

FIRST LANGUAGE CZECH

Paper 0514/01

Reading

Key comments

- In **Question 1** it is essential that candidates read the questions carefully. They should note the precise meaning of the words in the instructions; e.g. quote, explain using your own words, find an expression in the text, give reasons. Furthermore, the actual wording of the question is important, e.g. what is the shape of the lake, list three different nouns, etc.
- In **Question 2** candidates must read both texts carefully and work precisely with the information given.

General comments

Candidates were generally well prepared with regard to language use and spelling, and there were relatively few instances of linguistic weakness that prevented communication. Where there were spelling mistakes, these were relatively minor. In **Question 2** some candidates had difficulties with the inflection of the numeral *dvě/obě*, capital letters and the use of punctuation.

In terms of style, stronger responses were not repetitive: points were made clearly and concisely and then the candidate moved on to different information. Some weaker responses contained discrepancies in the stylistic construction of answers, especially in **Question 2**. Candidates repeated information by mentioning it at the beginning and then returning to it in various ways throughout the whole answer.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

In **Question 1**, answers should be accurate, clear, concise and unambiguous. Questions can sometimes be answered using just one word or a short phrase. A longer answer to such a question risks ruining the good beginning of an answer and contradicting itself.

Some sub-questions in this section required certain prior language and reading experience, as they tested the ability to understand language similes, metaphors, or synonyms. Candidates should regularly read texts with broader content, whether literary or factual, and think about the language techniques employed.

Most candidates were able to manage the questions that focused on extracting explicit information from the text, i.e. **Questions 1(a), 1(e) and 1(f)**.

Candidates found questions concerning the author's use of language, especially figurative similes and metaphors, more challenging, i.e. **Questions 1(b), 1(d), 1(h), 1(i), 1(j)**. Here, the strongest candidates showed that they were accustomed to interpreting complex literary language, but for the weaker candidates, a lack of experience in this area showed. For example, in **Question 1(j)** candidates were supposed to explain the term "bronze kings," which is a figurative expression for the bronze statues of rulers. However, in some responses the interpretation was incorrect, being interpreted as "wealth," "the glorious past during the Bronze Age," etc.

Again it is important to emphasise that candidates must read the question carefully. In **Question 1(c)** candidates were asked to describe a Danish house and a Swedish house. Several candidates confused the colours of the houses. Although the text explicitly states that the Danish house is white and the Swedish one is red, several candidates reversed this information.

In **Question 1(g)** candidates were asked to determine the shape of the lake in the text. Successful candidates took note of the word shape. Others did not read the question carefully and wrote about other

characteristics of the lake, i.e. instead of the lake being round, which was the correct answer, they wrote that the lake shimmers, that it is located in a bog, etc.

In **Question 1(k)** candidates were asked to give a noun to describe the behaviour of Swedish drivers to one another. The term **noun** was given in bold font in the question to guide the candidates. Some candidates described the behaviour of drivers in their own words instead, without using a specific noun, e.g. "They like each other and do not sound their horn at each other". The correct answer should have been respect / courtesy / graciousness.

Questions 2(a) and 2(b)

Question 2 focuses on comparing texts based only on factual information. Therefore, it is not necessary to compare texts in terms of stylistics, linguistics, time of their origin or their authorship. Candidates do not need to give their personal opinions on the text, or the impact of the text on the reader.

The most successful candidates progressed systematically, e.g. first they focused on the similarities and subsequently the differences. Some responses were confusing and stylistically awkward because a more random approach was taken.

When listing the differences between the two texts, it is always necessary to refer to both texts. It is not enough to mention only information from one text and not to compare it with the other text. For example, "Swedish houses are wooden, Czech houses are brick". If a piece of information from only one text is mentioned and is not compared with information from the other text, it cannot be credited.

Some improvement was seen in general this year, as there were no responses in the style of a list of information; candidates made the effort to formulate their own comprehensive and coherent responses that contained the necessary factual information and, at the same time, was divided into an introduction, body and conclusion.

FIRST LANGUAGE CZECH

Paper 0514/02
Writing

Key comments

- Candidates should concentrate on the following criteria, which are taken into account by Examiners marking the responses:
 - The essay should meet the specific requirements of the question.
 - Use of language
 - Spelling and morphology
 - Word choice – appropriate language for the given style and theme
 - Precise vocabulary to convey accurate meaning.
 - Text construction
 - Syntax (sentence and phrase construction)
 - Connections (links between sentences)
 - Techniques for text flow
 - Text coherence – paragraph structure (introduction, body, conclusion)
 - The reader's experience
 - Serious spelling mistakes impede the comprehension of the text
 - The structure of the essay should help the reader of the text to understand, not hinder them. For example, paragraphs should not be overloaded with clusters of information, a lack of punctuation or information presented in a confusing way and at random without a logical structure.
 - When marking a Narrative piece, the Examiner enters the fictional world created by the writer and accepts it; however, the writer should follow certain rules of orthodoxy and logic; e.g. the sun does not shine at night, chestnuts do not grow on trees in the spring, dogs are not stripy, etc.

