

O Level

French

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FRENCH
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Subject 3010

Paper 3010/1

Examiners considered that the Question Paper was of average difficulty and discovered no evidence of dramatic improvement or deterioration in standards. A number of examiners did however express the feeling that the gradual improvement in essay writing continues.

Question 1. Translation from French. This was considered a fair test and discriminated well at all points of the ability range. It was possible to put the emphasis in marking on basic comprehension rather than on subtleties of expression in English. There were no insuperable lexical difficulties although 'd'un pas alerte' did prove difficult to translate and was not penalised in the marking. Difficulties were also anticipated with the phrase 'il avait de l'argent plein les poches' but these did not materialise. Quite as many marks were lost by carelessness such as the omission of a translation of 'même' or 'déjà'.

The phrase 'assis au volant' caused problems to weaker candidates who saw a connection with 'voler' and whose translation included the idea of a stolen car. Many candidates were content with 'he had lived' or even 'he lived' as a translation of 'il avait pu vivre', whereas the marking scheme insisted on some gesture towards the translation of 'pu'. Many candidates failed to render 'la vie lui souriait enfin' mainly because of an apparent compulsion to begin 'the life . . .' which makes an acceptable translation impossible. Many weaker candidates confused 'ayant' with 'avant', translating 'ayant trouvé' as 'before finding', despite the past participle.

In the second section, the idea of 'quatre étoiles' referring to an hotel was generally understood; similarly, most candidates worked out the meaning of 'gratcie' from its constituent parts. But surprising difficulties were found with 'veste' and 'usée', both surely well-worn 'faux amis'. Another one, 'une longue journée' also appeared and produced almost as many journeys as days. Also in the final section difficulties were found with 'il écarta les rideaux', 'trois hommes de haute stature' and finally 'Oui, et alors?' for which the examiner accepted only something meaningful in the context such as 'So what?' or 'What about it?' Most candidates were satisfied with 'And so?' which conveyed little in the circumstances. As a marking point this was the most difficult in the passage.

Question 2. Picture Essay. Examiners were generally happy with both the pictures and with the standard of work. Candidates, with the exception of a handful who failed to notice the vocabulary given in the pictures or who confused noun and adjective, concluding that 'vénéneux' meant mushrooms, the singular logically 'un vénéneu', appeared not only to cope with the subject but told it with drama or humour or both. Most candidates did make use of the help provided. The pictures were admirably clear. There were also many encouraging examples of correct use of Imperfects and Past Historics in a single sentence and later many candidates used the Pluperfect Tense in describing what the children had eaten.

There was less obvious 'padding' than is frequently found, although there were examples of an obsessive interest in the children's ages. Also there are still candidates who treat each picture on its own, even to the extent of giving each picture a separate paragraph. This has the effect of producing a description of static

rather than writing a continuous story. In Picture one, few candidates made use of the verb 'garer' which had appeared in Question 1 and far too many thought that the car had been left in a 'rue'. The children had clearly not looked at all the pictures before starting to write, for mushrooms were occasionally referred to as 'fleurs' and there was also some copying of the word 'champignons' given in Picture 5. The imperatives in Picture 3 gave rise to considerable confusion in the use of singular and plural. Surprisingly, the mother often said 'Ne mange pas' to her two children and always the latter used the 'vous' form to their mother. Picture 4 gave rise to widespread difficulties, chiefly concerned with the verb 'rouler' the children to hospital. 'Rouler' was tried, though rarely with success, and 'nausea' appeared ad nauseam. Furthermore, most of attempts at saying that the children looked ill, felt ill, or had stomach-ache were incorrect. It was unfortunate in Picture 6 that 'visiter' was acceptable for visiting an invalid in hospital. A correct use of 'bananes' or 'une boîte de chocolats' was rare. It was noted how few – good – candidates can produce the correct concord of the Past Participle, usually after a P.D.O.

The general impression though was that – notwithstanding the usual wide range of standard – there was some excellent work at the upper end and that there were encouraging signs at most levels.

Question 3. Guided essay. Of the three topics set, the letter (a) and the narrative (c) were far more popular than the dialogue (b). Perhaps the rather unusual subject-matter in the dialogue contributed.

(a) Most candidates would have previously written a composition roughly along these lines and many were clearly using personal experience of a visit to France as a basis for their material. Some candidates failed to appreciate that on this occasion the letter was to be addressed to the family and not simply to the son or daughter, not that this was heavily penalised. In describing the homeward journey there was sometimes too much repetition of taking a certain form of transport at a certain time. Similar repetition was frequently found with a series of 'maux aimés' in listing experiences enjoyed, but perhaps this was difficult to avoid. Some candidates produced appropriate and even elegant French, with accurate references to local points of interest, but a large number of candidates were unable to supply any of the monuments of Paris – la tour Eiffel, les champs Elysées, l'Arc de Triomphe – with anything approaching accuracy.

