

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/01
Reading

Key messages

Question 1: Candidates should use their own words to answer the questions. Lifting from the text does not show understanding and quotations should only be used as illustrations to reinforce a point that has already been made. Candidates should take note of the mark allocation for each question as this provides an indication of the degree of development that is expected.

Question 2: When summarising the texts, only points that are common to both passages – albeit presented in a different way – can receive credit. Marks are also awarded for organisation and style, so planning is required to achieve best effect.

Language: Candidates should allow time to ensure that basic grammatical rules (e.g. verb endings, agreements) have been applied in all their answers.

General comments

In **Question 1** very few questions were left unanswered, but some were not answered fully. In **Question 2** some candidates took the time to write a plan to ensure they stayed within the prescribed 250 word limit. They used a varied vocabulary and a good range of linking and comparative words. This indicated that they had been well prepared in the techniques and requirements of the examination. Candidates who write their plan on the exam paper before the summary must remember to cross it out at the end; otherwise it will be part of the word count.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Candidates generally understood the text but occasionally struggled to answer the questions purposefully. The range of questions provided opportunities for all candidates to perform according to their ability.

Questions (a) and (g) were answered well by the majority of candidates. Marks are awarded for each specific relevant point made by the candidate. When a question is worth more than one mark, it means that more than one relevant point needs to be identified. When a justification or explanation is required it is important that it is provided to access the maximum number of marks.

- (a) Most candidates gave the correct answer. There were very few incorrect answers (e.g. *par accident / quand il avait huit ans*).

- (b)(i) Most candidates were able to identify one reason (many partially sighted people get annoyed because they feel that other people look at them when they are involved in an incident), but failed to mention that it also reminds them of their disability; instead they often said incorrectly that they found it unfair (e.g. *ils estiment que leur infirmité est une injustice*) or gave other answers like *ils deviennent une source de plaisanterie* which showed that they did not understand the text fully. Candidates need to check the number of marks per question in future as this question carried two marks. Some candidates gave only one reason and therefore missed out on getting both marks.
- (ii) Some candidates found this question a little more challenging and received no marks because they either gave an answer which was too vague (e.g. *ils tourment la situation / parce que ce n'est pas quelque chose de très commun chez les malvoyants*) or an answer which indicated they did not understand the text (e.g. *Ils se moquent de leur infirmité / ils jouent au concours de celui qui voit le mieux alors qu'ils sont malvoyants*).
- (c) In this question, candidates had to explain how Mathis' attitude towards learning braille was different from that of other partially sighted people. Therefore, in their answer they needed to convey the idea that Mathis was thinking ahead whilst the others only cared about the present. Some candidates did not notice that the question carried two marks and gave a partial answer. Other candidates did not appear to understand the text (e.g. *Mathis veut faire tout pour pas empirer sa vue / car il ne se plaint pas pour un peu de vue qui lui reste / Mathis n'a pas protesté lorsque ses parents ont voulu qu'ils fassent ses études dans un internat pour malvoyants et aveugles / tant qu'ils voient apprendre est inutile / l'utilisation d'un alphabet normal diminue leur sensation de handicap / certains malvoyants sont capables de prendre des risques concernant leur vue*).
- (d) As this question carried four marks, candidates were required to convey four separate ideas. The majority of candidates conveyed at least two ideas. The first idea was that Mathis had not told his friends that he was attending a special school; the second that he avoided using his white stick; the third and fourth that he was walking with confidence with his hands in his pockets and the latter point had to be linked to walking. Those who repeated the same idea could only score one mark for it (e.g. *pendant la journée il essaie de diminuer son utilisation de la canne blanche. Mathis n'utilise pas sa canne blanche quand il est en dehors de l'école.*) *Il ne dit à personne qu'il est dans une école pour les étudiants malvoyants* was rejected as it is not what is said in the text. The addition of sometimes / from time to time to the idea of walking with his hands in his pocket invalidated the answer. Other incorrect answers included e.g. *Il marche sans faire attention avec ses pieds / il marche avec les pieds fermes / il n'a pas parlé à ses amis de sa malvoyance...* Candidates often mentioned the idea that he was wearing sunglasses, but no mark was given for that point, which was the answer to the next question.
- (e) The majority of candidates performed well here. Generally, those who just said that he was wearing sunglasses and did not add the detail about wearing them all year round / all the time missed out on maximum marks. A few candidates said that it was because he was not using his white stick or said *parce qu'il frime / parce que les gens ne savent pas qu'il est aveugle / des aveugles ne peuvent pas se défendre* which was not awarded any marks.
- (f) For this question, candidates had to show their understanding of how writers achieve effects (Assessment Objective R4). It proved challenging although some candidates still gained full marks. Most candidates explained the writer's aim at great length. They didn't answer the first part of the question and thus could only get one mark. Some others gave completely irrelevant answers (e.g. *L'auteur essaie de nous expliquer pourquoi Mathis se comporte d'une certaine façon. Au début de la phrase l'auteur est très clair écrivant le message. L'auteur utilise beaucoup de mots connectifs pour faire un point clair à propos du comportement de Mathis*).
- (g) Candidates answered this question well. Incorrect answers were rare (e.g. *Parce qu'il ne veut que personne voit qu'il a une mauvaise vue / il ne veut pas perdre les avantages d'être malvoyant*).
- (h) Many candidates answered by giving a long narrative about Mathis which was not required. The question asked candidates to name four main aspects of Mathis' character and to justify each answer with an example. Both had to be provided in order to score a mark for each aspect. Candidates often gave examples without mentioning to which aspect of his character the example referred.