General comments

Questions in **Part 1** concerned discussion and argument.

Questions in **Part 2** concerned description and narrative.

Part 1

Candidates need to read the question carefully and reacting to it, argue with it, agree or disagree with it.

Successful candidates express their thoughts simply and clearly, selecting unambiguous verbal expressions and rather shorter sentences. This year, several candidates tried to use very complex and sophisticated language, and express their thoughts in very long and complicated sentences. This rendered the essay very difficult to understand.

It is advisable to re-read the essay before the end of the examination and make sure that it is comprehensible and clear and that ideas do not contradict one another.

Candidates should formulate ideas precisely so that the reader understands them immediately and without ambiguity.

The text should have an introduction, body, and summarising conclusion.

Avoid starting a paragraph with a conjunction unless absolutely necessary. Better responses were characterised by a richness of lexis.

If using rhetorical questions, make sure to try to find an answer to them in the response.

It is not appropriate to use abbreviations excessively (etc.) or slashes (e.g. woman/man, model/model) or brackets.

Colloquial and ungrammatical language should be avoided. The vocabulary should not contain any conversational, colloquial, vulgar words or words coming from dialects.

Candidates should pay attention to spelling: e.g. there is a significant difference between these pairs of words: *mi/my (me/we)*, *sním/s ním (I eat/with him)*, *bil/byl (hit/was)*, *plastický/plastový (cosmetic/plastic)*, *víš/výš (you know/higher)*, *omamné/omámené (narcotic/groggy)*, *vyžito/zneužito (make the best of/abuse)*, etc.

When using vocabulary that originates in another language, for example English, candidates should use the Czech spelling, e.g. *visage/vizáž*, *effect/efekt*, *business/byznys*. If the words are written using English spelling, this is considered a spelling mistake.

Candidates should be aware of the following common spelling and grammatical issues:

- (a) the use of “y” after an ambiguous consonant
- (b) subject-predicate agreement
- (c) wrong cases for nouns and adjectives,
- (d) improper punctuation - the use of English punctuation rules in Czech (for example – *čárka za slovy – nicméně, atd., za první, na druhou stranu*).

Part 2

Candidates must keep to the given theme. They should write about things that are familiar to them.

In descriptive tasks, candidates should use more colourful language, adjectives, poetic attributes or figurative terms.

In narrative tasks it is useful to keep the story exciting to maintain the reader’s interest. Candidates should focus on grabbing the reader’s attention from the beginning, and keeping the story exciting to maintain that interest.

Candidates also should use narrative techniques such as direct speech, internal monologues, short sentences and a build-up of tension and suspense.

Candidates should structure the text into paragraphs.

Candidates should follow the normal conventions for spelling, punctuation and direct or semi-direct speech. If the text does not contain punctuation, or punctuation is incorrectly used, it is very difficult to read.

Colloquial and vulgar words should be avoided. If they are needed for a particular narrative impact, they should only be used sparingly and in a character’s direct speech.

Candidates should be aware of the following common spelling and grammatical issues:

- (a) non-standard noun endings (for example „s *klukama*“, “s *holkama*”,)
- (b) punctuation in sentences, especially punctuation of embedded subordinate clauses

- (c) punctuation in direct speech.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1 – Argument and discussion

In this section, candidates choose one from four argument or discussion topics. They need to clearly and briefly formulate their own ideas, express opinions, view different aspects of the topic and defend their standpoint. This section allows candidates to demonstrate whether they are able to manage the stylistic structure of discussions and polemics.

Question 1

- (a) *Plastic surgery is an expression of our inability to accept and love ourselves the way we are. Give arguments for and against this statement.*

This was the most popular question. A lot of responses focused on a list of when to use cosmetic surgery and who undergoes it. Several candidates told a story from their own experience – someone who had undergone cosmetic surgery and how it turned out. Some mentioned famous celebrities. The most successful responses kept the question in mind throughout and wrote about self-esteem, pressure to look a certain way and the various positive and negative motivations behind an individual's choice to undergo cosmetic surgery.

- (b) *Marriage is an anachronism. Write a reflection about the attitude toward marriage in today's world.*

This question was not very popular. The key idea to approach was "Marriage is an anachronism." The candidate needed to explore this idea, and agree with it or argue against it. Some less successful responses told narrative stories about their parents' or grandparents' marriages.

- (c) *Cameras are watching us, cameras are protecting us. Essay about positive and negative aspects of surveillance devices.*

This question was popular. In discursive essays, it is a good idea to consider the positive and negative aspects and a variety of viewpoints from which the specific issue can be considered. The best responses were not limited to a single point of view. Candidates needed to avoid just telling a story or listing cases, for example, where cameras helped to arrest a thief. In some responses candidates listed only the positive or only the negative aspects of surveillance equipment (e.g. that it is expensive, it can be misused etc.) instead of discussing both sides of the argument. The best responses mentioned the impact of surveillance devices on us as monitored subjects, as the question required.

