

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/01

Reading

Key messages

- **Question 1:** Candidates should read the questions carefully and make sure they answer them precisely. Using a quotation from the text does not suffice. The best answers are to the point, with enough development to satisfy the number of marks each question carries. When an explanation is required, keeping to the wording of the text is not sufficient. Finally, there is scope for improvement when addressing questions targeted at Assessment Objective R4 (understand how writers achieve effects).
- **Question 2:** When comparing texts, candidates should concentrate on the content, rather than the style of the passage. To be valid, points of comparison need to be mentioned in both texts, albeit with a different angle. Candidates should plan their answers so that they are organised, accurate and concise because anything in excess of the prescribed word limit cannot be taken into account in the assessment.
- **Language:** Candidates should concentrate on accuracy. They should allow time to carry out a complete grammatical check of their answers to ensure basic grammatical rules have been applied correctly.

General comments

The two texts dealt with a topic of interest to candidates and they generally found them accessible. In **Question 1** very few questions were left unanswered and in **Question 2** many candidates planned their response to remain within the prescribed 250 words. This required an ability to identify valid points of comparison and to group them into concise and well written paragraphs. Many candidates need further support and training in how to produce an accurate guided summary.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Candidates generally understood the text but occasionally struggled to answer the questions purposefully. Marks are awarded for each specific relevant point made by the candidate. Expressing the same idea in several different ways is not appropriate. When a question is worth three or four marks, then three or four distinct relevant ideas must be identified. It is also important to read the question and understand its implications.

- (a) This was generally well-answered. Most candidates conveyed the idea that the work experience was a requirement of the course that Christine followed. A few omitted to mention the compulsory nature of this work experience; this was clearly shown in the text (*c.f. il faut effectuer...*). Others thought gaining access to the School of Engineering was conditional to finding a placement abroad.
- (b) A number of candidates answered (*Parce que*) *Christine dit...* and simply proceeded to quote a sentence from the text. Such an answer could not gain any marks. Candidates are expected to explain and manipulate the text to answer the question. If a quotation from the text is used, it should only be in support of an answer, as a justification but not as an answer in itself.
- (c) Most candidates were able to identify two reasons why Christine was unable to find a job as a waitress. The third mark proved more challenging to achieve, largely because of over-reliance on

the text. Potential employers had been mentioned in the previous sentence, so they were referred to as *ils* in the text. As an answer to the question, the use of the personal pronoun was ambiguous and could not be accepted. A few candidates managed to score three marks.

- (d) Many candidates simply wrote a summary of the third paragraph when the question required them to summarise the difficulties Christine encountered, as expressed in this paragraph. Some answers were too long and in part irrelevant. The best answers explained that *Christine, manquant de temps et toujours sans emploi se vit forcée de faire appel aux services d'une agence spécialisée qui ne produit que cinq réponses positives en deux semaines*. Most candidates managed to identify two problems, very few identified all four.
- (e) The three feelings experienced by Christine (...*impatiente, stressée et excitée*) had to be justified. Many scored two marks out of three because although they thought they had covered all three angles, they in fact expressed the same idea (the excitement caused by the novelty of the experience) twice, albeit differently: *c'était la première fois qu'elle partait à l'étranger* and *elle n'avait jamais visité l'île auparavant*. Christine's eagerness to start her new job or to be in Guernsey was often omitted, probably because candidates did not consider the whole of the paragraph to find their answer and simply referred to what followed the quotation.
- (f) Here, candidates had to show their understanding of how writers achieve effects (Assessment Objective R4). Some candidates successfully identified either the writer's aim or the writer's style; few managed both and many gave totally irrelevant answers. Some candidates did not attempt this question.
- (g) Here candidates had to explain the implicit changes in Christine's attitude (Assessment Objective R2). Many misread the question and simply explained how Christine felt at the start of paragraph 7. To describe an evolution, one needs two points of reference: a beginning and an end. Some expressed the home sickness and loneliness she experienced at first; few explained the pride she felt when she gained the confidence of her bosses. In fact, many wrote that "*ses patrons lui faisaient confiance*", although this was not what she felt. Finally, a substantial number of candidates, having misread the question, based their answers on paragraph 6.
- (h) The last question required candidates to collate information gathered from the text globally. Although there were more than four aspects of Christine's character that could have been mentioned, few scored full marks because this question required an overall understanding of the text and an ability to infer meaning. It was a good discriminator. The best answers identified and justified those characteristics. A small number misunderstood the question completely and described her stay rather than her personality.

