

FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/01

Reading

General comments

Generally speaking, performance was good this year. Most candidates responded with interest to the material presented in the reading passages. All questions were understood clearly by the majority of candidates. Presentation was generally of a satisfactory to good standard, but the handwriting of some candidates proved very difficult to read, which meant Examiners had to guess the meaning. Centres are advised to remind candidates about the importance of legibility of clear presentation. A very small number of candidates failed to answer all questions due to lack of time, which affected their overall result for the paper.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) The question asked in what season this story took place. Candidates of all abilities performed well, and this was the best-answered question of the paper.
- (b) Here, candidates were asked how the old man explained his appearance in the garden. Nearly all candidates answered correctly. There were some, however, who failed to score the mark because they gave an explanation which was not based on the text and, therefore, incorrect.
- (c) This question asked what Mertsalov told the old man. The overwhelming majority of candidates correctly answered that Mertsalov told about his troubles: that he was ill, that he had lost his job and that his child had died. Only a few candidates answered in general that Mertsalov told about his life.
- (d) For this question, candidates needed to explain how Mertsalov knew the surname of the doctor, which was from the label attached on the phial of medicine. Nearly all candidates correctly answered this question.
- (e) This question required candidates to explain that the deep tranquillity and silence that descended upon Mertsalov in the garden induced his desire to achieve the same tranquillity and peace through ending his life. A right answer was worth three marks, and it was important for candidates to indicate a clear understanding not only of what thoughts came to Mertsalov, but also why these thoughts occurred to him. Most candidates scored one or two marks, but only a small number produced a clear explanation and gained the maximum of three marks.
- (f) Here candidates were required to explain if the stranger sat on a bench close to Mertsalov by chance or for a reason. The narrator made it clear that it did not happen by chance. A large number of candidates realised this. The more successful candidates explained that the doctor looked at Mertsalov and understood his condition, being an experienced and thoughtful specialist who 'carefully observed his neighbour'.
- (g) This question asked why the words of the old man caused such a strong reaction. Nearly all candidates clearly explained that this happened because the stranger bought gifts for the children he knew, while Mertsalov did not have money for gifts or even for food. Those who failed to score full marks on this question tended either to give their own explanation or describe only one reason.

- (h) This question, worth four marks, required writing in own words how the wonderful Mertsalov. Answers at the top end of the scale were distinguished by thoughtful treatment of the text. On the other end of the scale answers consisted of sentences copied from the text or only slightly paraphrased, and this is why they did not receive the highest mark. A very small number of candidates did not complete this task; however, most candidates performed successfully and achieved three or four marks.
- (i) This question was more difficult for candidates. Most candidates tried, with varying degrees of success, to give their own explanation (sometimes mystical). Only very few candidates explained successfully that the quiet and calm of the garden induced Mertsalov to find eternal rest, while the same garden aroused the admiration of doctor Pirogov.
- (j) Writing the summary of how the writer characterised the old man was generally done well. Most answers scored full marks. Candidates were required to describe any two details from the following:
- The old man was not very tall, with a soft voice and a clever, serious face;
 - He instilled confidence in others;
 - He was professional;
 - He could bend others to his will;
 - He was gentle and modest;
 - He made the right decisions and made them quickly;
 - He was helpful;
 - He gave hope to others.

Question 2

The task was to compare succinctly the characters and actions of two doctors from two stories.

This is the most challenging part of the paper for most candidates as it requires more active and independent thinking than **Question 1**. Fifteen points were required for full marks. While there were some excellent summaries that scored full marks, some candidates gave evidence that their ability in and knowledge of writing summaries was limited.

