

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 in general performed well this year, although levels of accuracy and fluency varied among the scripts.

The majority of candidates completed all the questions and wrote a coherent composition. Differences amongst the written pieces were observed in terms of maturity, originality, and accuracy.

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 equal opportunities in education.

Question 1 tests skills in selecting, comparing and summarising specific information taken from the two passages (A and B). The strongest candidates were able to clearly demonstrate a high level of language proficiency and originality. The expectation is that candidates produce a piece which is not a mere summary of the passages, but rather a developed, logical and coherent discussion on the theme. Candidates should identify the main messages and go on to compare and contrast these in a short essay. In order to stay within the word limit, repetitions and circumlocution should be avoided.

Stronger candidates usually gave a succinct summary of the two passages and then went on to compare their main points. Arguments arose naturally from the two passages, and a clear case was made for the chosen option using excellent grammar and wide vocabulary.

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.

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.

Part 2

Questions 3-22 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

In order to do well on this paper, candidates need to show that they can:

- exercise control of appropriate grammatical structures,
- demonstrate an awareness of the conventions of paragraphing, sentence structure and punctuation,
- understand and employ a range of appropriate vocabulary,
- show a sense of audience and an awareness of register and style in both formal and informal situations.

Candidates must also demonstrate competence in the following four areas of writing skills:

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

Candidate performance was generally very good this year, with the majority of candidates producing competent and original compositions. Candidates who chose a subject suitable to their own linguistic level and personal style of writing tended to be the most successful. Those who read the questions carefully and showed evidence of some planning produced effective essays without repetition or losing focus.

Generally, compositions which displayed a wide range of vocabulary and the use of complex sentence structures characterised stronger candidates. Such candidates were also able to write coherently using 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 (KI-SHO-TEN-KETSU), while maintaining coherence in an authentic Japanese style. Candidates needed to show competence in the following areas of language use: relevance of content to the chosen topic, clarity of argument, coherence, grammatical accuracy, and paragraph links. In addition, a few candidates showed real originality in their writing, and a wide range of *Kanji*.

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 'I am so glad that I came here. There are no smart phones or fashionable shops but I have my own space and I feel at home somehow...' (Continue the story)
- 2 Do you support the system of co-education? Why? Support your argument giving concrete examples.
- 3 Explain the similarities and differences between the two words, 'adult' and 'a member of society'.
- 4 Unbalanced diet – why does it happen? Suggest a solution for this problem.

- 5 Do you think it is possible to nurture a true friendship that overcomes cultural and language barriers?
- 6 Use the following 4-character idiom in your composition: “one day is worth a thousand autumns”
- 7 Write a composition using the following expression: ‘ability/power to live’
- 8 ‘We should construct a society that does not depend on nuclear or fossil fuel.’ Do you agree with this concept? Explain the reasons, giving concrete examples.
- 9 Express your response to the following photo. You can choose any viewpoint.

Topic 1 gives candidates the opportunity to write in the genre of creative / fantasy writing, and therefore, coherence, creativity, and effective story-telling skills are essential. The story must follow naturally from the lead-in section given in the question itself, using the same style and register. Many candidates wrote about ‘ibasho (my place in the world)’ enthusiastically and successfully.

Topic 9 is also a creative writing question, but it uses a visual stimulus (a photo). Candidates are expected to describe what they see in the picture and to develop the material by supplying an original story or by discussing issues arising from the photo. This year’s photo showed a scene at a graduation ceremony where students were taking a group selfie. Many candidates, regardless of their level of linguistic competence, wrote an original story with merit.

For **Topics 2, 4, 5** and **8** candidates are expected to indicate their view first before developing analytical and logical arguments in response to the topic of the question. Register and style must be consistent throughout. A three-part discourse structure is required, which consists of Introduction, Content and Conclusion. Stronger candidates managed to successfully utilise a range of vocabulary and phrases appropriate for an analytical piece.

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 similarities and differences of the concepts of ‘adulthood’ and ‘social responsibility’ drawing on examples from personal experience.

For **Topics 6** and **7** candidates were expected to write an explanation of an idiom/proverb clearly and succinctly. Examples of successful essays often included a paraphrase of the idiom/proverb into a more ordinary language with an example from a daily-life situation, 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.