Question 2

In this session, candidates had to summarise the similarities and differences between the two texts.

This question is designed as a guided summary. Candidates' responses, therefore, should not exceed the word limit as only the first 250 words are taken into consideration in the assessment. For the best results, candidates should read both texts carefully and plan their answer as planning helps to improve organisation. It also helps with making valid comparisons and encourages the use of a more fluent and varied style.

Numbering points of comparison (e.g. *premièrement, deuxièmement*) uses up words unnecessarily and prevents the natural flow of language and should therefore be avoided. Another way of being economical with words is to avoid repeating '*Dans le premier texte / le texte A...dans le deuxième texte / le texte B*' for each comparison that is made. Such repetitions are unlikely to enhance the 'Style and Organisation' mark. Candidates should instead endeavour to use a variety of linking words. Similarly, lengthy introductions where candidates state what they are going to do are not required.

Candidates must also remember to compare like with like and to make clear the two sides of the comparison.

Most candidates managed to find between five and ten similarities / differences although many more could have been found. It is possible to deal with differences and similarities in two separate sections or to combine them. The latter approach is more demanding because it requires a clear focus and good organisational skills but it can be very effective. Because of the nature of the task, quoting from the text or giving line references is not advised.

The best candidates began their writing with a short introduction, which already contained some ideas (e.g. *Les deux textes parlent de deux hommes qui ont une infirmité (1), Mathis un Français (1) de 18 ans (1) et Ahmed un Tunisien de 27 ans*) and then wrote two paragraphs, one for the common ground and one for the differences, and lastly finished with a clear but short conclusion which contained a final idea. The candidates who did so tended to score higher marks than the candidates who just narrated the content of each text. It is also very important to make each point quite briefly and avoid repeating the same ideas as no credit is given for repeated points. Candidates should also aim to include several points in the same sentence, using expressions such as *les points similaires dans les deux textes sont...or une grande différence est que... or par contre / cependant / tandis que / alors que...* as phrases that clearly link or contrast their ideas. It is not necessary to write a conclusion unless it also includes a new point.

