

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 two 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 particularly well this year and showed excellent levels of accuracy and fluency.

Most candidates attempted to answer every question in both parts of the paper, suggesting that this year's candidates were well prepared for the examination and familiar with the exam format. They were able to allocate time for each section of the paper efficiently.

Approximately half of the candidates successfully summarised all the main points from passages A and B and described the common theme adequately. The best answers also depicted contrasting approaches to the common theme in A and B analytically and succinctly in coherent prose, while weaker responses were characterised by a reliance on lifting small sections directly from the passages without developing them further. On the whole stronger candidates tended to demonstrate mature analytical skills in writing, while weaker candidates were more likely to state their emotional reaction to the given theme without a clear structure. Many excellent responses provided opinions supported by concrete examples and logical arguments. In particular, the highest scoring answers included a clear, succinct balanced summary of the two passages for **Question 1**, and offered interesting and original ideas and suggestions in answering **Question 2**.

Candidates at this level are expected to compose a coherent discourse using longer sentences and structured paragraphs. This year there was a general tendency towards the use of shorter, simple sentence structures with conjunctive expressions only being used occasionally. The work of weaker candidates was characterised by missing particles, unfinished sentences, inconsistent sentence-ending styles, and idiosyncratic syntactic structures. These features are reminiscent of '*manga-language*' culture. Regular exposure to a selection of good literature across genres will help enhance candidates' writing skills and improve these issues.

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 'Links Between Economic Growth and Happiness'.

Question 1 tests skills in selecting, comparing and summarising specific information taken from the two passages (A and B). Candidates are expected to identify the main messages and go on to compare and contrast these in a short essay. Many excellent answers demonstrated a high level of language proficiency and originality. It is important to note that the composition should not be a mere list of the main points, but the main issues must be incorporated into coherent prose. Materials should be developed and expanded through clear logical and coherent discussion.

The strongest answers were clear and well thought-out, showing evidence of pre-writing planning. Such answers managed to compare the views and approaches described in passages A and B objectively and also included a brief introduction and conclusion. 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. In some cases weaker responses showed a heavy reliance on copying sections directly from the passages.

Part 1: Question 2

Question 2 invites candidates' responses to the passages in a variety of forms (e.g. a selective summary, a letter, a report, a speech, a script of a conversation or broadcast, etc.) which changes each year. This question tests the ability to write creatively and communicatively in a given genre. The composition must be relevant to the topic and it should be logically 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 concrete examples to support the argument. This year's candidates produced many positive and original responses and actively engaged with the main topic. They clarified which opinion(s) given in either Passage A or Passage B they agreed with and related their discussion either to their own experience or a relevant situation that they are aware of. Stronger responses argued for or against the need for strengthening an economy in order to gain happiness and provided examples to support their arguments.

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

The majority of candidates produced highly readable, original and competent essays. Stronger candidates with higher linguistic competence tended to choose a topic that required a wider range of vocabulary and clearly defined arguments; weaker candidates more frequently opted for imaginative narratives. Successful responses this year were written by candidates who had chosen a topic complementary to their own linguistic level and personal writing style. Linguistically less skilled candidates tended to use a limited range of vocabulary, but among them some managed to produce interesting pieces of writing with original ideas, using a good discourse structure and a style appropriate to the genre and content.

Candidates who chose a topic that required an analytical or argumentative approach (as in Topics 2, 3, 4, 5, and typically used a wide range of vocabulary and employed complex sentence structures. Many were able to write coherently using a clear three-part (Introduction-Content-Conclusion) frame of discourse structure.

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 and write a Japanese composition of 600–800 words. The following is a list of this year's titles.

1. It's raining today. I'll take my favourite umbrella with me when I go out. People say rain is depressing, but I actually like rainy days... (Continue with the story).

2. Write your thoughts about the ban on mobile phones within school premises. Give reasons and examples to substantiate your argument.
3. What does 'creating the future' mean to you? Explain and provide a concrete example.
4. Consider the cause(s) and possible solutions to the issue of *Middle school and High school pupils' lack of exercise*.
5. What is necessary to promote the 'sustainable development of Japan (or the country of your residence)'. Discuss. Give concrete examples to support your opinion.
6. Write a composition using the Japanese four-character-idiom, 'old-now-east-west (from all ages and cultures)' as appropriate.
7. Write your thoughts using the expression, 'tenacity'.
8. Write whether you agree or disagree with the idea: 'consumers should choose organic food despite its higher prices'. Then express your opinion logically giving concrete examples.
9. Write freely about your response to the photograph below. You can approach it from any aspect. (Photo shows a man holding up an eagle with spread wings).

Topic 1 is a creative topic and therefore coherence, creativity, and effective story-telling skills are being tested. The story should follow naturally from the lead-in section given in the question itself using the same style and register. Candidates who chose this topic generally told a story about his/her own experience and performed satisfactorily. Some opted for a very imaginative story, but could have improved by creating a plot with a more coherent development and a clear ending.

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. This year's photo showed a man holding up an eagle with outstretched wings. The candidates who chose this topic commonly produced a story of the bond between the man and the bird.

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 is 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 "creating a positive future" 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.