



Course Report 2018

Subject	Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) & Cantonese
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

Summary of the course assessment

It was pleasing to see the increasing number of new entries this year.

The examination was of an appropriate level of difficulty and in line with the course specification. Feedback from the marking team and from practitioners suggested that the question paper was fair in terms of overall level of demand.

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Translation

The question paper performed as expected, enabling candidates to access the full range of marks available. The overall purpose question and the translation were successfully attempted by the more able candidates.

Component 2: question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates performed very well in the listening section, which related to Chinese students studying abroad. The topics were familiar to candidates and the questions were accessible and fair.

In the discursive writing section, overall, essays were well structured and written in paragraphs. There were many very good essays that demonstrated flair, appropriate rendition of subjunctive clauses, and accurate use of discursive language. The more popular choices were question 4 on learning a foreign language, and question 5 on employability. No candidates chose question 6, on culture.

Component 3: portfolio

The portfolio is always a challenging part of the assessment for candidates. However, this year the overall the quality of performance has improved with some outstanding pieces. Candidates addressing an appropriately selected essay title performed best. Few centres presented candidate evidence relating to language in work.

Component 4: performance

Visiting assessors reported that the vast majority of candidates were well prepared and gave confident performances. However, a few centres had some technical issues. Candidates often performed strongly where an informative STL form had been received by the visiting assessor before the assessment date.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination. There were some outstanding responses. Most candidates were clearly well prepared for the examination, and familiar with the format. The questions in both reading and listening were able to stretch some able candidates but also to benefit the less able candidates. This year candidates performed very well in the listening section, and it is worth mentioning that there is an improvement in the overall purpose question of the reading paper. Candidate performance in the portfolio also improved.

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Translation

Overall candidates responded well to this paper. Most candidates demonstrated a high level of understanding of the article.

Component 2: question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Performance in discursive writing continues to be very good, with many outstanding responses. Candidates generally achieved very good results when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer, and when their essays were relevant to the question.

Component 3: portfolio

Candidate' responses in the portfolio have improved this year with some very good portfolios. Some submissions which took literary texts as their focus produced strong performances. Candidates performed well when they had an opportunity to demonstrate an analytical approach through the choice of an appropriate question.

Component 4: performance

The performance of candidates was very good. Most candidates managed to achieve full marks. The majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many candidates made good use of learned material, were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses, and incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation with the visiting assessor.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to the reading and comprehension questions. However, failing to provide accurate details caused some candidates not to gain marks. For example in question 1, 'It is increasingly difficult for university graduates to find a job', some candidates lost marks for writing 'for students' rather than 'university students'.

Although the overall purpose question is one of the most challenging parts in this question paper, there are increasing numbers of good responses. Some candidates retold the reading passage but did not develop their own argument. Some candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers in which they repeated most of the information they had already given in answer to the comprehension questions, rather than address the actual question and highlight the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the author. Many candidates provided information from the text rather than attempting to draw inferences. Some included quotes from the text in their answer, but just repeated these in English instead of using them to develop their argument. It is also noted some candidates just wrote in Chinese in the answers without any explanations in English.

In the translating section, grammar mistakes appeared in some candidates' responses, and some lacked the accuracy and details required for a fully accurate translation. A lack of consistency of the tenses was often the cause of marks not being achieved. Many candidates continue to lose marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles, 'the', conjunction words, and misusing tenses. Some candidates simply translated the text from the question using quotation marks.

Component 2: question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

The topic of the listening section was about Chinese students studying abroad. Although candidates seemed familiar with this topic, it proved challenging where candidates tried to predict answers or relied on guesswork. Some candidates were unable to retain sufficient details required to answer the questions accurately, and often misunderstood part of the information.

For the discursive writing section, three essay topics were attempted, with the most popular being learning and employability, with no candidates attempting the culture topic (中国新年给红包是一个好习惯). There are still some candidates who did not address the aspect set in the essay title, therefore preventing them from accessing higher marks.

