

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/02
Reading and Directed Writing

Key Messages

In order to do well in **Part 1** of this paper, candidates need to:

- ensure that the content is relevant to the question, and focussed on the theme of the 2 passages.
- ensure that their composition is coherent and includes a brief introduction and conclusion.
- show a confident grasp of the issues, taking ideas from the passages and developing them to relate to the task set.
- produce a clearly structured argument.
- display accurate grammar, well-formed sentence structures, effective linking between sentences and paragraphs, appropriate style for the genre with consistency throughout the prose, and good knowledge of kanji.
- observe the word limit

Part 1, Question 1

Candidates should produce a succinct summary of passages A and B. The summary should compare the different approaches taken to the common theme running through the two passages. The summary should be written in coherent prose, with a brief introduction and conclusion.

Part 1, Question 2

Candidates should respond to the passage by producing a piece of directed writing in the form stated in the question. The composition should compare and describe the similarities and/or differences between the approaches taken to the common theme described across the two passages, and the personal experiences and opinions of the candidate. Candidates need to support their arguments with a brief logical discussion, preferably providing a concrete example.

In order to succeed in Part 2 candidates need to display a confident grasp of grammar and vocabulary situated in a context and as a practical tool for communicating a message.

General Comments

Candidates performed competently again this year, showing familiarity with the format and expectations of the paper. A variety in the level of accuracy and fluency was seen across the candidature, but most candidates managed to complete all the questions in Parts 1 and 2 and showed effective time-management skills.

The majority of candidates performed competently in Part 1. They were able to describe the main messages in passages A and B, with the majority producing adequate summaries of the differing approaches to the theme. In **Question 1**, the best answers summarised the common theme in passages A and B succinctly and contrasted different approaches between them using coherent prose.

In **Question 2**, candidates were asked to give their opinions on the given theme. There were improvements this year in the way that average to stronger candidates clarified their opinions and supported arguments with concrete examples in a logical fashion. Some candidates demonstrated originality in describing and developing their ideas.

The highest-scoring candidates were able to develop strong cases for their arguments using the material in the passages to support their opinions. It was common for candidates to produce a fluent response expressing an emotional reaction to the passages; such candidates tended to be less successful in writing analytically.

Candidates at this level are expected to compose coherent discourse using longer sentences and structured paragraphs. Once again this year, there was a general tendency towards shorter, simple sentence structures and a lack of conjunctive expressions was seen. Among weaker candidates the following issues were observed: missing particles, erroneous use of particles, unfinished sentences, inconsistent sentence ending styles, and idiosyncratic syntactic structures as well as lexical and semantic errors.

Regular exposure to a selection of good prose across genres may help to enhance candidates' writing skills and improve in these areas.

Part 2 questions test grammatical, lexical and semantic knowledge, and the majority of candidates coped with these competently. Whilst the performance seen in Part 2 indicates that more than half of the candidates have a high level of lexical and grammatical knowledge, not all of them were able to apply the knowledge effectively when composing their essays.

Comments on Specific Questions

Part 1

Question 1

The passages this year were set on the common theme of *The Digitalised World and the Use of Paper*.

Question 1 tests skills in selecting, comparing and summarising specific information taken from the two passages (A and B).

The strongest answers went beyond a mere summary, developing the material through clear logical and coherent discussion. The structure of such compositions was clear and well thought-out, showing evidence of good pre-writing planning. They included a brief introduction and conclusion and compared the views and approaches described in passages A and B, often displaying high language proficiency and originality. Stronger candidates constructed arguments which arose naturally from the two passages, and made a clear case for their chosen option using excellent grammar and wide vocabulary. The best answers also managed to keep within the word limit, by avoiding repetition and circumlocution.

Weaker responses were characterised by less well-developed material and less varied sentence structures and vocabulary, but in most cases candidates still managed to communicate messages sufficiently using very simple but accurate language

Question 2

This question tests the ability to write creatively and communicatively in a given genre. Relevance of the content to the topic is of paramount importance. The best answers this year managing to be logical, consistent, coherent and succinct, whilst at the same time adhering to the register required by and accepted by the genre of the question.

Opinions should be stated clearly giving real examples to support the argument. This year's candidates generally responded to the question with a sense of immediacy and involvement, relating their discussions to more global environmental concerns.

Part 2

Questions 3-17 test the candidates' linguistic knowledge, which forms the basis of communicative writing. The candidates' ability to express their messages in a variety of ways is tested through rephrasing and paraphrasing, using appropriate words, grammar, expressions, etc.