Question 2

Candidates need to remember that their response should not exceed 250 words. Some were twice this length which is a shame because only the first 250 words can be taken into consideration in the assessment. This exercise is a guided summary; as such it requires specific skills and planning. The best way is to identify themes (rather than details) mentioned in both texts and to group suitable details for comparison within these thematic units. For example, in this series, the main shared themes were: personal information relating to the two protagonists; their respective work experience; their travel details and other practical information; their spare time and opinions of their experience. From these five sections, it would be possible to identify three or four specific points mentioned in each text that were either similar to, or different from, each other.

Having completed the comprehension questions linked to the first text, candidates already had a good knowledge of it. Candidates should therefore allow plenty of time to read the second text. Invalid comparisons could often be linked to a too brief reading of Text B (e.g. candidates saying that Martine was a boy and that she had received 3 positive replies to her emails; that Martine's journey to New Zealand had lasted a day; that she had travelled with 3 companions and lived in a youth hostel.) All these points had matching points mentioned in Text A but if incorrect information is given about Text B, credit cannot be given for identifying common strands.

Grouping points not only improves organisation, it also encourages the use of a more fluent and varied style. Numbering points of comparison (e.g. *premièrement, deuxièmement*.) uses up words unnecessarily and prevents the natural flow of language. It should therefore be avoided. Similarly, lengthy introductions where candidates state what they are going to do are not needed in a summary. Another way of being economical

with words is to avoid repeating “*Dans le premier texte ... dans le deuxième texte*” for each comparison that is made. Such repetitions are unlikely to enhance the “Style and Organisation” mark.

Candidates must remember that they have to compare like with like (e.g. *Les écoles d'ingénieur où les deux filles étudient leur imposent de faire une expérience professionnelle à l'étranger pour une durée de deux mois minimum. Christine a mis deux heures pour se rendre de St Malo à Guernesey en ferry, tandis que le voyage en avion de Martine pour aller de Paris à Auckland lui a pris plus de deux jours.*)

Most candidates managed to find between 5 and 10 similarities/differences although many more could have been found. In the simply written example above, six points were made in 60 words. It shows that there is scope to use more ambitious language, mention many more points and still remain within the word limit. It is possible to deal with differences and similarities in two separate sections or to combine **(a)** and **(b)**. The latter approach is more demanding because it requires a clear focus and organisational skills but it can be very effective. Since this is a summary task, quoting from the text or giving line references is not needed.

To improve, candidates should:

- Identify common themes and list as many differences/similarities as possible within each theme
- Organise and plan their response so that it is purposeful and fully relevant.
- Compare like with like (e.g. length of working day, leisure time activities).
- Select details occurring in both texts and avoid mentioning details featuring in only one of them (e.g. parents' financial help is mentioned in Text B but not in Text A; we know Christine's age but we do not know Martine's).
- Remain focused and avoid omitting the 2nd half of the comparison.
- Avoid excessive switching into narrative mode through over-reliance on the story line of the texts.
- Refrain from stating the obvious (e.g. the texts have different titles) or the trivial (different number of paragraphs or lines in each text) and concentrate instead on the content of the texts.

Style and organisation

Organisation is closely linked with content. The better candidates grouped and linked ideas, typically introducing several ideas into one sentence. The majority of candidates dealt with ideas in a series of short sentences, often following the same pattern, so that the overall effect was somewhat repetitive and at times laboured. A few picked points at random, losing focus now and again, and making their answer hard to follow.

Style relates to the range and complexity of structures and to the breadth and depth of lexis used. As in previous series', few candidates were at the extremes of the scale: stylish or purposeful responses were rare, so were very poor responses with excessive lifting written in basic and barely adequate language.

Accuracy (Questions 1 and Question 2)

The quality of language was similar to that of previous sessions, with possibly fewer candidates reaching the top band and also fewer in the bottom range. Most produced “appropriate but unsophisticated and generally simple syntax”. There was little evidence to show that answers had been checked, so that errors that should have been avoided (agreement of adjectives, use of the infinitive instead of the past participle, 1st person verb ending (in **Question 1**) when a 3rd person singular should have been used etc). Many favoured phonetical renderings to the detriment of grammatical accuracy. More errors occurred in **Question 1** than in **Question 2**. In the latter, candidates had more scope to produce their own language; in fact it tended to be quite repetitive as candidates seemed more concerned with making valid points than with improving the quality of their language.

Here are some areas candidates should concentrate on to improve the quality of language:

- Agreement of adjectives and participles
- Confusion over infinitive of –er verbs and past participles (*elle a décider ; elle à était accepter.*)
- Verb endings, especially 3rd person singular and plural of regular –er verbs
- Use of pronouns – confusion over direct and indirect object pronouns (*des problèmes financier qui lui empêcher (sic)...*)
- Confusion over *a* and *à*; over *et*, over *est* and *ai*, over *ces* and *ses*, over *on* and *ont*...
- Phonetical spelling (*elle a commencer a sabituer*) ; *elle s'avait*...
- Range of link words – candidates should strive to increase it.
- Range of vocabulary – candidates should strive to widen it.

