

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/02
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

Candidates across institutions performed competently again this year.

Part 1, Question 1 tested candidates' reading comprehension skills using two thematically linked passages in Japanese. The two passages presented different viewpoints or approaches to the common theme, and candidates were asked to summarise the two texts, giving an objective account of the different points raised.

Candidates generally responded to the texts positively and intelligently, and were able to summarise both passages well, contrasting the 'emotional' or 'natural' approach presented in passage A with the more 'objective' or 'clinical' approach given in passage B. Passage B contained some scientific terminology this year, and the majority of candidates coped very well with this, using both the kanji and contextual support to access the meaning. This showed good training and good technique.

Weaker candidates tended to spend too long on lifting text from passage A, which left them with little space to mention passage B. A few candidates also gave their opinions on the theme presented in the two passages, rather than writing a summary, as indicated in the question.

Responses to **Question 2** varied in their levels of appropriate content and effectiveness of language use.

Part 2 is designed to test the candidates' linguistic knowledge such as grammar, vocabulary, syntactic and discourse structures as well as socio-cultural appropriateness in language use (e.g. politeness indicated by Japanese grammar and vocabulary).

Candidates who score high marks in **Part 2** generally also achieve good scores in **Part 1**, since they write fluently and with greater accuracy. However, there were a few interesting exceptions where linguistically weaker candidates produced good essays for **Part 1**. Typically, they employed simple vocabulary and basic, but accurate, grammar and made maximum use of their simple style of writing to express themselves in an accessible and straightforward manner. The result was positive. Their style was consistent, and their discourse highly coherent.

It should be noted that even candidates with a very advanced vocabulary need to be careful not to make basic grammatical errors, and to ensure that their compositions are coherent. Otherwise, the written communication breaks down and the candidate cannot score a good mark. This is an important point that should be made clear to candidates at this level.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Candidates' reading comprehension and writing skills are tested in two questions.

This year's topic was "factors for successful interpersonal communication and relationship-building".

Question 1 tests skills in selecting, comparing and summarising specific information taken from the two passages (A and B). Further marks may be given to candidates whose writing demonstrates higher language proficiency and originality. Candidates are expected to write a short composition (circa 400 words) on a topic that is shared by the two passages. The composition cannot be a mere summary, but rather the material must be developed and expanded through clear, logical and coherent discussion. Given the required length of the composition, unnecessary repetition and circumlocution should be avoided.

A typical format used by competent candidates is as follows:

1. First, state very briefly (no more than a sentence or two) what the shared topic is in passages A and B. This constitutes a very short introduction.
2. Secondly, refer to the contents of [A] and [B]. For example, give a brief account of the shared theme and list the differences, explaining in what way the passages show contrasting views and the different approaches are conveyed.
3. Lastly, briefly summarise the differences of content in [A] and [B]. This constitutes a conclusion.

The above format is an example and there are other possibilities, of course. The structure of the composition should be clear and well thought-out. Therefore, good planning is essential.

Stronger candidates wrote a summary in circa 350-400 words (including a brief introduction and conclusion) comparing the views and approaches described in passages A and B objectively. They demonstrated a good grasp of the issues by giving a succinct summary of the two passages, comparing their main points. Arguments arose naturally from the two passages, and a clear case was made for the chosen option using excellent grammar and wide vocabulary.

In contrast, weaker candidates developed the material in a somewhat wooden way and used less varied sentence structures and vocabulary. Nevertheless, some of them still managed to communicate messages sufficiently, making the most of simple but accurate language use. These weaker, but successful, candidates' essays can be characterised by good paragraphing, accurate basic grammar and effective use of conjunctive expressions.

Question 2 invited candidates' to respond to the passages in a variety of forms (e.g. a selective summary, a letter, a report, a speech, a script of a conversation or broadcast, a continuation of a story, etc.). This question tests the ability to write creatively and communicatively in a given genre. Needless to say, the composition must be relevant to the topic. It should be logically consistent, coherent and succinct, but at the same time follow a specific type of register and format that are accepted for the genre. As in **Question 1**, accurate and appropriate use of *Kanji*, *katakana*, *hiragana*, punctuation and *Genkō-Yōshi* are also tested.

This year, candidates were asked to write a brief article in circa 300 words on the theme of "building positive interpersonal relationships" for a short speech to be delivered over the school's public announcement system. Candidates were asked to define a good interpersonal relationship and suggest ways to achieve it, stating opinions clearly and giving real examples to support the argument. This year's candidates generally responded to the question with a sense of immediacy and involvement. For example, candidates chose the stance of either A or B and explained reasons why they chose that approach, discussing ways to avoid bullying, alienation, or misunderstanding in schools and suggesting how to communicate better with peers, drawing from personal experience. Many candidates mentioned how relevant the topic was to their own lives, and argued convincingly with the support of real-life examples.

Part 2

Part 2 consists of four subsections. The questions test:

1. logical, semantic and grammatical knowledge [**Questions 3-7**]
2. lexical and semantic knowledge [**Questions 8-12**],
3. synonyms and Kanji [**Questions 13-17**]
4. grammatical knowledge and relevant metalanguage [**Questions 18-22**].

