

# FRENCH

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Paper 3015/01

Translation and Composition

## General comments

Overall the Examiners were impressed by much of the work that they saw and there were a number of superb performances right at the top of the range. Only a relatively small number had clearly been inappropriately entered for the Examination. There were some excellent answers to the essay questions which used a wide range of lexis and syntax though inaccuracy and phonetic spelling bedevilled much of the writing. A broad and fluent command of the material is highly commendable and will be well rewarded, but candidates must remember that accuracy in writing is essential for full credit to be given. The translation into French was a very popular choice and many candidates are to be congratulated on the high standard they achieved in this question; they had clearly worked hard to learn a good range of vocabulary and grammatical structures and there were many very good marks indeed which frequently mirrored, or in some cases exceeded, the marks gained for the essay. Set against this was the fact that, sadly, many candidates wasted marks through sheer carelessness and an apparent unwillingness to read the English carefully and translate exactly what is there. A small number found the demands of this question beyond them and scored poorly.

As usual, it was clear that candidates had been well prepared for this Examination, but each year many still prejudice their chances of success by ignoring the clearly stated instructions. For each essay question, candidates are instructed quite specifically and unambiguously that they must not write more than 150 words. Large numbers of candidates persist in ignoring this instruction and often exceed this number by an enormous margin – 300-plus words were common. It is emphasised that the rubric is unequivocal and that candidates writing any amount in excess of 150 words are simply wasting their time. Nothing whatsoever is taken into account after the 150 word limit for either Language or Communication - no tolerance at all is applied. Thus, those writing at great length will certainly be penalised by losing Communication marks - indeed all 5 marks can easily be lost with very long essays which do not begin to address the required points within the first 150 words. Furthermore, by writing at excessive length, candidates clearly will not have the time to check their work as carefully as they should in order to minimise the incidence of error.

A second continuing point of concern is that some candidates insist on ignoring the rubric by answering *three* questions instead of the *two* that are required. No advantage will be gained by doing this; indeed, candidates answering three questions are likely to find themselves rushing their work.

Thus, Centres are strongly urged to remind their candidates that the instructions in the question paper mean exactly what they say and that marks are likely to be affected where these instructions are ignored.

The vast majority of scripts were well and neatly presented and this was, as always, much appreciated by the Examiners. However, a number of cases of poor presentation with messy and unclear handwriting were noted. Candidates should be reminded, particularly if they make alterations to their script, that, while Examiners will always try to be tolerant, illegibility and ambiguous writing are never credited.

**Communication Marks (Questions 1 and 2 only):** Each essay has a maximum score of 5 available for successful communication of relevant points in unambiguous, but not necessarily completely accurate French. It should be noted that, while Examiners show considerable tolerance of faulty spelling and grammatical inaccuracy when awarding Communication marks, a mark will not be given for a phrase containing a verb form which is so inaccurate that the meaning becomes unclear. Poor handling of verbs was by far the most significant factor preventing the award of Communication marks. Lengthy essays will almost invariably be penalised as they are likely to fail to cover one or more of the later points or pictures.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1: Picture Story

Of the essays this was by far the most popular choice. The story appeared to be clear and there were very few cases of confused narrative. It was intended that the story would start at the arrival at the safari park where the family were welcomed by an official. The main thrust of the story whereby unwise behaviour on the part of the boy caused the monkeys to react and steal his cap which then had to be replaced by his parents in order to console him was generally clearly understood and related. Through writing at excessive length, many candidates did not get as far as the final picture before running out of words (indeed, in extreme cases, they had barely covered half of the pictures by this point, thus squandering between 2 and 3 Communication points). This was often the result of starting the story with a lengthy introduction describing events preceding the first picture. Such an approach is pointless as no Communication marks will be awarded for ideas not suggested directly by the pictures and there will always be plenty of material germane to the pictures enabling candidates easily to write the necessary 150 words.

The conventional third person narrative approach was, of course, frequently adopted, but many chose to write in the first person, as any member of the family, and this caused no problems.

The narrative was frequently competently executed and many candidates showed confident handling of the necessary vocabulary as well as a variety of appropriate structures. Most candidates (but by no means all) knew common words such as *parc (d'animaux)*, *s'arrêter*, *entrée*, *saluer*, *regarder*, *indiquer/montrer*, *sauter*, *toit*, *voler/prendre*, *pleurer*, *sortie*, *acheter*. Surprisingly, *chapeau/casquette* was not always known and, in spite of having been given a clear indication via the signboard of the French for 'monkey', several candidates were unable to use it. Those who wrote *signe* instead of *singe* elicited little sympathy. It should be noted that a good range of vocabulary will always score highly as will complex syntax – use of infinitive constructions and present and past participles, for example. Not all candidates managed tense usage successfully and there was frequent confusion between the Imperfect and the Perfect/Past Historic. The Pluperfect was not really needed in this particular story but, where candidates chose to attempt it, this tense was not always handled correctly. Minor common errors were confusion between *car*, *comme* and *quand*; between *se* and *ce* and between *ses* and *ces*.