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

0501/02

Writing

Key messages

To do well on this paper, candidates need to select two titles and write a response for each that is clearly relevant and well-structured. Essays should be generally accurate with evidence of use of idiom and appropriate vocabulary, and be coherent with well-developed ideas.

General comments

As in previous years, candidates were given a choice of 4 titles for the discursive/argumentative essay and 4 titles for the narrative/descriptive essay. Each essay was marked out of 25, comprising a maximum mark of 12 for style and accuracy and a maximum of 13 for content and structure. Most candidates observed the rubric regarding the number of words used (350-500 words per essay). There were some first-rate essays from able candidates who handled the two pieces of extended writing with commendable fluency and accuracy. However, quite a lot of essays fell into the average category due to poor grammar and very basic content, some of which was not always relevant to the question.

For **Section 1** it is important for candidates to read the question carefully and not be tempted to engage with a wider theme which does not relate directly to the question. When candidates choose the descriptive task in **Section 2** they need to produce a vivid description for the reader. In **Section 1**, the structure of essays was problematic for some candidates who wrote an introduction that was rather simplistic, sometimes simply including a repetition of the title. Some lacked appropriate linking words and included a very rushed conclusion. The very best and most relevant essays are those which support an argument or a discussion with apt illustration and exemplification.

The importance of clear handwriting cannot be overstated. Where candidates are aware of the limitations of their handwriting, they should be advised to take extra care to ensure that they are not unnecessarily penalised.

As far as the quality of language was concerned, there were some impressive essays, demonstrating grammatical accuracy and including an impressive range of structures, resulting in a high level of fluency. Some candidates managed to demonstrate their ability to use a wide range of expressions and vocabulary successfully. The linguistic quality of the best essays made them a real pleasure to read. However, in most of the essays grammatical accuracy was only adequate, with errors in use of noun-adjective, subject-verb agreement and use of tenses. Among a number of recurrent weaknesses and linguistic errors, the following were seen:

- Omission of accents: a-à, ou-où, du-dû, sur-sûr
- Lapses of register e.g. truc, chose, prof, boulot, dégueulasse
- Overuse of ça, cela, il y a
- Misspelling of common words e.g. proffesseur, gas, la plus part
- Use of à cause de instead of grâce à
- Use of the tu form instead of the vous or on form.
- Anglicism: les locaux for les gens du coin/du pays, les stations nucléaires for les centrales nucléaires, les fermes éoliennes for les parc éoliens, un hasard for un danger, digital for numérique, les tours guidés for les visites guidées
- Conjugation of first person singular in past historic tense: J'arriva for j'arrivai, j'alla for j'allai
- Confusion between imperfect tense, perfect tense, past historic and present tense
- Weak link words at the beginning of paragraphs: alors, puis, ensuite, aussi
- Imperfect tense of faire: il fesait instead of il faisait
- Preceding direct object agreement: je les ai vu

- Past participle agreement: *nous sommes allé*
- Use of *vite* instead of *rapide* (when mentioning fastfood)

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1(a)

L'énergie nucléaire est-elle l'unique solution à notre demande énergétique ?

This question was the third most popular. Good essays started by explaining that although our demand for energy keeps increasing, fossil fuels are no longer able to satisfy this demand. Most candidates agreed that nuclear energy was by far the best solution to our energy crisis – at least until we find a more efficient source of energy such as hydrogen. Others considered nuclear energy as one of the solutions but not necessarily the only one and argued that renewable energy was not to be ignored. There was no disadvantage in briefly mentioning some of the drawbacks of nuclear energy in order to argue the benefits of renewable energy but the essay was not specifically about the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear energy. Some candidates ignored the question and embarked on a discussion as to whether or not nuclear energy was safe.

Generally, there were insufficient examples used to reach an entirely satisfactory and convincing conclusion.

Question 1(b)

On ne fait pas assez pour combattre le problème de l'obésité dans notre société. Discutez.

This was the second most popular title. Those candidates who interpreted the question correctly often suggested that obesity was a growing problem in some countries and not only explained what was currently being done either by a governmental body or privately, but also what additional measures could be implemented. Current actions included sports at school, better sports facilities in most towns and villages, more people visiting a dietician, educating children to eat more healthily through various means, advertising campaigns on television to encourage regular exercise and “pour votre santé bougez plus” campaigns on high fat products. Additional measures included eating more fruit, vegetables and healthy snacks, a tax on sugar, parents to encourage children to avoid fast-food outlets and walk to school rather than being driven there. Good examples given in response to this question included: Jamie Oliver's plea to the British government to impose a sugar tax and encouraging restaurants to display calorie content on their menus.

