

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/01

Reading

Key points

- **Question 1:** Candidates need to make sure they show full comprehension of the text by using their own words to answer the questions. They should avoid quoting the text unless they are specifically required to do so by the question.
- **Question 2:** When listing the differences, candidates need to make sure they refer to the same idea or concept present in both texts, but dealt with differently or seen with a different perspective (specific examples will be provided below).
- **Language:** candidates should revise the basic agreements, tenses and verb endings.

General comments

Most candidates responded extremely well to the articles presented in the Paper, because they could relate to the problems and job satisfaction as described by the two teachers.

Almost all candidates completed the paper, which indicated that the time allocation was adequate for the candidates to read the texts and complete both questions. Some candidates left some questions unanswered, but it was clear that they did not know the answer rather than had a time problem. Some candidates managed to write a plan or a rough draft, and this was a positive indication that they had been well prepared in the techniques and requirements of the examination, as well as coached on how to manage their examination time allowance. The word limit recommendation in **Question 2** was respected better this year than in any previous year. There were just one or two Centres where all candidates wrote too much, indicating that teachers need to reinforce the idea of the word limit with their candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

It is crucial that the candidates read the questions from **Question 1** very carefully and make sure that they answer in the format required by the question. The number of marks allocated by the side of each question serves as a clear indicator of how many ideas need to be included in order to gain full marks.

The questions ranged from straightforward (**g**, **c** and **e**) to challenging unless the candidates were truly first language candidates (**f(i)**). The rest of the questions fitted in the middle band, where, as long as the text was well understood, the questions presented no major difficulty. Therefore, there were opportunities for all candidates to perform according to their ability.

- (a) Most candidates managed to identify two of the three possible answers for this question. The vast majority of candidates explained that Evelyne could not leave and that the way she mentioned 6 or 7 years resembled the phrase a prisoner would use. A few candidates also spotted that Evelyne had been sent to her school by an official, in the same way as a judge would sentence a prisoner. The question specifically asked candidates to use examples from the first paragraph **and** to explain them. Weaker candidates identified the text and copied it down, but failed to explain how the phrases gave the impression of a prison sentence.
- (b) This question provided a good level of differentiation. In order to address the question fully, candidates had to express two different concepts from the second paragraph in order to comply with the question's specific reference to the 1970s. Stronger candidates clearly identified that the

new teachers had a more atypical background and that the older teachers were disciplinarians and/or trained teachers through and through. The most frequent error was to write that the young teachers did not apply discipline, an idea found later on in the text without the notion that this was the case in the 1970s; therefore this was not a valid answer.

- (c) Candidates coped well with this question. Three marks were available from four possible answers from the text, which were easily identified by the vast majority of candidates. Some confusion occurred when some candidates thought that Evelyne's faculty was a place she previously taught at, instead of the place where she studied and trained.
- (d) Candidates were required to explain the meaning of a phrase. This was achieved well by the true first language candidates who knew that « *dicter à la virgule près* » means a rigid, disciplinarian approach to teaching, without varying at all from the set plan of the lesson or giving the students any consideration. Weaker candidates understood the phrase literally and explained that the teacher dictated with attention to good punctuation.
- (e) Most candidates were successful with this question, as they had no difficulty finding the answers and rewording the friendly and helpful atmosphere between the teachers. Some candidates only scored one of the two available marks because they used the text "*se serrer les coudes*" and then explained that they helped each other, which are the same point.
- (f) (i) This question was the most challenging one in **Question 1**. Most candidates understood that there was an element of violence in the school. However, to gain the mark, it had to be clearly said that the problem came from the violence/gang wars etc. from outside the school, which had spilled over into the compound of the school, as clearly stated in the phrase: « *.....guerres de territoire..... se résolvait dans l'enceinte du lycée* ».
- (ii) This was easier for most candidates because most of them identified some of the three possible ideas. Weaker candidates did not show full understanding when they only mentioned that the students were obliged to go to this particular school but failed to explain why (they were born/lived nearby). Stronger candidates managed to link their three answers in a consequential sentence such as « *ils sont obligés de venir à ce lycée, étant nés près de l'école, mais n'ont aucune chance de réussir, même s'ils travaillent dur* ».
- (g) This question was by far the most successfully answered for all but very few candidates. All candidates found at least one of the two quotes available.
- (h) Candidates easily identified the three main things which made Evelyne happy about her time spent in the school: she had not noticed the time passing, she found the students likable and she felt she had served a purpose. The fourth idea was more challenging, and only found by the stronger candidates: she had been able to hang on to her principles.

Question 2

With regard to the content, this question proved to be challenging for many candidates, more so when candidates expressed the differences between the two texts.

Only a very small handful of candidates found more than 10 of the possible 15 distinct similarities/differences. Similarly, very few candidates found fewer than 5 ideas.

Similarities were generally found easily. The most commonly stated ones were: two teachers, both female, both enthusiastic, leaving their job, having noted a change and some increase of violence amongst their candidates, both exhausted.