### Question 2

#### (a) Letter

This was a fairly popular choice. The defined situation seemed to be clear to most candidates but some took *un article* to mean a newspaper article which then created a confused scenario. Candidates are reminded that all **Question 2** essay questions now start with a given opening phrase which should be copied before continuing in the candidate's own words. Those who ignore the lead-in and start with their own, often lengthy, introduction risk losing Communication marks. Any item that could conceivably have been bought in a store was accepted, as was any likely fault or problem. Common, of course, were electric and electronic devices (usually turning out to be non-functioning) and clothing (generally found to have a tear or stain). A reference to the lack of cooperation on the part of the salesperson was then required, followed by the candidate's (presumably negative) reaction and a demand for some appropriate action (e.g. apology plus refund or exchange for a new item).

Many candidates fulfilled these tasks successfully and within the word limit. As with any essay, they should always be aware of their own linguistic limitations and should not attempt structures and vocabulary with which they are not familiar. It is foolish, when a wide choice of vocabulary is available (for the item purchased), deliberately to opt for an unusual word which then turns out not to be correct. Candidates should also ensure that they do not invent grammatical structures – phrases such as 'I would like you to replace this article' are difficult unless the particular structure is known. There is invariably a simpler way of doing it – e.g. 'Please replace this article for me'.

Candidates who started with the given opening followed immediately by relevant treatment of the rubric points usually covered the material satisfactorily. The best candidates were able to express their ideas in a range of appropriate and accurate French which gained high marks for Language. Competence in handling different tenses is clearly vital here if a high score is to be gained and this was not always evident. Many candidates seem to have little appreciation of the difference between the Perfect and Imperfect tenses. It should also be noted that the Past Historic is not

accepted in a letter. Correct handling of a multiplicity of other linguistic aspects is equally important as marks for Language are only awarded for accurate usage and not for “near-misses”.

**(b) Dialogue**

This was the least popular of the three options but the subject clearly did appeal to a number of candidates some of whom wrote witty and cogent dialogues in which the errant son or daughter frequently put up a spirited defence to the parental accusations of irresponsibility and absent-mindedness and produced persuasive arguments in favour of being granted a further pocket money advance! Solemn promises to be more careful in future with their money generally preceded softening of the parental hard line and an agreement to advance further funds.

It should be noted that only the actual words of the conversation should be written (with an indication, of course, of which person is speaking). Any kind of narrative interjections or description via reported speech is contrary to the rubric and will be ignored in the marking.

**(c) Narrative**

This was the preferred option for those offering a **Question 2** essay. As a result of being given the opening words, there were fewer irrelevant preambles than previously before the account of the mountain hike started, but some candidates were still apparently unable to resist the temptation to drag in a lengthy account of pre-departure preparations with the inevitable result that they ran out of words well before completing the Communication tasks and thus lost marks.

Candidates were required to refer to any aspect of the walk (scenery, animals seen, food on the way, their feelings and reactions to what was around them, etc.), to the worsening of the weather and the decision they took as a consequence. Some reference to the night was needed (how they sheltered, what they did/heard/saw, what their feelings were, etc.), to be followed by the conclusion to the account which was invariably, for those who still had words available, their safe return home.

There were some enjoyable and graphic accounts of this incident, with few misunderstandings of the points required but, as implied above, excessive length in the treatment of the earlier points often involved the loss of the later Communication points and it was not uncommon to find the word limit had been reached even before the deterioration in the weather let alone the arrangements for the night.

The best stories were lively and fluently written, using a range of appropriate vocabulary and structure. In general, the vocabulary was accessible and some candidates managed to display their knowledge of more recondite items such as exotic fruits growing by the wayside. Tense usage was sometimes suspect with, again, confusion between the Imperfect and Perfect/Past Historic and careless errors in other areas (gender, agreement of adjectives, incorrect use of object pronouns, misspellings) frequently cost Language marks.

**Question 3: Translation into French**

This was again the most popular of all the options and often produced work of a very high standard. There was a high level of parity between the essay mark and the one gained for the translation - though there were, of course, exceptions – and, in a number of cases, the mark gained for the translation was higher than the essay mark. The vocabulary and grammatical structures required seemed largely to be available to many candidates, though some of the structures, inevitably, proved to be more difficult. What seemed to be careless errors rather than lack of knowledge accounted for a large proportion of lost marks – confusion of ‘the’ and ‘a’, for example. While the marking principles are identical (ticks are given for correct units of language and errors are ignored) it should be pointed out that this is a rather different exercise from the essay. The linguistic demands for the translation are very precise and, in most cases, the English will transfer directly into French without the need for paraphrase, circumlocution or drastic changes in word order. Candidates are advised always to translate exactly what the English says and not to seek to use alternative words if this is not necessary. The Examiners will not credit French which strays too far from the sense of the English original without good reason.

