

# 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 frequently the writing was inaccurate. Candidates should be reminded that a broad and fluent command of the material is highly commendable and will be well rewarded, but that accuracy in writing is absolutely essential for full credit to be given.

The translation into French was once again 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 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 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 – this year, it was common to find essays of anything between 200 and 600 words and a small number were even longer. It would appear either that candidates do not bother reading the rubric or that they do not believe Examiners will exact any penalty. Yet again, therefore, it should be emphasised that candidates writing any amount in excess of 150 words are simply wasting their time. They should be reminded as clearly as possible that nothing whatsoever is taken into account after the 150 word limit for either Language or Communication. Thus, those writing at great length will almost certainly lose 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 answered *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 to carefully read the instructions on the question paper 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. In order to score 5 marks, candidates must make clear reference to at least five of the pictures in **Question 1** and to all the given rubric points in **Question 2**. Lengthy essays will therefore almost invariably be penalised if they 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 with the arrival of the family at the shop where the boy was immediately attracted by a display of toys, in particular a toy elephant. The parents were then seen in a different part of the store looking at clothes while the boy, clearly bored by this, was heading back towards the toy department. This was followed by the horrified reaction of the parents when they realised their son had vanished. The boy was then seen in the crowd sobbing at the realisation that he had lost his parents. He was comforted by an employee or manager who took him to her office to amuse him and await the arrival of his parents. Most candidates started their narrative at the appropriate point, but some were unable to resist filling in a lengthy background scenario to explain what had happened before this, often including an account of basic morning routine (getting up and washed, having breakfast, etc.). Such an approach is pointless as no Communication marks will be awarded for ideas not suggested by the pictures. The narrative was frequently competently executed but dwelling at too great a length on the earlier part of the story inevitably led to the loss of the later Communication points for many candidates. Those who kept within the word limit generally had no difficulty scoring the maximum of 5 for Communication.

The conventional third person narrative approach was, of course, frequently adopted, but many chose to write in the first person, as any of the three main characters depicted. No particular problems were posed by this though logic was sometimes stretched where the narrator was describing events he/she could not possibly have witnessed. Where a particular set of pictures allows this, it is generally recommended to confine first person narratives to those who appear in every picture.

The narrative was frequently handled very competently and many candidates showed confident use of the necessary vocabulary as well as a variety of appropriate structures. Most candidates (but by no means all) knew common words such as (*grand*) *magasin*, *supermarché*, *hypermarché*, *vitrine*, *indiquer*, *partir/se diriger/disparaître*, *choqué*, *avoir peur*, *fondre en larmes*, *pleurer*, *glace*, *remercier*, *joyeux*, *soulagé*, *embrasser*. *Foire* and *marché* were felt to be inappropriate descriptors of the store but *centre commercial* was accepted. *Boutique* and *magasin* were accepted, as well as the more obvious word *rayon* for the departments within the store. 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 always handled correctly, either not being used when it was required, or, more rarely, being constantly used without justification. Minor common errors were confusion between *car*, *comme* and *quand*; between *se* and *ce* and between *ces* and *ses*.

### Question 2

#### (a) Letter

This was a popular choice. Most candidates understood what was required and often covered the points very well but those who ignored the guidelines or who dealt with any point at excessive length were inevitably penalised. Five clear points were mentioned in the rubric (four separate points with one requesting two details) and all had to be covered to qualify for the award of the five Communication marks. Candidates are reminded that for all **Question 2** essays the opening phrase is given and should be copied out before starting the main body of the essay. Deliberately ignoring this and launching into a pre-learned and irrelevant opening will be penalised. A reference either to the health of any member of the family, or, more generally, what any one of them was doing at the time (job, pastimes, general activities, etc.) was required to open the letter. Mention of the writer's sorrow at hearing the news about the aunt was considered harmless and relevant but did not score any actual Communication marks. The amusing incident was intended to allow candidates to use their imagination and some of the accounts were extremely successful. Clearly, a very wide tolerance was attached to the definition of "*amusant*" but there had to be at least a tenuous link with the concept. Almost any occasion which could conceivably have been considered "*agréable*" was accepted for the next two points and a reference to an anticipated activity involving the aunt when out of hospital constituted the final point.

The majority dealt in a satisfactory manner with the points outlined above. Some rubric points will, of course, invite greater length than others, but a single, clear reference in an acceptable tense is sufficient for the award of a Communication mark. The points concerning the amusing incident and the pleasant events could clearly be dealt with at almost any length. Even where candidates have

avoided wasting words on irrelevant preamble, they should still beware of dwelling at excessive length on any one rubric point in order to ensure that they deal with all five before reaching the word limit.

Candidates who started with the given opening followed immediately by relevant treatment of the rubric points usually covered the material appropriately. Some, however, in spite of being given the lead-in, could not resist then turning to a conventional letter opening formula full of stock phrases and irrelevant references with the inevitable result that, once into the body of the letter and the actual rubric points, they quickly ran out of words. They should be encouraged to avoid doing this. 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, in particular, seem to struggle with 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 completely accurate usage.

**(b) Dialogue**

This was the least popular of the three options but the relatively straightforward subject of booking a hotel room clearly did appeal to a number of candidates some of whom wrote logical, competent and relevant dialogues. The best candidates dealt with the points exactly as stated and in the order in which they appeared. They were asked to give the dates of their planned visit and details of what sort of rooms were required. The receptionist was then asked for a brief indication of what there was to do in the hotel and/or the local area and to explain where the hotel was situated. The final point needed a brief discussion of the price and how the candidate intended to pay.