Candidates should be reminded to read the topics carefully and the content should be relevant to the topic. Some candidates chose employability (找工作,个人的兴趣最重要 when looking for jobs, personal interest is the most important thing). A few candidates wrote what they thought the important aspects were when looking for jobs, but did not address or very briefly addressed personal interest.

Component 3: portfolio

This year there was some very good work submitted for the portfolio, and it was seen to have improved following the Understanding Standards events.

Some candidates failed to produce a bibliography or had very limited information in their bibliography.

Selecting a title was still problematic for many candidates. Most found it difficult to select a title or essay question that generated debate or critical analysis, and too many had poorly worded titles or titles that were too vague or overcomplicated.

The weaker responses were those where candidates were descriptive, rather than critical and analytical, in their discussion. This was often the result of a poor choice of essay title. Often, there was too much of a 'storytelling' approach and insufficient critical analysis or evaluation. Some offered little analysis or critical reflection in their portfolio. Some candidates wrote the majority of the article by retelling the story but did not have a critical reflection.

Some candidates appeared not to have proofread their work effectively in English.

Component 4: performance–talking

Despite this being an area where candidates generally do very well, some still have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material to cope with questions they were asked. Some candidates were over-prepared for conversation, and sometimes lost spontaneity in their responses.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

In general, encourage candidates to make full use of SQA's Modern Languages Advanced Higher subject page, especially by referring to the Course Reports for Advanced Higher Chinese from the previous year, and the marking instructions.

Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that handwriting must be clearly legible to ensure the marks awarded equate to content.

Centres should encourage Chinese teachers and practitioners to work alongside their Modern Languages department to share best practice with other colleagues.

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Translation

Answers to the comprehension questions should contain as much relevant detail as possible as well as attention to detail to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

Centres should continue to develop dictionary skills with their candidates. In order to receive good marks in translation, it requires a good understanding of Chinese and reasonable expression of English. More attention should be given to the development of dictionary skills, especially when tackling the passage for translation. Some candidates continue to choose the first entry they find for the word they are looking up rather than persevering to capture the meaning that best fits the context.

Answers to the overall purpose question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion, preferably at the end of the answer. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, and not just a repetition of what has been argued in English.

Component 2: question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as much as possible. They should try to avoid prejudging or guessing the content.

Teachers and lecturers could advise candidates on how they should use the time they have when looking at questions before they hear the recording during the examination. Strategies for note-taking while they are listening to the recording could also be discussed.

Encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully, and to construct a relevant and personal response in which they may draw upon learned material — but this must be relevant to the essay title.

Component 3: portfolio

Centres should refer to SQA guidelines when preparing their candidates in this aspect of the assessment, particularly the suitability of the bibliography used. Candidates should develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall. Reliable bibliographies containing three or more references to sources are a feature of good practice. Wikipedia (without mention of a website), and a reference to a Chinese article (on its own without any author and publisher) do not constitute appropriate items for a bibliography.

The title or essay question should generate debate or critical analysis, and should not be too over ambitious or too general, but should include a discursive and/or evaluative approach. Encourage candidates to make the title as specific as possible, and research the area as deeply as possible.

Many of the portfolio pieces would benefit from more quotations in Chinese to support the arguments being developed. Translating these quotes into English should be avoided at all times.

Encourage candidates to develop an appropriate, formal and accurate use of English. More care and attention is needed concerning proofreading in relation to the use of English, spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts.

The quality of English in the portfolio is of paramount importance, and an appreciation of how to structure an essay is essential. Teachers and lecturers have an important role to play in monitoring the work of their candidates in this respect.

Component 4: performance

Centres should continue to prepare candidates in discussion techniques in the language, to enable them to deal with any question that goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	31
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	54
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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 -				
A	74.1%	74.1%	40	140
B	5.5%	79.6%	3	120
C	1.4%	81.5%	1	100
D	0.0%	81.5%	0	90
No award	18.5%	-	10	-

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 which 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.

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 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.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.