- (d) *Comic books – books for lazy people. Give arguments for and against this statement.*

Another theme that required consideration for and against the given claim. Several candidates limited themselves to describing their own adventures and reading experiences while reading comic books. Others wrote a description instead of a discussion, detailing what comic books look like, giving examples of comic books and famous comic book heroes. This approach was not what was required by the question.

Part 2 – Narration and description

Candidates needed to choose one from four topics, two of which were intended for description and two for narration.

In the **descriptive tasks**, the very best responses contained colourful, expressive language. Weaker candidates played it safe with more straightforward and mundane language. Candidates should not be afraid to use more colourful language, adjectives, poetic attributes or figurative terms in their descriptions.

In the **narrative tasks**, the best works were complex, sophisticated and interesting to the reader. The writing was orderly and satisfactorily managed. Weaker responses were a simple narrative with a beginning, middle and end, often without a climax. They consisted of simple, everyday happenings. In order to do better, candidates need to manage the climax carefully and keep the story exciting to maintain the reader's interest.

The best works were complex and sophisticated with appropriate details and some build-up of character or setting.

Candidates should use narrative techniques such as direct speech, internal monologues, short sentences and a build up of tension and suspense.

To prepare for the narrative section of the examination, candidates should read plenty of fictional literature for inspiration, and make notes of the linguistic and compositional tools used in them.

Question 2

Description

- (a) *Sunday afternoon in a city park. Describe a scene in a city park on a Sunday afternoon.*

This was a popular question. Many interesting descriptions arose here. However some candidates read the assignment incorrectly and described the park in the morning, and in some cases they described situations that are not typical for a city park (woods, fields with rabbits, changing of the weather from the early morning until the late evening, etc.). Or within the descriptions, they collected information that was contradictory or illogical (tulips were in blossom at the same time as there were chestnuts on the trees).

- (b) *Describe the appearance and feelings of a musician during his/her concert.*

This question was also popular. Several candidates described the musician's appearance and transformation of emotions very nicely; some, however, branched from the topic and concentrated on the description of the concert hall, the audience, the repertoire, etc. This meant that the description of the musician and his/her emotions was insufficient and mentioned only in passing. Candidates should remember that their response should be structured into paragraphs, for the ease of the reader.

Narration:

- (c) *You were right, mum. Or, how I admitted my mistake. Write a story inspired by the given title.*

Some responses were a simple narrative with a beginning, middle and end. In the best responses, candidates managed the climax carefully and kept the story exciting to maintain the reader's interest. The language used is important. Candidates should not use vulgar or colloquial words; or if these are essential to the plot, they should only be used sparingly and in a character's direct speech.

Unfortunately some candidates did not write a story, but instead wrote a discursive essay focusing on their relationship with their parents or the attitude of the younger generation to older people and the advice the older generation give. Candidates need to read the question carefully and make sure they respond in the correct genre of writing.

- (d) *"That day we had the most curious catch. A sealed bottle with a small white letter inside was dangling at the end of our fishing rod. We couldn't resist the temptation; we broke the bottle with the nearest stone and read the letter. At that moment we did not anticipate the adventure that was ahead of us." Write a story that starts with the quotation above.*

Some responses were a simple narrative with a beginning, middle and end. They often consisted of simple or unlikely events. Many works escaped from reality into unreal, fantasy or sci-fi world; this was acceptable as long as the connection to the given quotation was maintained. The story needs to be logical yet interesting, or on a more basic level it should have, at a minimum, satisfactory identification of features. Weaker candidates may have done better if their stories were based in the real world, because they sometimes got lost in their fantasy world and the thread of the story was lost. The end of the story should be logical and believable, even in sci-fi or fantasy writing.

Sections 1 and 2 – Use of Language

The following common errors should be avoided by candidates:

- the use of “y” after an ambiguous consonant
- subject-predicate agreement
- spelling of “hard”, “soft” (use of “y” and “i” in Czech) and possessive adjectives
- forms of the use of groups of consonants (*mně, mě, n x nn*)
- cases for nouns and adjectives (*s klukama, s holkama*)
- relations between words (“*navštěvovat a setkávat se s lidmi!*”)
- grammatical forms of verbs, especially of the verb “to be”, for example *my jsme, my bychom, vy byste*
- inflection of numbers – mainly of numbers “two”, “both” (for example – *oběma*)
- spelling of uppercase and lowercase letters (*Česká republika, pondělí, listopad*)
- punctuation in sentences, especially punctuation of embedded subordinate clauses
- improper punctuation - the use of English punctuation rules in Czech (for example – *čárka za slovy – nicméně, zaprvé atd.*)
- anglicisms in vocabulary
- spelling –wrong spelling can cause misunderstanding (*omamné / omámené, využito/zneužito*),
- remembering bars and hooks above the letters (including candidates who type their responses on a computer).