



Questions & Answers

Changes to assessment in National 5 Modern Languages

1 General questions

Why not make each element 25 marks to avoid scaling?

To make reading and listening worth 25 marks each, we would have to adjust both question papers. This is something we rejected, as explained during the rationale section of the webinar presentation because both question papers already provide sufficient challenge for candidates as well as offering discrimination.

To make the performance worth 25 marks, we would have to alter the balance of marks between presentation, conversation and sustaining the conversation.

If we were to set writing as 25 marks that would make it worth 12.5 marks and we cannot have half marks.

Is listening now going to play a bigger role because its weighting has been increased?

The requirement to strengthen the exam, and the necessary changes this has involved, does have some impact on the receptive skills. There is now equal weighting of the skills with reading, listening, writing and talking now contributing 25% each to the final grade.

2 Assignment–writing

Why is an additional assignment–writing component necessary?

The assignment–writing draws on the best features of the previous unit assessment. It enables candidates to sample the course more widely, and increases personalisation and choice.

The existing writing question paper does not allow for remediation and consolidation opportunities or for building on the very useful aspects of formative learning. With the removal of units, we need to maintain the challenge and application involved in understanding how language works.

Is the assignment–writing the same as a Standard Grade folio piece?

No, this does not resemble the folio because candidates are only allowed a maximum of two attempts and the permitted reference materials are specified with the reiteration that no correct version in the modern language is to be supplied by the teacher or lecturer.

Will the additional assignment–writing dissuade future candidates at National 5 and impact on uptake?

No. The assignment–writing reflects how we already practise writing skills in normal class activities — through remediation, consolidation, and understanding which errors have been made and how to rectify them. The assignment–writing is an opportunity for candidates to improve on a piece of written work, in a supported manner, and apply problem-solving skills (in grammar/knowledge about language) using reference materials. These are skills that are generic and applicable to other subjects.

What is the impact on workload in relation to the assignment–writing?

The assignment–writing is a means of validating the development of writing skills that teachers and lecturers already undertake in the classroom. It is not marked in centres and the role of the teacher or lecturer is to support candidates through a process of improvement of a piece of writing. Teachers and lecturers already provide formative feedback on writing skills as part of normal learning and teaching activities.

The formative aspect is the feedback and improvement process applied once, to one piece of writing. The finished piece which is submitted to SQA is the summative aspect. An estimated mark for the assignment–writing is not required although centres will still submit an estimated mark for the overall course assessment.

How does SQA ensure that all centres will 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.

Will the assignment–writing put pressure on candidates to achieve top marks?

The assignment–writing is not about producing a perfect piece of writing. It is about producing a piece of writing that a candidate has been able to improve.

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

Yes. The process of completing the assignment–writing has dividends for the performance–talking and candidates can, where appropriate, use the same topic or context covered in the assignment–writing as part of the presentation section, for example. Language and structures covered in the assignment–writing may also be useful in the conversation section.

What happens if a candidate does not complete the assignment–writing because of, for example absence?

The process and deadline for the assignment–writing will be made clear to candidates at the start of the National 5 Modern Languages course. This should provide sufficient opportunity within the academic session for candidates to complete the assignment–writing over a period of time.

Candidates who do not produce an assignment–writing for any reason will be awarded 0/20 marks for this component. This does not mean they will receive a ‘No Award’ result for the course as they can still be presented for the other course assessment components.

What paperwork is associated with the submission of the assignment–writing to SQA?

Centres must use the National 5 Modern Languages assignment–writing answer booklet for all candidates. To ensure authenticity, candidates must sign the declaration to confirm the writing is their own work.

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

Centres will be notified by SQA of the submission deadline through their SQA co-ordinators. Centres will need to 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.

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. It assists candidates with self-evaluation by explaining how they can make amendments to their writing.

By using these techniques it helps the candidate build confidence in relation to knowledge and understanding of how the modern language works. It can also develop skills for the

writing question paper (employability e-mail) where candidates are required to respond to unseen bullet points/adapt any learned material or structures.

Must teachers and lecturers 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 problem.

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, coupled 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.

Will 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.

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

No, this is not necessary. There is also no penalty to apply to any area of a candidate's writing if only some of the suggested bullet points/areas for coverage are addressed. Indeed, teachers and lecturers may wish to use questions/statements in English as stimuli, rather than bullet points.

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.

Should candidates choose contexts instead of the teacher or lecturer?

Candidates can choose contexts based on the scenarios produced by SQA. Teachers or lecturers can also devise their own assignment-writing stimuli based on topics of a particular interest to their candidates.

Will candidates have to create their own titles?

Candidates should create their own titles but teachers/lecturers may provide support for this.

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.

What does ‘teachers are not to provide a correct version in the modern language’ 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.

Are candidates allowed to prepare at home?

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

If candidates write a paragraph for homework before they choose their task, can they use it for their draft?

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

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

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

Does the stimulus have to be stated by the candidate, or supplied to SQA with the writing?

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

Will candidates have to be told when the writing will take place and choose their topic in advance?

It would be appropriate to inform candidates of when the process will begin, but they will choose their topic in the classroom on the day of the first draft.

Must the assignment–writing 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 but if they wish to write about a different topic, then both centres and candidates are free to create their own stimuli. It is not essential to have a list of bullet points or questions; a title is sufficient.

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. At the same time, 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, ie the candidate has prepared something else and learned it off by heart?

Given that 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 vocabulary or verbs etc, then this is fine but centres should bear in mind that candidates are not permitted to access banks of phrases, writing frames or pre-prepared 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 as to examples of detailed language.

Is there any limit on the length of vocabulary lists?

No, there is no specific length but too much vocabulary 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.

3 Performance—talking

Will the requirement for candidates to cover a different context in the conversation complicate the performance—talking?

Principal Verifiers have provided feedback in Verification Key Message reports that many centres already encourage candidates to cover two different contexts in the presentation and conversation. This is good practice because it allows candidates to access different vocabulary and structures, and potentially access higher pegged marks.

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 I 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). This is sufficient and both the candidate and assessor should be clear about which different contexts are going to be covered in the presentation section and conversation section.

Do I have to state on the recording when I am starting the conversation section?

No, this is not necessary.

How can teachers and lecturers be sure that candidates do cover a different context in the conversation section from that used in the presentation?

The marking instructions for the National 5 performance–talking have been amended to help centres mark conversation sections where a different context from that of the presentation has not been used by the candidate. Centres should apply the stated penalty to the conversation section where a different context clearly is not covered. It is good practice to ensure the internal verifier confirms coverage of a different context in the conversation during sampling of performances in centres.

External verifiers will check that a penalty has been applied to the conversation section if a different context from that of the presentation has not been covered.

The length of the performance–talking is now roughly the same as Higher. Will this continue?

The course assessment for Higher will be reviewed in preparation for session 2018/19.

Can you still ask questions about the context covered in the presentation and then go on to another context?

Yes, teachers and lecturers are encouraged to use a few bridging questions between the presentation and conversation to assist with the flow of the overall performance.