

# FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/01

Reading

## General comments

On the whole, candidates responded well to the question paper and showed interest in the situation presented in the reading passage. All questions have been understood clearly by the majority of candidates and nearly all candidates attempted all questions on the paper except in a few instances when questions were inadvertently missed out. Presentation was generally of a satisfactory to good standard, but the handwriting of some candidates proved very difficult to read. Centres are advised to warn their candidates about the importance of legibility and clear expression in their scripts. A very small number of candidates had written very short answers due to lack of time or skill, which affected their overall result for the paper.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

- (a) Here the question asked was 'Who is Almazov?' and this was one of the four, best-answered questions of the paper. Most candidates performed well on the question and gave the correct answer: '*Almazov was a young, not rich officer.*'
- (b) Candidates were asked where Almazov studied. All candidates answered correctly that he studies in the Academy of General Headquarters.
- (c) The question asked was 'Who is Vera?' All candidates answered correctly that Vera was the wife of Almazov.
- (d) For this question, candidates needed to answer what practical work Almazov had to do. All candidates correctly answered that he could draw the plan of the place.
- (e) This question required candidates to say what role Vera plays in Almazov's studying. Nearly all candidates answered correctly that she gave her husband moral support: she herself never loses heart; she tries to inspire him to believe in success; she gives up her comfort and needs for the sake of her husband; she replaces the secretary and gives him practical help.
- (f) Here candidates were required to explain why Almazov answers Vera's question so irritably. All candidates answered correctly that Almazov thinks he failed the exam. But this is only one part of the answer, and therefore gains only one mark. The full answer is that he was angry because he had worked so hard and now must go back to the regiment.
- (g) This question, worth two marks, required candidates to write in their own words how the practical work was finished (about 20 words). Most of the candidates gave the right description that Almazov and the professor came to that place; the professor saw the bush, was surprised and apologized to Almazov for his mistake. Some answers consisted of sentences copied from the text that were only slightly paraphrased, and thus they could not receive full marks for this question. However most candidates performed successfully and achieved two marks.
- (h) This question proved to be a bit more difficult for candidates. The question asked why Almazov changed his opinion about the professor so sharply. Nearly all candidates clearly explained that this happened because he was upset. Those who failed to score full marks on this question tended either to give their own explanation or describe only one reason. The right answer was worth three marks, and it was important for candidates to indicate a clear understanding not only of what happened, but also why this happened. Most candidates scored one or two marks, but there were a number who produced a clear explanation and gained the maximum of three marks.

- (i) This question was worth four marks and required Candidates to write the words which were used to convey the mood of Almazov in the first part of the story and explain what effect was gained by using them. Answers at the top end of the scale were distinguished by their detailed treatment of the text and thus scored full marks. Only a few candidates did not complete this task. The author gives the portrait of a desperate man; his movements are sharp; his words are rude; his speech is abrupt and full of bitterness and anger; he is annoyed with himself and with the world. Writing the summary of how the writer describes the mood of the man was generally done well. Candidates were required to describe any four details from the following:

- насупившееся лицо
- сдвинутые брови
- нервно закушенная губа
- злобно хрустнул пальцами
- заговорил горячо и раздраженно
- дрянь
- все к черту пошло
- злобно
- с озлоблением
- Видно было, что (ему) хочется заплакать

- (j) For this question, candidates needed to explain in their own words what, certain phrases meant in the in the context of the excerpt.

(i) Most candidates completed the task and performed well on this question.

(ii) This question was more difficult for candidates. All candidates explained that «бесчувственный сухарь» means cold person, who is not able to sympathize with others. Only very few candidates explained successfully that «педант» means a quibbling, fault-finding person, who pays unnecessary attention to trifles; a man, who is excessively severe in making formal demands.

## Question 2

- (a) Explain in detail which circumstances forced the characters in both stories to resort to lies (125-150 word, 10 marks)

The best answers contained introspective and incisive analysis of the texts whereas answers at the other end of the scale consisted mostly of sentences copied from the texts that were only slightly paraphrased. Some candidates wrote irrelevant commentary, opinion or personal reflections on the issue but most candidates performed successfully and achieved the full marks on this question.

- (b) Compare the attitude to lies of Almazov and Vera from the first story to that of the boy and his father from the second story (75-100 words, 5 marks).

Candidates found this question more challenging than the previous one. Sometimes candidates wrote essays about general issues such as fear and lies, lies and punishment, lies and future life etc. - but this was beyond the demands of the questions which only asked to compare the attitude of Almazov and Vera, the boy and his father to lies. Few candidates meditated on the reasons behind the lies in the texts and whether it turned out to be profitable for the characters or not. 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.

**Question 2** turned out to be the most challenging part of the paper for most candidates. While there were some excellent summaries that scored full marks, some candidates gave evidence that their skill in writing summaries was fairly limited.

