

# FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/01  
Reading

## General comments

Generally speaking, performance was strong this year. Most candidates responded with interest to the reading passage, especially in their responses to Question 2. All questions were understood clearly by the majority of candidates and their answers showed a good understanding of the main issues. Nearly all candidates attempted all questions 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, with the result that the Examiner had to guess the meaning. 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 overly short answers due to lack of time or skill, which affected their overall result for the paper. The marks of a very few candidates were affected by writing over-long essays, which often meant that they failed to group their ideas and to focus on the main issue.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

- (a) This question asked 'What does Ershakov trade in?' Candidates generally performed well on the question, which was one of the four best-answered questions of the paper. Ershakov trades in tea.
- (b) The question asked 'What is Geine's occupation?' Candidates generally performed well on this question. The answer was that he writes advertisements.
- (c) Here candidates were asked what order he had fulfilled. The answer was that he had written the advertisement for tea. Again, candidates generally performed well here.
- (d) For this question, candidates needed to answer what Ershakov had offered him for his work. The majority of candidates correctly answered that he had offered him sugar and tea.
- (e) This question required candidates to explain in their own words what Ershakov wants. Most candidates answered correctly that he wants to sell long-unused goods, but for the price of fresh ones; besides that, he wants the consumers to think that they receive fresh goods with a discount. That means that he wants to deceive the customers. Some answers, however, did not achieve the highest marks due to copying part of the text.
- (f) Here candidates were required to explain how the writer offers to satisfy the wish of Ershakov. There are two parts to this answer: he offers to give the customers contradictory information; he wants to deceive them.
- (g) This question, worth three marks, required writing briefly and in candidates' own words what the advertisement suggests and what is the aim of the suggestions. The strongest candidates gave the correct description that they offer different sorts of tea with delivery by post; also the chance to receive one of the five additional items free, if they buy for a sufficiently high price. Some answers consisted of sentences copied from the text that were only slightly paraphrased, which did not achieve the highest mark. Most candidates performed successfully and achieved three marks.

- (h) This question 'Write what the portraits of the characters of the story (their appearance and speech) tell us about their personalities' was challenging for some candidates.
- (i) Some candidates answered that Ershakov is an educated European merchant. However, the message of the text is that he thinks that he is educated, cultured, but he is not; his lifestyle is unhealthy and immoral; he talks scornfully to people of lower social status; he is greedy, ready to deceive, also he knows that the deception is a bad thing. The correct answer was worth three marks.
- (ii) Some candidates answered that the writer was a proud man who does not deceive the customers; some thought, that he is a positive character, in contrast to Ershakov. The best candidates gave the full answer, that the writer is a poor, old, ill man, perhaps a drunk; he has some education; he talks ingratiatingly to those of higher status; he patiently endures coarseness and humiliation; he suffers remorse due to the necessity to deceive the others.
- (i) For this question, candidates needed to explain in their own words what, in this context, the following phrases mean. Most of the candidates responded correctly.
- (i) Even a great writer like Shakespeare would find it difficult to write so many advertisements at once.
- (ii) Ershakov usually pays in kind, that is to say, with the food which he sells.
- (iii) A very easy job, which anybody could do.

## Question 2

- (a) Here candidates were required to state the criteria of successful advertisements given in the second text. (100-125 words). Strong responses were distinguished by thoughtful treatment of the text. Weaker answers consisted of sentences copied from the text that were only slightly paraphrased. Some candidates wrote commentary, an opinion or personal reflections on the issue, while others, who managed to produce an effective summary of both texts, overlooked some relevant points. The answer should have consisted only of relevant facts. That said, many candidates performed successfully and achieved the highest marks.

The criteria for successful advertising presented in the second text are as follows:

- To present an advertisement through mass media;
  - To keep in mind psychology;
  - To attract attention;
  - To create bright images;
  - To keep attention;
  - To awaken an interest, having an effect upon the intellect and the emotions;
  - To excite the wish to buy the goods;
  - To justify the buying.
- (b) For this question, candidates should compare the elements of the successful advertisement from both the texts (100-125 words). This question proved more challenging for candidates. Sometimes candidates wrote very good essays about common subjects, e.g. the history of advertising, giving many examples from mass media and the candidate's own experience, but this was not what the question required. On the positive side, a significant number of candidates were able to produce clear and focused responses based on careful examination of both passages.

The elements of the successful advertising used in the first text are the following:

- Use of ornaments and coats of arms;
- Written in a bombastic style;
- Referring to important current affairs;
- Hinting at the good reputation of the firm;
- Using slogans;
- Offering a wide choice of tea;
- Describing the freshness and quality of the different kinds of tea;
- Promising free goods;
- Criticizing the competitors.

