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FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/02

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

Candidates across Centres performed satisfactorily. It appears that, generally, candidates are becoming better-prepared for this examination and teachers are to be congratulated for their efforts. Most candidates completed all the questions, demonstrating improved time management and, perhaps, greater familiarity with the exam format. Judging from the results of **Part 2**, candidates have good lexical and grammatical knowledge, but not all of them can apply this knowledge to the writing of an essay effectively. More writing practice, through letter writing, report writing, etc. could enhance their skills. Candidates at this level are expected to be able to compose a coherent discourse using longer sentences and structured paragraphs. However, there is a general tendency towards shorter, simple sentence structures and lack of conjunctive expressions. Missing particles, unfinished sentences, inconsistent style of sentence endings and weak syntactic structures are also observed among weaker candidates. Such tendencies may be an influence of 'manga-language' culture. Teachers are advised to use a good selection of prose for classroom exercises.

About half the candidates expressed their ideas and opinions coherently, but fewer candidates were able to develop material to make a very clear case for their arguments: suggestions or opinions were not well supported and interesting ideas were left undeveloped. Many candidates wrote fluently to express emotions, but very few candidates could write analytically and logically. Again, more exposure to a good selection of prose across different genres will help to enhance their writing skills.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Candidates' writing skills were tested in two questions.

Question 1

This tested the candidates' ability to select, compare and summarise specific information from the two passages, A and B. Marks are awarded for Content, Style and Structure, and Language. The two passages share a topic about which the candidates are expected to write a relevant short composition (circa 400 characters). While relevance is one of the key elements, the composition cannot be a mere summary of the reading passages: personal responses to the chosen topic must be clearly, logically and coherently expressed. Given the stipulated length, unnecessary repetitions and circumlocution are best avoided. Therefore good essay planning is essential.

An example of a format used by competent candidates is as follows:

- Firstly, state very briefly (no more than a sentence or two) what the shared topic is (in the passages A and B). Alternatively, give a brief personal reaction to the reading passages (e.g. the stories are surprising, moving, familiar, etc.). This constitutes a very short introduction.
- Secondly, refer to the contents of [A] and [B]. For example, give a brief account of the common theme and compare the differences of opinions in the two passages.
- Explain how the facts and experiences described in the passages are similar/dissimilar to one's own viewpoint/experience. Develop the argument further by analysing the personal viewpoint/experience, etc. then compare that to the situations/viewpoints that are described in [A] and [B].
- Give a short concluding remark. For example, this can be a short summary of the main points followed by suggestions, and/or predictions for future situations.

There are, of course, other possible formats. The important point is that the structure of the composition should be clear and well thought out.

Question 2

This question invites a response to the passages in a variety of forms (e.g. a selective summary, a report, a speech, a script of a conversation or broadcast, a continuation of a story, or expressive development of an idea in the passage, etc.) It tests the candidates' ability to write more creatively and communicatively using high-level linguistic skills. Needless to say, the composition must be relevant to the topic, coherent and succinct. It is also expected to follow a style accepted for the genre. As in **Question 1**, accurate and appropriate use of kanji, Katakana, Hiragana, punctuation and genkoyoshi is also tested. This year, the candidates were asked to write a brief letter, enquiring about the possibility of a (study) visit, to one of the companies mentioned in the reading passages. The candidates had to write in circa 300 characters why they are interested in the company (e.g. stating briefly their own experience and future prospects in relation to the company's activities) and suggest a date for the visit. They also had to make use of Japanese politeness expressions and grammar. Adequate letter writing format is desirable.

Nearly half the candidates were able to satisfy all of the above requirements. Their descriptive writing skills were adequate to good. Logical or analytical writing skills were less satisfactory among weaker candidates who struggled to express their ideas clearly and succinctly and tended to lose the thread in the middle of writing. Writing a short composition can be more challenging than writing an extended one because it has to be succinct. Again, good composition planning is essential.

Part 2

This consisted of four subsections. The questions tested:

- Logical, semantic and grammatical knowledge (**Questions 3-7**).
- Lexical and semantic knowledge (**Questions 8-12**).
- Synonyms and kanji (**Questions 13-17**).
- Grammatical knowledge and relevant metalanguage (**Questions 18-22**).

