



# CONTENTS

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<b>FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Paper 0516/02 Reading and Directed Writing.....	2
Paper 0516/03 Continuous Writing .....	3

# FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

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Paper 0516/02  
Reading and Directed Writing

## General comments

Generally speaking, performance was satisfactory, with most candidates gaining marks in the A – C range. Several candidates either left some sections unfinished or failed to answer all three questions due to lack of time, which brought their mark down.

## Comments on specific questions

### *Part 1*

#### **Question 1**

##### *Short summaries/comparison*

Candidates were presented with two passages on the theme of duels. The first passage was from a work of fiction by an early 19-century author and described the life of a young officer in a small military fortress and events leading up to a duel between him and another officer. The second text was an article from a magazine containing a brief history of duels in Russia. While the strongest candidates had no problem in producing a concise and coherent piece of writing in their own words, the weaker candidates showed poor writing skills. Particularly common were the following faults:

- Unfocused narrative, with various points either mentioned at random or described in excessive detail.
- Failure to concentrate on relevant points.
- Frequent copying from the texts.
- Stating the candidate's opinion of the texts or expressing personal reflections on the issue of duels: for example, saying which of the two texts the candidate found more enjoyable to read, considering the moral aspect of duels or offering alternative solutions to the settling of disputes.
- Failure to produce a competent comparison. Many answers gave the impression that the candidates were not sure what exactly their comparison should be based on: some did not go beyond stating that the texts were similar thematically but different in that one was an article from a magazine and another was an extract from a work of fiction. Others concentrated on comparison of factual detail of the content, for instance, similarities and differences between number of characters, the cause and outcome of the duels, and even the number of participants in the duels described in both texts.
- Exceeding the word limit by a considerable margin.
- Ignoring the instructions and producing a summary of only one text, or interpreting too literally the instruction to give a **short** summary and compressing the précis into a couple of sentences. A few candidates wrote answers without mentioning the content of either text.

On the positive side, a significant number of candidates were able to produce clear and focused answers containing perceptive comparisons based on careful examination of style and composition, and the majority of candidates demonstrated a good grasp of stylistically appropriate idiom and grammar.

**Question 2**

*Conversation between the commandant of the fortress and the duellists*

Overall, this part of the paper elicited the best performance. Almost all candidates showed good comprehension of the text, and were able to manipulate the syntactic and stylistic structures of the language in order to produce a convincing piece of writing. At the top end of the scale the answers were distinguished by exceptional ingenuity and stylistic flair, but there were a few weak answers consisting of sentences copied from the text and slightly paraphrased. Several candidates misinterpreted the instructions and wrote a dialogue between the participants in the duel or introduced superfluous characters.

**Part 2****Question 3**

*Talk by a psychologist on the correct use of computers*

This part of the paper turned out to be the most challenging, with many candidates seemingly unable to see the point of the exercise. The best candidates responded to the task well and demonstrated thoughtful and imaginative treatment of the stimulus article and effective and stylistically appropriate use of syntactic structures and vocabulary. Weaker answers, while competent overall, suffered from lack of development and tended to repeat the main points of the text rather than use them as a base to build upon. A small but significant number of candidates failed to develop the content or adapt the style of the stimulus article and simply copied substantial segments from the text.

**Paper 0516/03**

**Continuous Writing**

**General comments**

The overall standard was satisfactory. There were comparatively few outstanding performances, but no really bad ones either. Many candidates displayed a good grasp of idiom and grammar and were able to put together a competent piece of writing.

Most popular were **Question 1** (*What does contemporary youth feel concerned about?*), **Question 2** (*Positive and negative aspects of television*), **Question 4** (*The most important event in my life*), **Question 6** (*The role of sport in the modern world*) and **Question 8** (*continuation of a story*). The essays in the top range contained well-developed, relevant, and appropriately illustrated arguments, and showed impressive ability to manipulate the structures of the language, with only the occasional minor error of grammar or use of vocabulary. In story writing, the best answers were distinguished by skilful handling of narrative, effective employment of descriptive devices, and stylistic flair. Amongst weaker answers the following flaws occurred most frequently:

- *Failure to address the title adequately*: going beyond specific examples to generate the broader argument or to discuss the broader implications; writing something only vaguely related to a question; in story writing, tacking on pre-prepared narrative – often a plot of a well-known film – to the first sentence.
- *Inadequate structure*: absence of an introduction and/or conclusion; unfocused ideas and arguments put together at random.
- *Style*: limited range of vocabulary, simple syntactic structures, lack of sensitivity to register (i.e. use of informal idiom or slang), awkward syntax.
- *Grammar and syntax*: basic errors, including wrong prepositions and cases; incorrect use of indefinite pronouns; incorrect use of the gerund; incorrect use of verbal tense; wrong conjunctions in the subordinate clauses; incorrectly constructed complex and compound sentences.

- *Punctuation:* absence of commas in complex and compound sentences, in sentences with relative clauses and participle constructions, in sentences with parenthetical words; lack of familiarity with the use of the colon, semicolon and hyphen.
- *Spelling:* a fair number of spelling errors, some of which were careless slips that could have been eliminated by a careful final checking of the script. It is important that candidates leave enough time for this.

However, it should be noted that grammatical accuracy punctuation and spelling were largely adequate, and often presented less of a problem than command of idiom or content.

Unfortunately, a small but significant number of candidates produced work that was clearly derived from practice answers to questions from past papers. Candidates should be advised that those who merely reproduce "prepared" essays, irrespective of the question or context, will lose out on marks.