

A Level

French

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FRENCH ADVANCED LEVEL

Papers 9110/1, 9112/1 and 8123/1

Prose

The paper did discriminate well amongst the candidates.

It revealed some surprising areas of ignorance in basic vocabulary: quite a few candidates did not know the French for *monkey*, which resulted in one candidate's imaginative translation *un ascenseur des arbres*. Many candidates had difficulty with *to sigh*, *lips* ('la mouche' – 'les chèvres'), *introducing*, *listeners*, *to shake one's head* ('serrer'); phrases such as *to nod one's head* and *to shake hands* caused much difficulty.

Genders were not noticeably erratic, 'la verre' being the most common mistake.

The most frequent errors in order of importance – and some relevant to the essay – were:

- 1 – misuse of *subjunctive*, very commonly used after *je pense que*.
- 2 – confusion between *imperfect* and *conditional*.
- 3 – use of *devoir* – present tense commonly used where conditional was needed.
- 4 – *qui* for *que* and the reverse.
- 5 – confusion between (a) *aussi*, *assez* and *si*; (b) *une part*, *une partie*, *un parti*.
- 6 – *obéir* and *enseigner* used transitively – on the other hand *look at him* was translated *regardez lui* (or *le regardez*).
- 7 – *loin* used as adjective.

- 9 – *Puis* used for stage in argument, rather than temporally.
- 10 – *Comme* used for *since*, *because*.
- 11 – *faire* plus adjective used for *rendre* plus adjective.
- 12 – *those* old temples: *ceux vieux temples*, a frequent mistake.
- 13 – *what was that?* *qu'est que c'est?*

Conclusion

As in past years careful attention to grammar and a sound basic vocabulary were enough to secure very good marks; but such candidates were not in a majority and what was most disappointing was the disregard of too many candidates for elementary grammar, particularly in respect of verb forms and agreements.

Essays

On the whole the essay work was better than the prose.

Not too many candidates were able to write fluently and accurately but some had very interesting things to say on a variety of topics.

Generally speaking there was rather less irrelevance than in past years, which was an encouraging sign.

Essay (e) . . . *Les français sont insulaires et chauvins . . . Discutez.*

Only very few essays on this topic, none of which was particularly well informed or penetrating.

(f) *"Les voyages forment la jeunesse" dit le proverbe. Est-ce que cela s'applique à un voyage en France?* (answered by about 12%)

This tended not to bring the best out of candidates and was seen by many as the invitation simply to talk about exchange visits or holidays. The best essays were those which went further to discuss the specific reference to France or the more general proposition about the role of travel – or both.

(c) *Quelle est votre attitude à l'égard des religions et de leur influence à notre époque? Discutez.* (answered by about 18%)

This was quite well done on the whole, the best candidates striking a good balance between the philosophical and social/political implications of the question, apart from a few who took the opportunity to discuss religion as male chauvinism.

(a) *Quelles étaient vos lectures préférées quand vous étiez petit(e)? Romans d'aventures, contes de fées, bandes dessinées . . . ? Pourquoi?* (answered by about 15%)

This offered scope for imaginative writing, but tended to produce disappointing results. Only a few chose to analyse why certain types of reading appealed; some misunderstood the question and wrote about favourite school lessons.

(b) *"Les sports commercialisés sont 'mauvais' pour les spectateurs et les joueurs." Discutez.* (answered by about 20%)

A topic which required careful thought. Some were content to speak about the intrusion of politics and vandalism rather than commercialism as such, but there were some sensitive, well structured essays which discussed more closely the different merits of professional and amateur sports.

(d) *D'après vous quels sont les avantages et les désavantages de la discipline dans la vie et à l'école?* (answered by about 35%)

This was certainly the most popular and generally a well answered question: the title suggested its own clear structure and candidates were able to discuss a broad range of connected areas: encouraging on the whole.

General Comments

It is usually the case in this paper that candidates find the second unseen passage (the "journalistic" one) rather more difficult than the first. All examiners commented this year upon the even spread of the marks between both passages. The overall comprehension of both passages was quite good, and there were few candidates who seemed totally floored by the difficulties. There were very many individual problems, however, and these are set out in more detail below.