Some candidates used the question to explain the causes of obesity and offered some solutions. These types of essays lacked the right emphasis and did not score high marks for content.

Question 1(c)

Le tourisme apporte autant de bien que de mal. Qu'en pensez-vous ?

This question was by far the most popular, and it generated a number of thoughtful, well-balanced essays. On the other hand, there were some essays which consisted of a list of superficial illogical ideas. It seemed logical for candidates to list the positive aspects of tourism and contrast these with the negative aspects and finally reach a conclusion. Amongst the benefits frequently mentioned were: tourism is a vital source of income which can be reinvested and contribute to improved local education, health and other public services. It also creates jobs and skills for local people; local infrastructure is improved as it is essential to provide water and sanitation facilities, roads, public transport and airports for tourists. From a tourist's point of view, it is culturally beneficial to meet different people from different areas or countries, to see some contrasting landscapes which may educate them about the dangers to ecosystems in the modern world. As for the detrimental effects of tourism, some of the ideas suggested by candidates included: tourism can become an environmental catastrophe if it is not sustainable; construction of hotels and new facilities for tourists disturb wildlife habitats and tourists also tend to damage their surroundings and show a lack of respect for local cultures and communities. In addition, most of the profits go to foreign companies rather than to the local community; most jobs given to the local people are unskilled and badly paid and as some holiday resorts become more popular this makes houses too expensive for locals and makes the cost of living too high; most activities and infrastructure developments are aimed at tourists and therefore local communities may be sidelined or even ignored; locals may lose their traditions and cultures as they prefer to adopt the tourists' fashion and ways of life.

Good essays concluded positively or with the hope that ecotourism will develop and this might help to reduce some of the drawbacks of tourism.

Question 1(d)

« De nos jours, il n'est plus nécessaire de se marier. » Êtes-vous d'accord ?

Not many candidates opted for this title. In general, candidates needed to sustain a convincing and logical argument. Most candidates suggested that marriage had become an outdated institution and is no longer a necessity for current generations for various reasons: people have become less religious in some countries; women can now work and do not need to get married to ensure financial security; the divorce rate is increasing and does not encourage people to tie the knot when so many marriages end in divorce; it is usually acceptable to have children without getting married and a wedding can be very costly and many couples prefer to save money for their future home or family.

However, there were some candidates who felt that marriage was still important to couples in order to live in a harmonious environment. They mentioned that there are still countries where traditions are strong and couples cannot live together nor have children without getting married. It was also observed that if one spouse was to die this would give more financial security than if the couple were not married. Others argued that marriage gives more stability to children through sharing the same family name as their parents.

A substantial proportion of essays lacked a convincing argument and provided only a superficial analysis.

Section 2

Question 2(a)

Décrivez un événement culturel auquel vous avez participé.

This title gave candidates the opportunity to describe a cultural event and it generated some good answers. There were some very detailed descriptions and candidates who created a rich experience for the reader focused on all five senses: hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch. Amongst the cultural events candidates chose to describe were: holy festivals, the opening of an art gallery, an international cultural day, a theatre/ballet event, a tattoo convention and other festivals. However, there were some candidates who converted the descriptive task into a narrative task; their essays lacked dimension and did not achieve the required objective. Some candidates provided a description which fell outside the remit of the task because it did not focus on a cultural event.

Question 2(b)

Comment imaginez-vous l'école du 22^{ème} siècle?

This title proved challenging for most candidates who mainly focused on the description of a number futuristic objects without offering much else. This made the description confusing, producing very little impact and hardly any sense of progression. There was also inconsistency in the use of past, present and future tenses. Good candidates managed successfully to create a vivid image of a school using all five senses.

Question 2(c)

« J'étais tellement essoufflé(e) que je n'arrivais plus à tenir sur mes jambes. » Incorporez cette phrase dans une courte histoire.

This title was the most popular in this section and produced some fantastic stories. Some of the stories written were most engaging, using flashback and a solid storyline, and demonstrating a sophisticated ability to switch between the past historic and imperfect tenses. Others were slightly inconsistent and rather predictable - consequently the climax was not managed successfully. The most common themes used to create the story were a race or a sports competition or running away from danger. There were occasions when detail was inappropriately used, for example, when no running had actually occurred to prompt being "out of breath".

Question 2(d)

Un jour, une personne inconnue vous demande de remettre une lettre à quelqu'un. Écrivez le début ou une partie de l'histoire.

This was the least popular title and generally the climax was not managed effectively. Some essays missed the essential point of being given a letter by a stranger and implied that they received the letter by post. Some candidates attempted to build up suspense but by revealing the content of the letter too early they somehow spoil the climax. Other stories were too predictable. Nonetheless, there were some interesting essays that were focused on espionage, for example, or where the main theme revolved around a love letter.