Common faults were:

- Frequent copying from the texts.
- Writing extended introductions and conclusions. Ideally candidates should start with the point of the question and answer to the question itself.
- Writing a commentary, personal opinion or personal reflections on the issue. This paper calls for writing to inform, not writing to comment. The answer should consist only of relevant facts.
- Writing more than 250 words or less than 200 words. Candidates were not penalised for this but too long an answer does not leave time for candidates to check their work; too short answer does not give the possibility to answer the question fully.
- This is a First Language examination and candidates are expected both to understand what they read and to express themselves. Some candidates clearly had difficulties with spelling (even confused English and Russian letters) and grammar and this affected their marks.

# FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/02

Writing

## General comments

Generally speaking, performance was good this year, with only a very small number of candidates showing poor writing skills. Most candidates responded with interest to the tasks and their presentation was of a satisfactory to good standard. However, poor handwriting sometimes made examining very difficult. Centres are advised to warn their candidates about the importance of legibility and clear expression in their scripts. A few candidates had written very short essays due to lack of time or skill, which affected their overall result for the paper.

All the questions in the question paper were attempted. The most popular questions were **Question 1(d)** ('Computer hackers became more popular amongst young people). Explain your reaction to this phenomenon') and 2(a) ('Have you ever been by the sea during a storm? Describe this. What feelings does a stormy sea call up in people?'). There were some outstanding performances, producing coherent pieces of writing with well-linked and well-developed ideas. The essays in the top range were sophisticated, with content, structure, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy and style sustained at the highest level.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1: Discussion and Argument**

The best responses showed consistently well-developed, logical arguments. Complex arguments were clear and appropriately illustrated, each point being relevant, straightforward, logical and coherent. Each stage was linked to and followed the preceding one with sentences within the paragraphs soundly sequenced.

The problems with the essays that were not in the top range were as follows:

- **Failure to address the title adequately:** making statements without elaborating on them or giving an illustration; giving only one or a few arguments; failure to address the complexity of the question; lack of logic; writing something not related to the question (e.g. anecdotes or jokes).
- **Inadequate structure:** little material, presented in a disorderly fashion; illogical sequence of ideas; absence of introduction and/or conclusion; ideas unfocused or randomly put together; poor sentence structure; intrusive or repetitive ideas.
- **Style:** poor control of language; errors of punctuation, grammar and spelling; limited range of vocabulary; only simple syntactical structures; frequent use of colloquialisms, informal idioms or slang (for example, 'клево, чувак, бугай, куча людей, по чуть-чуть, ваще, ихний, очухавшись, чисто безразлично', etc.); awkward syntax and the use of English letters instead of Russian ones.

### **Section 2: Description and Narrative**

The best descriptive essays presented by the candidates contained well defined, well developed ideas and images with a range of details. The best narrative essays were complex and sophisticated and on occasion contained stylistic devices such as sub-texts, flashbacks, time-lapses, etc.

The weaker answers displayed the following problems:

- **Failure to address the title adequately:** content not related to the question (for example, in **Question 2(a)** some candidates told stories about their own travelling on a ship and only a few words about a storm on the sea itself and the feelings of people during the storm); question misinterpreted (e.g. in **Question 2(c)** some candidates described their own birthday party and all the

presents they had received; failure to follow instructions (e.g. **Question 2(d)** set a task to write the beginning of a fantasy was disregarded and instead a narrative was written with a beginning, middle, and end).

- **Inadequate structure:** in descriptive tasks, the overall picture unclear and lacking development and direction; details frequently missed; focus on events and sequence of events rather than images and atmosphere; repetition and muddled order; in narrative tasks disproportionate sectioning of the story (sometimes with is no real climax); dialogues without function; overuse of dialogue; poor use of descriptive devices such as describing or commenting on different qualities of fictional characters; irrelevant paragraphs.
- **Style:** poor control of language; errors of punctuation, grammar and spelling; limited vocabulary; basic syntactical structures; poor use of epithets and figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole and other tropes designed to create a certain mood; frequent use of colloquialisms, informal idioms or slang.

In addition to the above, candidates must try to avoid the following common mistakes:

- **Morphology and syntax:** wrong preposition and case; incorrect use of pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs; incorrect use of verbal tenses and aspects; incorrectly constructed complex and compound sentences
- **Punctuation:** absence of commas in complex and compound sentences, in sentences with gerund and participle constructions and in sentences with parenthetical words; incorrect usage of punctuation marks (question mark, colon, semicolon, hyphen) - especially in dialogues.
- **Spelling:** incorrect spelling of common words such as 'Россия, родственник, молодежь, население, облако, энциклопедия, парадокс, эстафета, передавать, помочь, беречь, ходить, увидеть, выйти, будущий, налево, справа, удивительно, большинство' etc.; using English letters instead of Russian; a variety of spelling errors, some of which were slips that could have been eliminated by a careful, final checking of the script.

On the positive side, a significant number of candidates were able to produce coherent pieces of writing, demonstrated skilful handling of the narrative and effective use of descriptive devices and stylistic awareness.