Part 2 consists of four subsections. The questions test:

- 1) Semantic and grammatical knowledge
- 2) Lexical and semantic knowledge
- 3) Synonyms and Kanji
- 4) Grammatical knowledge and relevant metalanguage

In this section, the majority of candidates demonstrated good lexical and grammatical knowledge and a good command of kanji.

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/03
Continuous Writing

Key Messages

On this paper candidates must demonstrate competence in the following areas:

1. Material presented should be relevant, appropriate and accurate.
2. The structure should be coherent and cohesive, in particular with regards to paragraphing and sentence structure, and candidates should include an introduction and conclusion.
3. The style should be appropriate to the audience and should include a varied range of vocabulary and sentence structure.
4. Candidates' work should be accurate, particularly regarding grammar, punctuation, and usage of *Genkō Yōshi*.

Candidates should also make sure that they keep to the word limit.

General Comments

Many candidates wrote very competent and original compositions. Successful candidates chose an appropriate genre and style of writing that matched their chosen subject-topic. To prepare for this examination candidates are encouraged to learn different genres and writing styles such as: narrative (telling a story); descriptive (photographing a scene with words); expository (presenting the facts); persuasive (convincing the audience) and analytical (evaluating facts and reasoning their relations).

Successful candidates wrote coherent prose using a wide range of vocabulary and complex sentence structures. Typically, their compositions were written in a clear three-part (Introduction-Content-Conclusion) frame of discourse structure. Some of the top candidates skilfully employed a traditional Japanese four-part discourse structure to maintain coherence in an authentic Japanese style, which consists of four parts: KI (Introduction of a topic), SHŌ (Development on the topic), TEN (Surprise Turn – a literary device unique to Japanese composition), and KETSU (Conclusion). This structure is particularly effective in writing a narrative in Japanese, while more 'universal' three-part structure is more suitable for 'analytical' essay.

A few candidates distinguished themselves in originality, use of *Kanji* and their use of vocabulary.

Candidates are encouraged to read a selection of good prose, both classical and contemporary, in order to improve their writing skills.

Comments on Specific Questions

Nine titles were given to elicit the candidates' imaginative, descriptive or argumentative responses in an appropriate style. Candidates need to choose one topic, circle the number, and write a Japanese composition in 600–800 words. The following is a list of this year's choices.

1. 'I couldn't believe my ears. I never thought that I would be so lucky!' (Continue the story from here).
2. Write your opinion about 'lowering voting age to 18'. Write to convince the audience, supplying the reasons and evidence for your argument, or explicating the background of your opinion.
3. What does 'true education' mean to you? Explain your thoughts explicating it by means of concrete examples.
4. Consider possible causes for 'online game addiction' and suggest solutions.
5. What sort of practical Eco Activities can students do and how should they promote them? Write your opinion and make concrete suggestions.
6. Write a composition using the word 'to make up (one's) mind' somewhere in the prose.
7. Write your thoughts about the expression '*take wo watta yōna seikaku* (having a very frank/straightforward character)'.

8. State whether you agree or disagree with the idea, 'school curriculums should include vocational education', and explain the reason why. Discuss logically and coherently giving concrete examples to support your opinion.
9. Express your response to the following photo. You can choose any viewpoint. (Students wearing helmets doing DIY)

Topic 1: This was an imaginative topic and therefore coherence, creativity, and effective story-telling skills were tested. The story should follow naturally from the lead-in section given in the question itself using the same style and register.

Topic 9 was also a creative writing question, but it used a visual stimulus (a photo). Candidates were expected to describe what they saw in the picture, but also to develop the material by supplying an original story or by discussing issues arising from the photo. Interpretation of the photo was entirely open to the candidates, but connection to the elements in the photo should be clearly maintained at a degree throughout the composition.

For **Topics 2, 4, 5** and **8** candidates were expected to indicate their view first, and then to develop analytical and logical arguments in a consistent manner. This requires an appropriate three-part discourse structure, which consists of Introduction, Content and Conclusion. This year's stronger candidates, demonstrating a high level of language knowledge and use, tended to choose these topics.

Topic 3 was a free essay on a given topic whereby the candidates' creativity and effective use of language to express personal opinions were tested. Successful candidates discussed the concept of 'peace' drawing examples from social affairs or personal experience.

For **Topics 6** and **7** a clear and succinct explanation of an idiom/proverb was required. Examples of successful essays often took the following approach: fixed expressions may be paraphrased in more ordinary language, and a proverb can be explained taking an example from daily-life situations. These should be followed by a discussion about the idiom/proverb in a coherent manner.

Candidates are strongly encouraged to plan the contents and structure of their compositions before they start to write, paying attention to the clarity of storyline, message or argument. Good time management is also essential for a successful outcome.