It was felt that asking for a hotel room should be well within a candidate's ability and most had no problem, but simply asking for *Deux chambres*, for example, was not considered adequate. Many candidates wrote far too much when discussing the attractions available and then left themselves short of words to cover the final point about the cost.

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 another popular choice and many candidates seemed to relish the scope it gave to their imaginations. As a result of being given the opening words, there were few irrelevant preambles before the account of the restaurant visit started, though, as with the other essay questions, some candidates dealt with the earlier points at far too great a length and thus ran out of words before completing the Communication tasks. In spite of the foregoing comment, a very small number of candidates seemed to go out of their way to try to avoid the restriction imposed by the given opening, either by writing irrelevant material and then quoting the opening words when well into the essay, or by repeating the given phrase and then indulging in a lengthy flashback. Both these approaches are pointless and will seriously affect the marks awarded.

Candidates were required to say where they sat (not simply *à une table* without stating where it was), to describe what they ordered (a reference to either food or drink was acceptable for the point), to highlight any problem associated with the meal, and to describe a consequence. Needless to say, the two major points – the problem and the consequences – gave great scope for imaginative invention. Various unspeakable items were discovered in the food, or it was served unconscionably late, and reactions varied from vigorous complaints to the management to physical fights and the police being called.

There were some enjoyable and graphic accounts of these incidents, 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 final Communication points.

The best stories were lively and fluently written, using a range of appropriate vocabulary and structure. 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 *Avoir besoin* was poorly known. The redundant *et* often appeared in the phrase “come and have dinner”. The rest of this paragraph was generally well handled.
- Paragraph B “As far as the town centre” – *jusqu’à* was very poorly known. The structure with distance (*à trois kilomètres*) was poorly handled. “Headed for” was often not known. Otherwise, the paragraph was frequently successful.
- Paragraph C The preceding direct object rule was generally not known (*qu’elle avait mises*). “The lady next door” proved difficult. “Her friend said” was frequently not inverted.
- Paragraph D *S’approcher de* was not well known, nor were *la caisse* and *le caissier/la caissière*. The pluperfect “had lost” was often missed. *Son porte-monnaie* was often *portefeuille*. “To drop” was not always known.
- Paragraph E Hardly anyone knew *entrer en courant*. *Tenant* was often correct but many unaccountably put *attrapant*. “Is this yours?” was very well handled by many but the structure with *venir de faire* was not. The last word, *gentillesse*, was well known.

# FRENCH

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<p>Paper 3015/02 Reading Comprehension</p>
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## 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 exercise straightforward. Problems sometimes arose with the following questions:

#### **Exercise 1**

##### **Question 3**

Some candidates did not select **A** as the correct answer.

#### **Exercise 2**

Almost all candidates performed well in this exercise.

#### **Exercise 3**

The vocabulary of this exercise appeared to be unfamiliar to a number of candidates. **Question 15** was answered correctly by almost every candidate, but **Questions 13** and **14** were incorrect in many cases.

### *Section 2*

#### **Exercise 1**

Many candidates scored extremely well on this exercise.

Problems sometimes arose with the following questions:

##### **Question 16**

In a small number of cases candidates answered that Mathias lived in Rennes, suggesting that they had not understood the overall subject matter of the letter.

##### **Question 23**

A few candidates appeared to misunderstand *pensionnaire* and wrote that Mathias's father or parents would be becoming pensioners and retiring to Rennes.

### Question 24

In attempting to indicate that Mathias would belong to a football club a few candidates wrote: *Il partie d'un club de football*. This was not accepted as it conveyed something quite different. Some candidates said that he would be going out in Rennes but omitted to mention his friends.

### 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 25

Some candidates lifted, « *Après avoir lu des livres passionnants* ». This was not accepted, because although it referred to the books it really does not make sense as an answer to the question. Some candidates answered *un rêve*.

### Question 27

A few candidates stated that François was either 12 or 30 years old.

### Question 28

Many candidates failed to mention that François went to the Arctic to prepare for the expedition.

### Question 32

A significant number of candidates failed to score on this question. Most of these wrote: « *Parce que le couteau était dans son sac* » or similar, which suggests that they had not understood what they were being asked.

### Question 34

Some candidates did not write about lack of shelter, which the question required, but wrote generalisations about bad conditions, subsequently inferred frightening encounters with wild beasts and lack of provisions.

### Question 35

Although there were some very good responses here, some candidates lifted, « *Une année plus tard après avoir parcouru 7 000 kilomètres*. » which was not accepted, because it does not make sense as an answer to the question. Some candidates supplied answers similar to those noted for **Question 34**.

### 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 39

The idiom *prendre feu* did not seem to be known by some candidates and various incorrect past participles were offered including *mis* and *eu*. *Prit* was also offered suggesting confusion with the past historic.

### Question 41

Many wrote *du*.

**Question 42**

Some wrote *elle*.

**Question 46**

A significant number failed to provide a correct answer here. Some candidates wrote *vu* or *sonné*.

**Question 49**

Some candidates wrote *le*.

**Question 51**

*Avait* or *avaient* was sometimes supplied.

**Question 52**

*Le* was occasionally supplied.

**Question 53**

Many candidates wrote *que*.

**Question 55**

Candidates generally realised that part of *pouvoir* was required here, but then failed to supply the correct part. Candidates offered the infinitive itself or *peut* or *put*.