



# **Common questions about Higher 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 Higher Modern Languages course. It enables candidates to sample the course more widely, increases personalisation and choice and gives them the opportunity to write using detailed and complex language.

The Higher assignment–writing encourages candidates to write in a personalised way, expressing ideas relevant to the chosen topic in the stimulus. Candidates should write discursively, expressing different viewpoints and opinions.

The requirement for candidates to present arguments and draw conclusions provides for better progression to Advanced Higher.

## Is the process of producing the assignment–writing open to differing interpretations in centres?

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.

## Is the assignment–writing completed in the centre under controlled conditions or are candidates able to take the feedback home and complete the assignment there?

The assignment–writing must be completed in the classroom, under a high degree of supervision and control, as set out in the course specification.

## Can centres create their own writing improvement code or must they use a standardised version?

Centres are free to use any writing improvement code that their candidates are familiar with. The writing improvement code published in the assignment–writing coursework assessment task is an example.

## 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.

## **Does the stimulus have to be in English?**

The course specification contains mandatory information and the 'Evidence to be gathered' section for the assignment–writing indicates the stimulus must be in English.

## **Should candidates make reference to the stimulus?**

The detailed marking instructions ('content' column) make reference to how well the candidate has addressed the title, whether the content is relevant and whether the candidate presents different viewpoints and draws a conclusion. Candidates should make reference to the stimulus in their assignment–writing.

## **Do candidates have to give a word count?**

No. The recommended length (200 to 250 words, 260 to 330 Chinese characters) is given for guidance purposes. Assignment–writings submitted that fall outwith the recommended length do not incur an automatic penalty.

## **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, employability, culture
- ◆ the stimulus
- ◆ candidate answer booklet, signed by the candidate

## **Are there exemplars of Higher assignment–writing?**

Exemplars of Higher assignment–writing are available on the [Understanding Standards website](#).

## **Performance–talking**

### **Will candidates be penalised for the discussion being too short or too long?**

The length of the performance is recommended, and no automatic penalty is applied to performances that fall outwith this time. However, performances that are significantly shorter than the recommended length may not allow the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate the content or language resource required to achieve the upper marks. Similarly, performances that are significantly longer may lead to an increase in the number of errors made.

### **What sort of questions can teachers and lecturers use for the ‘settling-in’ period?**

At the start of the assessment, teachers and lecturers should ask some general questions, for example what the candidates are studying, what they think of where they live, what they do in their free time, or future plans. This is to settle them into the task and this initial section should last no more than 2 minutes.

### **Do the ‘settling-in’ questions count towards the final mark?**

The assessment of the performance–talking is based on content, accuracy and language resource and is judged on the performance as a whole.

### **How do teachers and lecturers assess the initial ‘settling-in’ period if the questions do not allow candidates to give answers using detailed and complex language?**

As above, the performance–talking should be judged holistically. However, while introductory questions may be more straightforward, candidates may still demonstrate detailed and complex language in their responses.

### **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.

### **Should the performance be audio-recorded by centres?**

The performance–talking is a single, one-off assessment event and must be audio or video recorded. Details of the assessment conditions and evidence to be gathered in centres can be found in the Higher course specification, under the ‘Performance–talking’ section.

### **Why are the pegged marks for the performance grouped in pairs?**

The pegged marks give additional guidance on how best to assess candidates’ performance. Assessors should first decide on which row best matches each candidate’s performance–talking and then use the descriptors to allocate either the upper or lower category.

### **Are there Understanding Standards materials to help teachers and lecturers with internally verifying their marks?**

Exemplars of the Higher performance–talking are published on SQA’s secure website. Access to this can be gained via the centre’s SQA co-ordinator.

## General questions

### Is there exemplification of directed writing?

Yes, there are exemplars of directed writing available on the [Understanding Standards website](#).

### Why are there scaled marks in the Higher Modern Languages course?

The scaling of marks in Higher Modern Languages means the four skills assessed (reading, listening, talking, writing) are equally weighted. The scaling of marks in course assessment 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 [Higher 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 Higher Modern Language web page.

You will find general questions and answers about National Qualifications on our website at [www.sqa.org.uk/faq](http://www.sqa.org.uk/faq).