To improve, candidates should:

- identify as many differences / similarities as possible (use highlighters, make lists)
- organise and plan their response so that it is purposeful and fully relevant
- compare like with like (e.g. Mathis became partially sighted at the age of 8 after he caught meningitis whereas Ahmed became blind at the age of 3 after an operation for a brain tumour)
- refer to details occurring in both texts and avoid mentioning details featuring in only one of them (e.g. *On sait qu'est-ce que Mathis veut faire comme carrière mais on ne sait pas celle d'Ahmed / On nous parle du professeur d'Ahmed mais on ne connaît aucun professeur de Mathis*)
- remain focused and avoid omitting the second half of the comparison or mentioning things which are not in the text
- avoid switching into narrative mode through over-reliance on the storyline of the texts
- refrain from stating the obvious (e.g. the texts have different titles / the character in text A is called Mathis and the character in text B is called Ahmed) or the trivial (different number of paragraphs or lines in each text) or the style of writing (e.g. *le premier texte est un texte littéraire mais le second texte est une narration / les deux textes ont un style autobiographique / ils sont tous les deux à la troisième personne du singulier*) and concentrate on the content of the texts.

Style and Organisation

Organisation is closely linked with content. Some candidates grouped and linked ideas, typically introducing several ideas in one sentence. The majority of candidates dealt with ideas in a series of short sentences, often following the same pattern, so that the overall effect was somewhat repetitive. A few picked points at random, losing focus now and again, which made their summary hard to follow.

Style relates to the range and complexity of structures and to the breadth and appropriate use of lexis. In this session, fewer candidates were at the extremes of the scale: Examiners did not read very many stylish or purposeful responses, and on the other hand, neither did they read very many poor responses that were difficult to read with ideas randomly presented in basic and barely adequate language.

Accuracy (Questions 1 and Question 2)

Generally, candidates tended to perform better in **Question 1** than in **Question 2** as their answers were shorter and they had the support of the text. In **Question 2** they had to produce their own language. Similar errors appeared in both questions.

Areas where there is scope for improvement are:

- use of the infinitive instead of the past participle or vice versa (e.g. *Mathis n'a pas protester / les garçons se font insulté et maltraité*)
- incorrect verb ending (*Ahmed vie sans ses parents / Mathis voix encore un peu / tout le monde les regardent / il ne veux pas perdre / il étais dans cette école...*)
- failure to agree adjectives and past participles (e.g. *ils sont allé dans une école spécialisé*)
- wrong gender (e.g. *la braille*)
- omission of *ne* when using the negative form
- failure to use the subjunctive after *de peur que / il a peur que* (e.g. *il a peur que sa vue est diminué ou même qu'il l'a perdu*)
- incorrect use of pronouns (e.g. *...perdu la vue qu'il lui restait / Sa les rappelle de leur infirmité / ils ce font harceler*)
- confusion over phonemes (e.g. *ses parents long envoyer en France / il mais / mai c'est / s'est / ces mains dans sa poche / ça canne / s'y sa vue / c'est camarades pensent...*)
- agreement of adjectives and participles
- correct verb endings
- correct use of pronouns
- knowing the difference between *a* and *à* ; between *et*, *est*, *ai* and *aie*; between *c'est*, *s'est*, *ses*, *ces*; between *ce* and *se*; between *l'a* and *la*; between *dans* and *d'en*; between *sa* and *ça*; between *été* and *était*; between *on* and *ont*.
- widening knowledge of linking words and vocabulary.

Concentrating on these areas should allow candidates to access maximum marks.

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/02
Writing

Key messages

To do well on this paper, candidates need to select two titles and write a response that is clearly relevant and well-structured. Essays should be generally accurate with evidence of use of idiom and appropriate vocabulary, and be coherent with well-developed ideas.

General comments

As in previous years, candidates were given a choice of 4 titles for the discursive/argumentative essay and 4 titles for the narrative/descriptive essay. Each essay was marked out of 25, comprising a maximum mark of 12 for style and accuracy and a maximum of 13 for content and structure. Most candidates observed the rubric regarding the number of words to be used (350–500 words per essay). For **Section 1**, the best essays engaged fully with the title, were well-structured, fluently argued and coherent. They featured a clear and relevant introduction and conclusion to the title set and contained some examples to illustrate the various points being made. Some less successful essays lacked structure, direction and ideas, and explanations were not always logical. In less good essays particular problems were weak linking words between paragraphs, no proper introduction and a weak conclusion. For **Section 2**, some descriptive essays were exceptional and a pleasure to read, producing a vivid experience for the reader. Narrative essays were not as well thought through; some candidates still overused dialogue and a lot of stories were very predictable from the start.