(b) The majority of candidates attempting this question were usually either very good or very bad. Some clearly gave a great deal of thought and produced very quite imaginative dialogues, with effective use of a variety of verbs in negative interrogative and imperative. At the other end of the scale were banal attempts at the subject, with little effort to produce idiomatic French and often betraying ignorance of basic structures.

(c) Most candidates preferred the innocent outcome to this situation i.e. the man had forgotten his keys, though the use of the pluperfect was, as usual, elusive. However, the occasional burglar did provide some variety and generally speaking the subject was handled effectively with many candidates taking the opportunity to introduce some direct speech. Few candidates were able to cope with the idea of bumping into a ladder and there was the usual crop of errors associated with 'entrer dans' and 'téléphoner à'. Since the situation is open-ended, candidates choosing to involve the police and the police station should make sure they know how to spell them. None the less, much very capable and interesting work was examined.

Question 4. Prose translation. Many examiners reported their impression that more candidates had taken this option than in previous years and all welcomed the trend. In co-ordination, it was agreed to adopt a pro-rata bonus system of marking in order to bring marks on *Q.4* exactly into line with those awarded on *Q.3*. It was generally agreed that this had been successfully achieved.

There were few real difficulties either of vocabulary or grammar although 'platform', 'coach', 'inspector', 'compartment', and 'student' all caused some trouble. A surprising number of candidates failed to render some common expressions of time such as 'last Friday' ('le' was common), 'at the last minute', 'too late', and 'an hour and a half later'. There was much confusion between 'quitter', 'partir', and even 'laisser' in the phrases 'the train had just left Orléans', and 'the train was leaving' (tout court). A large number of candidates did not find 'chez ses parents' for 'at his parents' house'; 'à la maison de ses parents' was also accepted but many did not find this either. The question 'Where did you get on?' caused more difficulties than anticipated. Even 'without hesitating' claimed many victims though it sometimes appears that all candidates use 'sans hésiter' at least once in the essay questions.

Some examiners noted a tendency for *Question 4* to attract candidates from both extremes of the ability range. It was indeed possible for really able candidates to score full marks on this question (as was also the case in *Questions 2* and *3*). Very weak candidates did manage to pick up a number of the easier points. However it would be regrettable if the candidates in the middle ranges of ability were to be under-represented in *Question 4*.

Paper 3010/4

A very fair paper in that the vocabulary and idiom of the passage were quite accessible. The story-line was well understood and the overall standard high. Although some candidates still persisted in adding unnecessary detail, most gave concise answers. There was also very little use of the Past Historic.

Assistant examiners reported an improvement in general presentation but some found the widespread use of Tippex (and the like) very disturbing. The resulting script is often messy and illegible, and certainly does nothing to improve the presentation.

The change of procedure this year clearly helped the middle-of-the-road candidates who, finding the paper less of a memory test, performed much better.

Comments on answers:

Q.1. Well answered; the majority of language errors were sur le métro/au m./en le m. Irrelevant information about Christiane's feelings or the weather were often added, or indeed given as the only answer.

Q.2. 'Elle portait un parapluie' was not enough. It was necessary to say that 'she opened her umbrella'. Most managed the comprehension but amazingly few knew the past participle of 'ouvrir'.

Q.3. Comprehension good but language errors rife, particularly the faulty agreement of the adjectives ('cheveux blonds', 'yeux bleus'). A great number heard 'blancs' for 'blonds', and there was the usual crop of 'chevaux'.

Q.4. Mostly good. "Les boîtes aux lettres" when understood was often misspelt. When not understood, then some strange, made-up words appeared. Attempts to add 'la sienne' were equally disastrous (le ciel, la Seine). The handling of "elle s'est dirigée" was not good.

Q.5. Well answered; the most common error was the failure to make the past participle agree, if a direct object pronoun was used.

Q.6. Well done, comprehension wise. 'Entendre' was often found for 'écouter'. Few would use 's'allonger' correctly, although it was not needed in the answer. 'Disco' frequently confused with 'disques'. Some omitted any reference to music and referred only to the carpet or thought that Anita was in the kitchen.

Q.7. Many candidates had difficulty expressing that the music was loud ('lourde', 'basse'). Some answers were too general – just complaining about the noise for example. A surprising number thought that the neighbours were complaining because they couldn't hear the music!

Q.8. Most knew that she had lost her job but the failure to use the Pluperfect was the most common error. "Une lettre est arrivée" occurred frequently, once again showing how little known is the construction "arriver à" meaning "to happen", although it is a hardy annual. The unnecessary addition of "des raisons économiques" led to language errors.

Q.9. Comprehension good; the common errors were: inability to use the conditional correctly: the overuse of Direct Speech: confusion over chercher/trouver.

Q.10. Mostly good; as a longer answer was necessary ('elle avait gagné un prix' was not enough), language errors were frequent, especially 'un/une vacance', spelling of 'un prix', 'gagner', 'Etats-Unis'. The best answers were those restricted to the length of the trip, where and with whom. Those referring to the 'Dream Holiday' got into considerable difficulties.