Finding the differences turned out to be more challenging. Those that were mentioned were: the different settings for the two stories (France/Belgium and good/challenging schools) the reverse career evolution for the two teachers (one started full of enthusiasm and lost her motivation, the other felt forced at first and ended up really involved in her job) the different format of the texts (article/biography) and the different stages/ages of the teachers (one retiring/one at the beginning of her career).

Some weaker candidates found one or two ideas and then described them at length.

In this question, it is not necessary to provide evidence of the ideas by quoting the text; that is why a limit of 250 words can still give the candidates ample word allowance to include all 15 ideas. In fact, candidates who quoted the text all scored more poorly. Better candidates had prepared a list of bullet points in their draft work and then worked these points in two comparative paragraphs.

It is not necessary to write a lengthy introduction, but if the candidates feel the need to present the texts, they should aim to include some of their points, for example: *Ces deux textes parlent de femmes (1) qui sont professeur (1) l'une en France et l'autre en Belgique (1) qui se sont toutes deux bien investies dans leur profession. (1)*. This introduction would already score 4 marks but only uses a few words. Importantly, the candidates would then need to avoid repeating any of these ideas in the bulk of the essay, since the points have already been made. It is advisable that candidates aim to include several ideas in the same sentence.

When preparing to answer **Question 2**, it is advisable that candidates consider the meaning of a “difference”, i.e. an idea present in both texts but with a different outcome or different view points, or even different importance. For example, some candidates wrote that Evelyne had political conversations with her faculty friends. This is a point included in the first text, but it has no link with a similar or opposite/different point in the second text. Therefore it will not score any marks and it shows that the candidate narrates the texts rather than compares them.

With regards to the organisation of **Question 2**, candidates are advised to write two clear paragraphs, one with the similarities and one with the differences. Weaker candidates just narrated each text and made no comparative attempts. Candidates are expected to use expressions such as *les points similaires dans les deux textes sont.....* or *une grande différence est que.....* or *par contre...cependant...as* phrases that clearly link or contrast their ideas.

It is not necessary to write a conclusion unless it also includes a new point, for example: *En conclusion, on peut voir qu'Evelyne termine sa carrière avec le sentiment d'avoir servi à quelque chose, alors que Leslie ne voit plus l'enseignement comme une priorité pour elle. (1)*

Candidates are not asked to add their own opinion about the texts.

Language (Questions 1 and 2)

Generally, the language used in **Question 1** came from the text and this is fine as long as the candidate's understanding is clearly expressed, as explained above. Direct lifting of chunks of text may well not answer the question and will not demonstrate understanding.

Overall, the quality of the language used by candidates was better this year than in previous years. It was evident that some Centres had advised their candidates to check their spelling and grammar before the end of the examination, as some corrections were seen. This practice should be encouraged for all candidates.

In **Question 2**, candidates who copied from the text scored poorly because this meant that they failed to compare the texts.

Stronger candidates were able to express their answers in fluent and at times error-free French.

In **Question 2**, as well as the language itself, the structure and style of the essay were also rewarded by a further 5 marks. This mark was limited when candidates wrote much more than the recommended 200 to 250 words or when they narrated the texts rather than comparing them.

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/02

Writing

Key messages

- Candidates need to write responses that are relevant and well structured.
- Responses should be accurate and make use of idiom and a wide range of appropriate vocabulary.
- Responses also need to be coherent and include well-developed ideas.

General comments

As in previous years, candidates were given a choice of 4 titles for the discussion and argumentative essay and another 4 titles for the narrative or descriptive essays. Most candidates observed the rubric regarding the number of words to use (350-500 words per essay). The best essays submitted were well-structured and fluently argued, putting forward a balanced viewpoint with a range of ideas in support of both sides of the argument. Some less successful essays often had a beginning, a middle and an end but the development lacked direction and ideas, and explanations were limited. Some candidates seemed to have difficulty producing a satisfactory concluding paragraph that synthesised the various ideas in their essay. There were also essays which had no proper introduction or concluding remarks whilst in others the conclusion simply repeated the title, often using the exact words that had already been used earlier in the development. Candidates need to be advised to give more thought to their conclusions, which should be striking and interesting. In descending order of popularity, the pattern was as follows: **Section 1: Question a, Question c, Question b, Question d; Section 2: Question d, Question c, Question a, Question b.**

The linguistic quality of the best essays made them a real pleasure to read; mistakes were few and far between and they were characterised by an extensive grasp of vocabulary, a good sense of idiom and the confident use of complex sentences. Less successful essays tended to be simple and laboured and there was a tendency to use the same noun repeatedly in close proximity, when it would have been better to use pronouns or synonyms. In weaker scripts, many of the linguistic errors left the reader confused and the logic of the argument presented was difficult to follow. Amongst a number of recurrent errors, the following were seen:

- omission of accents, e.g. a and à, ou and où
- the use of *cela* in place of a gender-specific pronoun
- overuse of *gens, ça, cela, il y a*
- use of *les chercheurs* instead of *les chercheurs*
- imperfect tense of faire: il *fesait*
- conjugation first person singular past historic: *j'arriva, j'alla*
- conjugation of irregular verbs in past historic
- disregard for appropriate register: *truc, chose, machine, pas mal de, nul*
- use of *atteindre* wrongly (for **Section 1: Question c**)
- use of the *tu* form instead of the *vous* form
- use of *à travers* instead of *au moyen de*
- gender of *camera*
- use of *dans* instead of *sur*
- confusion between imperfect tense, perfect tense, past historic and present tense
- inappropriate conjunctions at the beginning of paragraphs: *alors, puis, ensuite, aussi*
- confusion between the infinitive and the past participle
- failure to agree past participle of a verb when a direct pronoun is placed before a verb
- failure to agree past participle with the subject when the auxiliary is *être*.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question (a)

This question required candidates to analyse the dangers and benefits of mobile phones. Candidates could identify most of the advantages such as use during an emergency, the ability to allow parents and children to stay in touch, the convenience of being able to reach your child immediately in the event of a change of plans, access to a multitude of gadgets if you own a smartphone and being able to contact people at any time wherever you are. As far as the risks of mobile phones were concerned, some candidates explained that mobile phones could be used to spread rumours, inappropriate pictures and to directly harass peers, the uncertainty as to how electromagnetic radiation from those phones affects the developing brains of children, the danger of being mugged in the street; youngsters who have their phone on whilst sleeping may expose themselves to some danger and road traffic accidents that could result from phoning whilst driving. The conclusion most candidates made was moderate and most of them agreed that in today's society, mobile phones have become a necessity, but people should avoid being exposed to known risks by taking some precautions. Some candidates did not explain the dangers clearly, merely stating how some people could waste too much time on their phone.

Question (b)

The essays submitted gave a whole range of examples such as the ethical issues with cloning and religious organisations, whether or not researchers should use animals for testing new medicines which could one day lead to a cure for diseases, and the benefits of medical research in the improvement of our standard of living. Only a few candidates were successful at raising philosophical questions and at attempting to argue for the necessity of continuing medical research without limitations as we still have a lot to discover. Some candidates, quite rightly, referred to what medical research had already achieved, eliminating some fatal diseases and saving thousands of lives. Some essays were pleasing to read, each reaching a different and individual conclusion.

Question (c)

Many of the essays submitted contained sweeping misconceptions such as cameras being located in changing rooms or toilets, and did not attempt to analyse how and to what extent CCTV cameras could or could not benefit the individual. Balanced essays often made the point that CCTV cameras can be an invasion of privacy as we are filmed in most public places making us feel uncomfortable; nevertheless those cameras can also be a deterrent to criminals or could be used as evidence to incriminate a person; those cameras make us feel safe. It was pleasing to see some candidates referring to George Orwell's surveillance culture and exploring the possibility of such a culture developing in the near future.

Question (d)

Not many candidates opted for this title. Among some of the aspects raised, it was agreed that nobody could put a price tag on someone's life. Some candidates were side tracked into referring to God and their development went off topic. Among the interesting ideas were paying for a miracle cure to save one's life, defining and interpreting the meaning of life and lessons from history when we used to trade lives (slavery).

Section 2

Question (a)

This question gave the opportunity for candidates to describe a historical period. Successful candidates were able to give a description with well-developed images and ideas, adding details as and where necessary. Among the historical periods chosen there were: Ancient Greece, The Roman Empire, World War I and World War II. Less successful candidates wrote a chronology of events of the chosen period which did not have any effect, imagination or impact.

Question (b)

This title was the least popular. Candidates who chose this question were successful in describing a particular event in the life of this voluntary worker. Some were more successful in giving details such as the apprehension of the person before arriving at his/her mission, a description of the atmosphere and the impact the volunteer had on people at the time. Among chosen settings there were an old people's home and a village affected by a tsunami, an earthquake or flood.

Question (c)

All candidates who chose this question did incorporate the sentence, however, some candidates still managed to modify the wording in order to fit their story. This time, candidates needed to narrate a story in the first person singular as the given sentence restricted: *"il me fallait..."*. It was important not to modify the sentence but adapt the story to the given sentence. Most stories were centred on buying a last minute present and not having much money left. The plot of some essays was predictable and therefore the climax was not managed effectively. In the more successful essays, effects were successfully achieved and some stories were very engaging, keeping the reader on the edge of their seat until the very end. There were a few weak essays which consisted of a simple story with everyday happenings ('I woke up, I washed, I went out, I came home).

Question (d)

This was the most popular question and was open to all kind of stories. Some candidates explained how they appeared on the island using complex and well developed flashbacks: falling from a cruise ship, plane crash, sailing and hit by a storm or simply amnesia. There was a mixture of responses: some essays were impressive, inviting the reader to explore an island full of traps and giving an accurate description of the setting; less succesful pieces were pedestrian and lacking in excitement besides a day to day routine of getting some fruits, fishing and sleeping. The use of the present tense throughout the story was acceptable but may have resulted in the story losing its panache. Some candidates successfully wrote their story in the form of a journal. Most stories were original, full of details and with a good storyline.