The importance of clear handwriting cannot be overstated. Where candidates are aware of the limitations of their handwriting, they should be advised to take extra care to ensure that they are not unnecessarily penalised.

As far as the quality of language was concerned, the best essays combined high levels of accuracy, fluency and complexity, showing the ability to use a wide variety of vocabulary. The linguistic quality of the best essays made them a real pleasure to read. Weaker candidates tended to use simple language and were inconsistent when using different tenses or subject-verb agreements. Among a number of recurrent weaknesses and linguistic errors, the following were seen:

Omission of accents: a – à, ou – où, du – dû

Wrong preposition in verb + infinitive constructions for example *préférer de*, *aider de*

Use of *la ville urbaine* instead of *la vie urbaine*

Dans les réseaux sociaux instead of *sur* les réseaux sociaux

Lapses of register, e.g. *truc*, *chose*

Overuse of *ça*, *cela*, *il y a*

Misspelling of common words, e.g. *la plus part*, *rendre conte*, *environnement*, *exercice réseaux*, *government*

Anglicism: *le cyber-bullying* for *le harcèlement en ligne* or *la cyber-intimidation*, *balancé* for *équilibré*, *en addition* for *en outre*, *les facilités* for *les équipements/installations*

Gender of *media*

Confusion between homonyms *ceux/ce*, *est/ait*, *on/ont*

Use of the *tu* form instead of the *vous* or *on* form for **Section 1**

Conjugation of first person singular in past historic tense for –ER verbs: *je marcha*, *je demanda*

Confusion between imperfect tense, perfect tense, past historic and present tense

Weak link words at the beginning of paragraphs: *alors*, *puis*, *ensuite*, *aussi mais*

Imperfect tense of *faire*: *il fesait* instead of *il faisait*

Preceding direct object agreement: *je les ai entendu*

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question (a)

Expliquez les avantages et les inconvénients de la vie urbaine.

Good essays gave details of the advantages and disadvantages of an urban life. Some advantages which were frequently mentioned were as follows: the highly developed transport facilities, better paid jobs, better education, better health care with hospitals or clinics close by, convenient local shops and entertainment (cinema, leisure centres, libraries, etc.). Other candidates also developed the idea that living in towns or cities makes us develop a love for humanity as we encounter people of different backgrounds and origins. City residents are more likely to be open to new ideas and prejudices soon wear off. There were similar numbers of disadvantages; towns and cities are overcrowded, there are too many traffic jams and people suffer from air and noise pollution. Many of the streets are dirty and towns do not have enough green spaces. People suffer from depression and isolation; everything in town is very expensive: accommodation, food, clothes, etc. A few candidates compared urban life to rural life which was not required by the question and the essays were partly off topic; however, it was perfectly acceptable to express one's opinion in the conclusion about whether or not an urban setting was one's ideal place to live.

Question (b)

« Le sport à l'école devrait être obligatoire et non pas facultatif. » Discutez.

It was important to focus on sport at school and not just on the benefit of sport in general. Some candidates first stated that in most schools, sport is compulsory until the age of 16. Most candidates succeeded in explaining that sport should be considered as a school subject like Maths or French even though not all young people are good at it. It was also agreed that compulsory sport in schools was a way to encourage children to keep fit physically and mentally and was certainly helping them to avoid obesity. Furthermore, sport has some social benefit and is a way for pupils to engage with each other, learn team building activities and for some a possible opportunity to start a long-term friendship. A few candidates also illustrated that some sports celebrities started their particular sport at school. On the other hand, physical education in schools could be considered as a waste of time for some youngsters as either they do not like the sport schools have on offer or would prefer to focus on other school subjects. A few candidates discussed the challenges for some pupils with medical conditions to take part in sport and the resulting bullying which could be directed towards less-sporty children. Some essays did not explain relevant ideas in detail and therefore development was limited. By way of conclusion, strong essays recognised the importance of compulsory sport in schools for health and social benefits and that, in most cases, sport helps pupils to perform better in written examinations.