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/03
Continuous Writing

General comments

This year's candidates produced competent and original compositions. Successful candidates chose a topic that suited their linguistic ability and personal style of writing, which helped towards producing a readable and often interesting composition. Knowing one's own areas of strength in writing is an important strategic skill.

In general, weaker candidates tended to opt for story-writing and free composition in a simple style. Stronger candidates tended to choose a topic requiring an analytical or argumentative approach. Typically, they demonstrated a wide range of vocabulary and employed complex sentence structures, and wrote coherently using a clear three-part (Introduction-Content-Conclusion) frame of discourse structure.

Some of the stronger candidates skilfully employed a traditional Japanese four-part discourse structure to maintain coherence in an authentic Japanese style. This discourse structure consists of the following four parts: KI (Introduction of a topic), SHÔ (Development on the topic), TEN (Surprise Turn – a literary device unique to Japanese composition), and KETSU (Conclusion).

Improvements continue to be observed in the following areas: relevance of content to the chosen topic, clarity of arguments, coherence, grammatical accuracy, and paragraph links. Some improvements have also been seen in the areas of originality, *Kanji*, adequacy and appropriateness of lexical choices, although these tended to only be amongst the stronger candidates.

Examiners were pleased to see that, compared to a few years ago, there were far fewer compositions with negative undertones, expressions of hatred, depression and violence. However, the linguistic content of weaker candidates' compositions often showed (in variety and density) close resemblance to the linguistic contents of *manga* and popular games. An example of the influence of *manga* is textual inconsistency. For example, vocabulary fluctuated between colloquial and extremely archaic. Typically, sentences were short and haphazardly put together. Use of *manga* or popular magazine articles may interest learners, but their content and register are not necessarily adequate for candidates at this level.

Stronger candidates' compositions suggested that they have been amply exposed to a selection of good prose, which can be found in classical and contemporary literature and educational magazines.

Comments on specific questions

A choice of nine titles was provided, calling for the candidates' imaginative, descriptive or argumentative responses in an appropriate style.

The marking criteria were as follows.

- Material (interest, relevance, exemplification, explanation, detail, and maturity);
- Structure (paragraphing, paragraph links, balance and cohesiveness in the overall structure, sentence sequence, structural effects, and clear beginning and end of the discourse);
- Style (word range, sentence structure, sense of audience, varied style in the choice of vocabulary and structure, and stylistic effects); and
- Accuracy (grammar, punctuation, dialogue, word usage, spelling including *Kanji* use, and usage of *Genkô Yôshi*).

Linguistic accuracy, clarity of argument and originality of the content are essential for good writing. Furthermore, an appropriate style and discourse structure must be chosen according to the genre in which the candidate is writing, and they should be consistent throughout. For example, a creative piece of writing

requires original content, an appealing storyline, and an effective story-telling method, while a scientific, or politically-oriented essay requires analytical and logical argument, convincing reasons and adequate examples to support the arguments.

This year's questions were as follows:

- 1 "The feeling... that you have previously experienced something that is actually happening right now... is called *déjà vu*... you know", said Kay, and she suddenly stood up as if she remembered something..." Continue the story from here.
- 2 Express your opinion on the theme of "Global Economy". Give reasons and/or facts to support your argument.
- 3 Explain what the phrase "a fulfilling life" means to you. Explain your ideas giving concrete examples.
- 4 Discuss possible causes of "non-observance of school regulations" and suggest solutions to the problem.
- 5 What voluntary activities are undertaken in your local community? Discuss how these could be promoted to young people. Give your opinion clearly and make suggestions using concrete examples.
- 6 Write a composition using the word "*SEI-I* (good faith/straightforwardness/sincerity)".
- 7 Write freely about your thoughts on the idiomatic phrase: "*ISHIN-DENSHIN* (tacit understanding/telepathy)"
- 8 "Instead of universities that give general education, the number of vocational schools that nurture and enhance candidates' employability should be increased". Discuss whether you agree or disagree with this statement, and give reasons why. Supply concrete examples to support your argument and discuss logically.
- 9 Write a composition based on your impression of the photo below.
[Photo shows a hand holding some soil with a tiny plant growing from it.]

Question 1 was a creative writing question and therefore, coherence, creativity, and effective story-telling were essential. The story needed to follow naturally from the lead-in provided using the same style and register. **Question 9** was also a creative writing question, but with a visual stimulus. Candidates were expected to describe vividly what they saw in the picture, and to develop the material by supplying an original story or by discussing issues expressed in the photo. For **Questions 2, 4, 5 and 8** candidates were expected to indicate their standpoint first, and then to develop analytical and logical arguments in a consistent manner. This required an appropriate three-part discourse structure consisting of Introduction, Content and Conclusion. **Question 3** was a free-essay on a given topic. Candidates' creativity and effective use of language to express personal opinions were tested. For **Questions 6 and 7** a clear and succinct explanation of an idiom/proverb was required. For example, fixed expressions may be paraphrased in more ordinary language, and a proverb can be explained by taking an example from everyday life. This should be followed by a discussion about the idiom/proverb in a coherent manner. Needless to say, the content of the essay should be relevant to the chosen topic in all cases. Candidates are encouraged to plan the content and overall structure before they start writing.