Q.1 - Vocabulary. There were not a great number of lexical problems in this passage. Many of the problems in translation were because of questions of rendering a nuance in English rather than failure to know a word. Among weak spots were: *jeune fille* (a large number translated "young girl"); *appliquait* ("passed", "stroked" etc.); *commode* (not well known); *geste* (often translated as "air" or "manner" rather than as a movement); *craint* (very often "thought", "believed"); *même* in *une même valeur* was frequently understood as "even" rather than "same". Even when the meaning was correct, the phrasing in English was faulty ("a same value"). *Où elle serrait ses épingles* gave rise to some of the most creative renderings, since it combined two words unknown to many candidates; ("shook out her locks"; "cut her fingernails"; "kept her petals"). A major difficulty was provided by *une espèce de convoitise inavouée*. A surprising number did not know *empêchait*, and *cédant à un mouvement* proved difficult, since, even when candidates knew *cédant*, they found it difficult to render *mouvement* into English. *Biens* was frequently seen as necessarily meaning "wealth", "fine things", "riches".

Grammar, syntax etc. The constructions which proved most challenging in this passage were those where French made use of a subjunctive. *Bien que* provided few difficulties, but *sans que* was widely mistranslated, as was *jusqu'à ce que sa conscience lui fît honte . . .* Confusion also reigned in the renderings of *comme si elle eût craint qu'une personne invisible ne le contestât* and *elle y aurait passé . . . si elle avait pu y faire du feu*. It seems fair to assume that this passage did not contain a great number of problems that ought to be beyond the scope of an A level candidate.

Q.2 - Vocabulary. The overall comprehension of this passage was adequate, but the slightly technical nature of some of the language provided something of a stumbling block. Even so, there seems reason to suppose that candidates might have come across *la moto*, and even if they hadn't, it could hardly have meant "motto", nor could *un moyen d'autonomie* really mean a "type of transport". In these, as in other renderings, one feels that candidates could have used more common-sense, particularly since most understood the general sense of the passage. There were very many cases where candidates grasped the meaning, but produced a stilted rendering instead of finding an acceptable English equivalent, e.g. "mortal accident" for *accident mortel*; "conducts oneself" for *se conduit*. Difficulties were presented by *la circulation sans contrainte* ("circulation", "traffic"); *évasion* ("invasion"); *campagnes* ("companions", "countryside"). *On a lancé des campagnes* therefore became "you are thrown by your companions". Other problems were *visaient* ("advised"); *propriétaire* ("propriety"). *Engin* and *formation* were very often rendered literally.

Grammar, syntax etc. On the whole the constructions in this passage provided fewer problems than the items of vocabulary already mentioned. One or two con-

structions proved confusing to some candidates, notably the long sentence, *Plusieurs fois . . . de la route*. The initial problems of vocabulary already referred to were compounded by the difficulties of *chacune d'entre elles* followed by a negative.

Some difficulties seem to arise more specifically from the candidates' problems in handling English, rather than in the understanding of the French. For example, the verb omitted from the French *conséquence de ce manque de respect*; and also the sentence *C'est aussi, malheureusement la portière . . . voiture qui tourne*. These were sentences where candidates nearly always understood the words and the syntax, but just couldn't put their English together into an acceptable rendering. *Pour s'en sortir entier* was one of the most difficult items to render, and few candidates did so successfully.

Although a report of this kind inevitably concentrates on the problems and difficulties raised by the translation passages, it must be said that there were many good renderings, and some really excellent renderings. A general complaint, however, from all the examiners was the continuing poor standards in spelling and in the use of English. Those who thought that *convoitise* might have something to do with "covetousness" often spelled it "covetedness" or "covertness". Although, in general, the examiners do not penalise English spelling, this reaches the point where it is not possible to know whether it is spelling at fault or lexical error. Candidates need to pay particular attention to the translation of tenses. Some examples have been given already, but one could also mention the uncertainty about the way to render the Imperfect; some candidates found it necessary to repeat "used to" on every occasion an Imperfect appeared. As a general rule, candidates should be encouraged to question the literal translation (e.g. "she attached herself" for *elle s'attachait*) and to ensure that they have translated all items in a particular phrase (e.g. *bien plus encore* is inadequately translated as "much more"; *si elle avait pu y faire du feu* requires translation of *y*).