Questions 3-17 test the candidates' linguistic knowledge, which forms the basis of good writing. Questions in this section test the candidates' linguistic flexibility. Messages are expressed in a variety of ways through rephrasing and paraphrasing, using appropriate words, grammar, expressions, etc.

Paper 0507/03

Continuous Writing

General comments

The overall performance this year was very good. Teachers across Centres are congratulated for this achievement.

General improvement was seen in the following areas: relevance of content to the chosen topic, grammatical accuracy, kanji, adequacy and appropriateness of lexical choices, and paragraph links. While stronger candidates were able to use varied expressions and sentence structures corresponding to the context, weaker candidates showed a strong tendency towards uncoordinated sentences and a mixture of archaic and colloquial expressions that are characteristic to Japanese "anime" language. Judging from the lexical and semantic structures in stronger candidates' compositions, they seemed to have had more exposure to a good selection of reading material, which can be found in classical and contemporary literature.

Comments on specific questions

A selection of nine titles was given, and called for the candidates' imaginative, narrative or argumentative response in an appropriate style.

Marking criteria are detailed as follows:

- Material (Interest, Appropriateness, Exemplification, Explanation, Detail, and Maturity).
- Structure (Paragraphing, Paragraph Links, Balance and cohesiveness in the overall structure, Sentence sequence, Structural effects, and Clear beginning and end of the discourse).
- Style (Word range, Sentence structure, Sense of audience, Varied style in the choice of vocabulary and structure, and Stylistic effects).
- Accuracy (Grammar, Punctuation, Dialogue, Word usage, Spelling including kanji use, and Usage of genkoyoshi).

Candidates were expected to write not only with linguistic accuracy, but also with clarity of argument. Further, an appropriate style and discourse structure must be chosen according to the genre in which s/he is writing and it should be consistent throughout. For example, a creative-writing essay requires originality and appealing story-telling methods, while a socio-cultural or a socio-scientific essay requires analytical and logical arguments and convincing reasoning.

The list of titles were as follows:

1. '...Hello! Excuse me?' I turned round and saw a young woman standing there with a huge bouquet of flowers. 'Erm...yes, what is it?', I said looking confused. Then she smiled and said... (complete the story).
2. Should "moral education" be reinstated as a compulsory subject (at primary and secondary levels)? State your opinion giving reasons, facts, etc. to support it. Discuss convincingly.
3. If you were given the role of prime minister for the next six months, what would you do? Write clearly giving concrete examples.
4. Explain the term 'global warming' succinctly and consider the cause(s) of this phenomenon.
5. What do you think will help stop bullying and discrimination in schools? State your opinion and give specific suggestion(s).
6. What do you associate with the word "jikyū-jisoku" (self-sufficiency)?
7. Give your thoughts on the idiomatic phrase, "ame futte ji katamaru" (falling rain hardens the ground, i.e. adversity builds character). Write freely.
8. "All animal experiments should be stopped." State whether you agree or disagree with this statement and give reasons. Supply specific examples to support your argument and discuss logically.
9. Write a composition based on your impression of the picture below.

Question 1 requires creativity and originality as well as coherent and engaging story-telling skills. **Question 9** is also a creative writing task, but it uses a visual stimulus (a photo), and thus candidates are also expected to describe vividly what they see in the picture using appropriate expressions. **Questions 2, 4, 5 and 8** require the candidates to indicate their standpoint first, then to develop analytical and logical arguments using an appropriate discourse structure. **Question 3** is a free essay in which candidates are required to employ richer linguistic skills to express a semi-fantasy world effectively. **Questions 6 and 7** require candidates to give a clear and succinct explanation of the idiom/proverb, i.e. paraphrase the fixed expressions in more ordinary language. Candidates are then expected to discuss the phrase in a coherent manner.

Essays should be relevant to the chosen topic and, needless to say, a clear structure – such as the typical Japanese format consisting of four sections KI, SHŌ, TEN, KETSU – is required. Candidates are encouraged to plan the contents carefully prior to writing their composition.