Question (c)

« Les réseaux sociaux font plus de mal que de bien dans notre société. » Qu'en pensez-vous ?

This proved to be by far the most popular title in **Section 1**. Good essays concentrated on both sides of the argument and then drew a conclusion with opinions. Everyone agreed that it is easy to stay in touch via social media regardless of geographical location. Some candidates gave elaborate details of the particularly good aspects of social media such as finding true love, widening their personal knowledge or sharing information or personal photos. A few essays were slightly ambiguous as the development essentially focused on the internet and not specifically on social media. Not all consequences of social networking are positive; some candidates successfully managed to explain that cyber-bullying, inadvertently divulging personal information and addiction could have dramatic consequences for some individuals. In general, candidates believed that the dangers outweighed the benefits, nevertheless, the dangerous effects of social media can be countered and, like many things, social media needs to be used in moderation.

Question (d)

À votre avis, devrait-on imposer des limites au pouvoir des médias ? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas ?

This question produced some good responses although this was the least popular choice. Some candidates had an excellent knowledge of current affairs and succeeded in illustrating their ideas with recent events in the world. On the one hand, excessive media power can be dangerous and can unduly influence people's opinions or even offend certain community groups and therefore governments should be able to have some control over the media. On the other hand, complete freedom of speech allows a variety of opinions to be expressed which does not exist in all countries. Some arguments were outstanding and very convincing. Exemplary answers referred to Charlie Hebdo, presidential elections, totalitarian regimes. A few candidates did not grasp the meaning of media power and produced essays which were off topic.

Section 2

Question (a)

Décrivez une personne âgée qui vous a impressionné(e).

This question received mixed responses. It was misinterpreted by a few candidates who embarked on a long description of the life of an old person. Most candidates chose to describe a grandparent and those who were most successful used all five senses and gave vivid details of the physical aspects of the individual as well as his/her living environment such as in a retirement home or a hospital.

Question (b)

Décrivez une promenade en forêt.

This question generated some extraordinary answers. In outstanding essays, the author gave a clear picture of what they could see, feel, hear, smell and taste as their walk in the forest proceeded. Some of the answers may have been rehearsed but a few candidates were able to give a description using well-developed images, illuminated with appropriate details. However, there were some candidates who converted the descriptive task into a narrative task. Other essays lacked development and were simply a description of objects in the forest.

Question (c)

« En ouvrant cette porte je savais que toute ma vie allait changer. » Incorporez cette phrase dans une courte histoire.

Answers mainly revolved around a new career path being chosen or perhaps entering an old house or a new school or simply being at home alone. Some of the stories were very engaging and made an impact on the reader. Other essays were too predictable and the given sentence did not fit properly simply because opening the door did not lead to a major change in the person's life. To be most effective, the narrative needed to be set in the past tense. This proved to be challenging for some candidates who struggled to switch between the past historic and the imperfect tenses satisfactorily.

Question (d)

Un matin, vous vous réveillez sur un lit d'hôpital, une jambe dans le plâtre. Écrivez le début ou une partie de l'histoire.

This question allowed candidates the use of flashbacks to explain to the reader the reason why they had woken up in a hospital bed. The use of the past tense was not always accurate. Although some of the stories were effective with an authentic build-up, others recounted everyday life happenings without much relevance to the situation. A few candidates opted for the loss of memory but quickly ran out of steam. In general, it is essential to avoid sections that are too long and unexciting or the use of too much dialogue. Instead, it is preferable to describe emotions and how these change as the story develops.