Paper 9110/3

'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.' One year is very much like the next. The candidates may be different but they reveal the same strengths and the same weaknesses as their precursors. Perhaps, however, I might express a guarded optimism; for it did seem to some of my fellow examiners and to myself that the standard of the essays which we marked was a little higher than previously. I should like to think that this trend can be maintained over the years to come.

The most popular text was undoubtedly the Molière, answers being divided equally between *Q.2 (a)* and *Q.2 (b)*. Sartre and Anouilh also proved rather popular, followed by Racine, Zola and Duhamel. Clearly there is a strong element of conservatism in those who teach this paper. Understandably so perhaps, since authors such as Molière and Racine have an immense amount to offer candidates, and the Sartres and Anouilhs of this world writing in a much more familiar idiom to twentieth-century readers will bring into focus some of the problems and the perplexities of our own society. They will always prove popular. I do regret however that so very few candidates tackled the questions on *Adolphe*.

In general, I think it is true to say that candidates performed in the essay questions much better than in the context questions. In these latter questions there is an irresistible tendency, it would appear, to recount almost the entire plot of the

work under consideration. This weakness is something which can readily be corrected by practice in the classroom.

The criticisms which I have to make about the work of candidates come in largely two areas. First of all spelling. Nearly all my colleagues have commented this year as in previous years on the atrocious spelling to be found so frequently. Let me give a few examples: 'threw' ('through'), 'a bear flame', 'Ram porns his watch', 'Monsieur Pasquier has no taste for gambolling'. None of these words is particularly difficult and yet they are so very often wrongly spelt. I do think however that those who teach might stress to their pupils the correct spelling of certain words which are in very common use and which are consistently wrongly spelt: e.g. *sentence* (not *sentence*), *existence*, (not *existance*), *argument* (not *arguement*) and so on. And secondly, and very much allied to this question of spelling, is the fact that so many of the candidates use words inaccurately. Such defects inevitably prevent candidates from expressing clearly what they are meaning to express. Let me give one or two examples of this, since this is an extremely important aspect of their work for A-level overall. 'Harpagon is Mariane's *perspective* husband', 'Laurent has a *sense of perception*', 'Antigone *abnegates* her emotions to Fate', 'Créon is *humane* and demonstrates this when he offers to kill the guards to save his niece'. Frequently it is possible, as in these examples, to see what the candidate is driving at, but is not always so easy. What am I to make of this remark, for example, 'He pawned his gold watch (and mother too, but he considered her his property)'? It does get difficult at times.

A final suggestion: it is an almost unknown occurrence for candidates to make any sort of comparison between one work and another. They seem to see each book that they study as separate and isolated. But there are so very often similarities which throw a further degree of light upon other works.

I would encourage candidates to take a wider view of the works which they study than is normally the case.

Papers 9110/4 and 9112/4

Candidates are to be congratulated upon the amount of detail that they managed to extract from the two passages, though achievement was generally higher on Passage 2. Presentation was usually good and great efforts had obviously been made to keep separate the relevant material for each answer, especially in Qs. 5 and 6 of Passage 2. In the first passage, however, there was some confusion over who was meeting whom in Q.2 and who was asking the questions in the section concerning the press.

Passage 1 – Investigating a suspected crime

Since candidates could not be expected to be experts in either the French or English police systems, any choice of vocabulary that showed Gonzagala to be a senior police officer – above sergeant, but not as high as 'commissioner' – was accepted in Q.1 and, similarly, in Q.10, any indication that 'le directeur' was his superior – from simple 'head' through even to commissioner – was considered well-detailed.