Question 2 proved to be the most challenging part of the paper for most candidates. While there were excellent summaries that scored full marks, some candidates gave evidence that their knowledge of the text in their summaries was limited.

Common faults were:

- Frequent copying from the texts.
- Writing extended introductions and conclusions. Ideally the candidate should start with the precise answer to the question itself.
- Writing a commentary, an opinion or expressing personal reflections on the issue. This is writing to inform, not writing to comment. The answer should have consisted only of relevant facts.
- Writing long explanations.
- Writing more than 250 words or less than 200 words. Candidates were not penalised for this but too long an answer did not give time to candidates to check their work, along with giving more scope for irrelevance; too short an answer did 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 well. Some candidates clearly had difficulties with grammar and spelling (even confusing English and Russian letters) which affected their marks.

# FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/02

Writing

## General comments

The overall standard of response was good. There were some outstanding performances, and many candidates were able to produce two coherent pieces of writing displaying a competent grasp of idioms and grammar.

Standards of grammatical accuracy varied widely. A very small number of candidates showed poor writing skills and the handwriting of some candidates proved very difficult to read, with the result that the Examiner had to guess the meaning. 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. The marks of a few candidates were adversely affected by writing an over-long essay, as this often meant that the work lacked a conclusion or satisfactory organisation and development.

Surprisingly, few candidates wrote a plan for their answer. Where candidates wrote a plan, their answer was usually well structured and balanced. Planned answers tended to avoid repetition and to include a strong conclusion, in addition to being more likely to observe the word limit.

Most candidates responded with interest to the tasks. All questions were attempted. The most popular questions were **Question 1(a)** ('Life is unthinkable without new technologies. Life is dull and boring without art. Discuss this topic') and **2(a)** ('Have you ever been travelling through a forest or the countryside during a thunderstorm? Describe this. What feelings did you experience before the first peal of thunder, while the storm was gathering strength and immediately after it ended?')

## Comments on specific questions

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

The best essays presented by the candidates contained a consistent quality of well-developed, logical statements. Their complex arguments were clear, sophisticated, 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:** The inability to argue; 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 (for example, in **Question 1(d)** 'The Olympic games and sport itself are now mostly a question of money', candidates described only the Olympic games or their favourite sport); lack of logic; writing something not related to the question (for example, in response to **Question 1(b)**, describing life in a new boarding school abroad or discussing the failings of the education system in the UK or in Russia instead of explaining whether the schools prepare or do not prepare students for life in modern society).
- **Inadequate structure:** Little material, and presented in a disorderly structure; absence of introduction and/or conclusion; unfocused or randomly put together ideas and discussions; sequence of sentences is poor; intrusive or repetitive ideas.
- **Style:** Poor control of language; errors of punctuation, grammar and spelling; limited range of vocabulary; only basic syntactical structures; frequent use of colloquialisms, informal idioms or slang; awkward syntax and using English letters instead of Russian.

## Section 2: Description and Narrative

The descriptive essays in the top of the range contained well-defined, well-developed ideas and describing complex atmospheres with a range of details. The best narrative essays were complete, sophisticated and might contain devices such as sub-texts, flashbacks and time-lapses.

Weaker answers displayed the following characteristics:

- **Failure to address the title adequately:** Content is not related to the question (for example, in **Question 2(a)** some candidates told stories about a thunderstorm, downpour, holiday, walk in the forest, but not about the feeling of the people before, during and after the thunderstorm); some candidates incorrectly understood the title of the question (for example, in **Question 2(d)** 'Unbelievable stories: A hundred hours between life and death' some candidates wrote a story without something unbelievable.)
- **Inadequate structure:** In descriptive tasks the overall picture is unclear and lacks development, direction and aim; details are frequently omitted; writing focuses on events and sequence of events rather than images and atmosphere; there is repetition and muddled ordering; in narrative tasks there are unequal or inappropriate sections of the story; there is no real climax; sentence sequences are used only to link simple series of events; poor use of descriptive devices such as describing or commenting on different qualities of fictional characters; some of the paragraphs have no relevance to the plot.
- **Style:** Poor control of language; errors of punctuation, grammar and spelling; limited vocabulary; only 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 pay attention to the following points:

- **Morphology and syntax:** wrong prepositions and cases; incorrect use of pronouns, adjectives, 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; lack of familiarity with usage of question mark, colon, semicolon, hyphen.
- **Spelling:** Incorrect spelling of common words; use of English letters instead of Russian.

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