No points proved universally impossible but difficulties were experienced with a number of items:

- Paragraph A - *aller s'amuser* – the addition of *et* between the verbs was not accepted.  
- *café du village* – this was not always successful.
- Paragraph B - The difficult points ('having said goodbye', 'On arriving') were often well done but what was assumed to be an easy point – 'the village square' – proved almost universally elusive – many opting for the over-vague *centre* or the meaningless *carré*.  
- *étaient assis* was confused with *s'asseyaient*.  
- 'At a table' was frequently rendered as *à table*, which was considered to have a different meaning.
- Paragraph C - The two particularly testing phrases included in this paragraph – 'They had been playing for an hour' and 'what had happened' – did indeed prove difficult but a number of candidates handled them successfully.
- Paragraph D - Surprisingly, *comptoir* was poorly known – either not recognised at all or spelt phonetically.  
- The Future of *envoyer* was poorly handled but, pleasingly, many candidates coped well with *qui pourra vous aider*.
- Paragraph E - Once more, much of the more challenging material was competently handled but there was a near-universal failure to translate 'room' by anything other than *chambre*, which was, of course, not accepted.

# FRENCH

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Paper 3015/02  
Reading Comprehension

## General comments

Overall candidates appeared to be very well prepared for this paper and found it accessible. Some candidates would benefit from closer reading of the text. In most cases presentation was good and handwriting legible.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section 1**

Most candidates found this Section straightforward.

Problems sometimes arose with the following questions:

#### **Exercice 1**

##### **Question 3**

Some candidates did not select **A**, so did not seem to understand *guichet* and supplied **B**, *quai*, as their response.

##### **Question 5**

A significant number of candidates chose **A**, 'passport' instead of the correct response **B**, 'money'. *Péage* may not have been understood.

#### **Exercice 2**

Almost all candidates performed well in this exercise.

#### **Exercice 3**

##### **Question 12**

Some candidates offered **F**, *Littérature*, instead of the correct **E**, *Langues*.

### **Section 2**

#### **Exercice 1**

Many candidates scored extremely well on this exercise.

Problems sometimes arose with the following questions:

##### **Question 16**

In some cases candidates answered with a list of the addressees names, suggesting that they had misread *où* for *qui*.

### **Question 21**

Some candidates merely mentioned a/the swimming pool without detailing where it was.

### **Exercice 2**

Again a high percentage of the candidature produced very good responses. Some errors may have been avoided by closer reading. Rather than making inferences, candidates are advised to give answers based more precisely on the text.

Problems sometimes arose with the following questions:

### **Question 26**

Some candidates wrote, « *il est un des meilleurs chefs* » and made no reference to *les 2 étoiles*.

### **Question 27**

Although most candidates wrote about Marcel having been abandoned, some unfortunately also stated that he was adopted and the latter clearly came later. Some supplied vague responses about his circumstances being difficult and some stated that he was an orphan, which was not in the text.

### **Question 31**

Some candidates failed to mention that his embarking on the training was teacher instigated.

### **Question 32**

Although they mentioned the stress/heat of the kitchen, some candidates merely referred to long hours and did not specify '12 hours per day'.

### **Question 33**

Some candidates wrote, « *il fait un accident* », implying that he caused rather than had an accident. Some ignored the accident and referred here to Marcel now having a job in a prestigious French restaurant.

### **Question 34**

A few candidates did not write about Marcel's reaction and mentioned that he had lost his arm. Some wrote vaguely about his *chagrin/désespoir*.

### **Question 35**

Some candidates did not write about the means Marcel used, but instead wrote about his intentions, namely « *il voulait prouver qu'il pouvait encore faire ce métier* ». Candidates sometimes found it difficult to supply a reflexive verb, when trying to express the idea that he set himself a daily challenge.

### **Section 3**

Responses to this exercise were mixed; some candidates seemed to find this very difficult, including some who had performed very well on the preceding exercises, whilst a significant number scored almost full marks.

The most frequent errors occurred in the following questions:

### **Question 37**

Some supplied *le*.

### **Question 42**

Many wrote *du*.

**Question 48**

Some wrote *ce* or *l*.

**Question 52**

A significant number supplied *de*.

**Question 53**

There were various past participles supplied here which, although correctly spelt, did not make contextual sense. *Prit* also occurred.

**Question 55**

*Leur* was sometimes supplied.

**Question 56**

A significant number of candidates supplied *sur*.