By some over-sight, possibly, the answer to the second half of Q.1 was not to be found in the text but only in the title of the passage. The second mark was therefore ignored here and used to greater effect elsewhere in the passage. No penalties were incurred for attempts to cover this point and any material more relevant to Q.2 was carried forward and credited there, where the assembly of

police (not the hotel staff) and the distribution of work were looked for. Qs. 3 and 4 posed little problem but, in Q.5, 'le petit jour' was either not understood or ignored and '11 o'clock' became the favourite, though incorrect, answer.

The 'initial shock' was mostly omitted from Q.6 and 'radiophonique' was often heard as 'fanatique', resulting in some exciting flights of lunacy. In Q.7, only the better candidates remembered to include the qualifying adverb 'plutôt' and, at the other extreme, a few managed to scabble out an answer of sorts without even having understood the syntax of the question! The confusion, as mentioned above, over the exact rôle played by the journalists resulted in some strangely reversed situations in Qs. 8 and 9, but the most common error was the asking of 'question after question', thus ignoring the value of 'répondre', and the hearing of 'corps' as 'coeur'. There was understandable difficulty with the exact meaning of 'passer . . . sous silence' and many candidates ignored it altogether, as they did 'jugea plus prudent' in Q.10.

The quality of English is not really our concern, perhaps, but where bad spelling, especially in note-form answers, interferes with clarity of meaning, marks can be seriously at risk; it is difficult to know what to make of the brief note: 'to big' (a spelling error common to more than half of the candidates), and impossible to credit the word 'resposable', even in a complete sentence.

Passage 2 – The changing face of France today

The difficulty of paraphrasing clearly the complicated idea behind 'un producteur urbanisé' underlines a point made frequently in previous reports that, although this is not an exercise in translation, the most successful candidate is undoubtedly the one who sticks as closely as possible to the original text. Paraphrase, though perfectly admissible, can be a dangerous friend and, while few candidates earned no credit at all for their attempts to explain what an urbanised producer might be, the simple translation proved best. Nonetheless, to the delight of examiners, some very good work was done on this passage by candidates of all abilities.

In Q.1, as throughout this passage, the word 'peasant' was accepted but, to many, especially those who had understood 'basse paysanne' for 'base paysanne', he became a wild, uncivilised savage without the intelligence to live in a town (!) and this mental image sometimes had an adverse effect upon this and later answers and coloured the writers' interpretations of the passage.

Apart from the afore-mentioned problems over 'producteur urbanisé', the most common error in Q.2 was the tense of 'a fait des études' and one was often left with the impression that the French farmer is not allowed to watch television until he has finished his homework! The true paradox of Q.3, that of *timing* as represented by 'au moment même' and 'viennent de', was often missed and (skipping lightly over some of the unlikely proportions given for Q.4) the great disappointment of Qs. 5 and 6 was the evidence, to judge from the unfamiliarity of 'sabots', that so few of today's students are acquainted with simple French folk-songs. Although candidates did not confuse the information required in these two questions, it was Q.5 that gave rise to the most irrelevant 'waffle' and wild invention. In Q.6, it was insisted that 'le pays' should be understood as the region or local area and neither 'national' nor 'country' earned marks.

Typical of the good work done this year were some excellent renderings of 'pas pour autant' in Q.7 and the recognition, by many candidates, that further details were available in an earlier sentence that might be used, with perfect relevance, to support, expand on or even substitute for this final clause.

ternative words (e.g. 'superintendent/commissioner') can actually cancel out a mark already won. In the example, 'superintendent' would have been credited, but the alternative, which is not synonymous, proves that the candidate cannot decide *what* the word means. Naturally, no credit is given for French words 'lifted' from the passage. It is a source of deep regret that examiners cannot credit candidates for those brief moments of pleasure that they afford us, like the many who 'made their own goat's milk' or the candidate from the South Coast who, having correctly rendered, in *Q.2*, every possible detail on the attributes of the modern farmer, concluded: "He also has nothing to do with his grandfather"!! Full marks! But, sadly, no bonus!

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