when considering the overall purpose question. Considering the structure of the text, its title, use of first or third person, use of humour, direct appeal to the reader, anecdotes, use of appropriate quotations, for example how the text ends, would prove helpful to candidates in tackling this question.

Centres could give some thought to sustaining practice in dictionary skills, in order to avoid the more obvious errors in translation. Candidates would benefit from exposure to translating using a variety of tenses in order to develop their knowledge and understanding of these.

Question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates would benefit from exposure to as much listening practice as possible. Past paper practice is useful in training candidates to respond to exam-type questions. However centres should encourage candidates to use the many online resources available, to listen to authentic French delivered at a natural speed, for example listening to the news in French, accessing podcasts.

Portfolio

The careful selection of an essay title is crucial in allowing candidates to show a critical and analytical approach in writing their portfolio essays.

Teachers and lectures should discuss titles candidates have chosen and undertake regular checks on progress to ensure that candidates' portfolios are developing well. Candidates should proofread their work to help avoid awkward expression in English. It is important that texts and/or films chosen for discussion actually lend themselves to the nature of the study undertaken.

Centres encouragingly continue to use a variety of texts for the completion of the portfolio and while they use some traditionally-used works, some centres have opted to study war poems or poetry by Prévert or Baudelaire, or introduce innovation in their choice of focus, for example *La petite fille de Monsieur Linh* by Philippe Claudel, or *Kiffe Kiffe demain* by Faïza Guène.

Performance—talking

Candidates who were exposed to the type of interaction expected were generally more comfortable with the assessment and performed well.

As much talking practice as possible would be beneficial to candidates. Taking care over the completion of the STL form benefits candidates substantially, since an appropriately completed form provides a good springboard for a genuine, natural conversation which allows candidates to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	638
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	603
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	39.5%	39.5%	238	138
B	18.2%	57.7%	110	118
C	19.7%	77.4%	119	98
D	5.8%	83.3%	35	88
No award	16.7%	-	101	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The principal assessor and SQA qualifications manager meet with the relevant SQA head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.