Common faults were:

- Frequent, indiscriminate copying from the texts.
- Writing extended introductions and conclusions.
- Writing a commentary, an opinion or expressing personal reflection on the issue at hand, for example, saying which of the two texts the candidate found more enjoyable to read, or speculating on what one of the doctors would do in the situation of the other. The answer should have consisted only of relevant facts.
- Writing long explanations. For example, focussing on a passage from the second story about the historic time and the Russian Revolution and/or about the profession of doctors in general, where it was only necessary to say that Pirogov lived in peaceful times but doctor Yashvin in the time of Civil War.
- Using over-long or irrelevant quotations.

Even some of the best candidates, who managed to produce an effective summary of both texts, overlooked some relevant points. On the positive side, a significant number of candidates were able to produce clear and focused answers containing comparisons based on careful examination of both passages.

FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/02

Writing

General comments

The paper was completed by all candidates, and the overall standard was satisfactory. There were some outstanding performances, and many candidates were able to produce two coherent pieces of writing, displaying a competent grasp of idiom and grammar.

All questions were attempted, and all were equally popular.

Section 1: Discussion and Argument.

The essays in the top range contained well-developed, relevant, sophisticated and appropriately illustrated argument. The weaker answers shared the following faults:

1. **Failure to address the title adequately:** the inability to go beyond specific examples and generate a broader argument or to discuss the broader implications; writing something only vaguely related to the question.
2. **Inadequate structure:** absence of introduction and/or conclusion; unfocused or randomly put-together ideas and discussion; irrelevant or repetitive ideas.
3. **Style:** limited range of vocabulary; reliance on simple syntactic structures; overlong complex and compound sentences; lack of sensitivity to register (e.g. inappropriate use of informal idiom or slang); awkward syntax and foreign-sounding forms of expression.

Section 2: Description and Narrative

The best descriptive essays presented relevant ideas and images, generating imaginative and evocative descriptions with a range of vivid details. In story writing, the best answers were distinguished by skillful development of narrative, effective use of descriptive devices and stylistic flair. The weaker answers displayed the following faults:

1. **Failure to address the title adequately:** content only loosely related to the question (for example, writing about a real city when asked to describe an imaginary one); in descriptive essays, failure to follow the instructions to write a beginning of a story and writing a narrative with a beginning, middle and end instead (**Question (c)** elicited several answers containing an unconvincing plot lacking in any descriptive detail); failure to follow instructions to write a **пакказ**, i.e. a **fictional** story (**Question (d)** where a large number of candidates produced scripts describing series of events with only occasional details of character and setting).
2. **Inadequate structure:** in descriptive tasks, focus on events and sequence of events rather than images and atmosphere, lack of balance between different sections, repetitive use of images, lack of effective descriptive detail. In story-writing, poor development of narrative, with sections too long or too short; a climax not effectively described or led up to, or lacking altogether; poor use of descriptive devices such as describing or commenting on different qualities of fictional characters or inviting readers to infer qualities from characters' speech or appearance).
3. **Style:** limited range of vocabulary, reliance on simple syntactic structures, poor use of epithets and figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole and other tropes designed to create certain moods; awkward syntax and foreign-sounding forms of expression.

In addition to the above, most essays shared, to a greater or lesser extent, the following shortcomings:

1. **Morphology and syntax:** basic errors, including wrong prepositions and cases; incorrect use of indefinite pronouns with particles **-то** and **-нибудь**; incorrect use of the gerund; incorrect use of verbal tenses; incorrectly constructed complex and compound sentences.
2. **Punctuation:** absence of commas in complex and compound sentences, in sentences with gerund and participle constructions, in sentences with parenthetical words; lack of familiarity with usage of question mark, colon, semicolon and hyphen.
3. **Spelling:** a sprinkling 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 time for this.

However, it should be noted that grammatical accuracy, punctuation and spelling were overall satisfactory, and often presented less of a problem than command of complex syntactic structures and idiom or quality of ideas.

Disappointingly, a number of candidates produced work that was clearly derived from practiced answers to questions from past papers. Candidates should be advised that those who merely reproduce "prepared" essays, irrespective of the question or context, will be awarded very low marks, if at all.