

ARABIC

Paper 0544/02
Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

Overall, the standard achieved by the vast majority of candidates was very high. Most candidates were familiar with the requirements of the paper in terms of rubrics and question types and they had been well prepared in Centres. Occasionally however some candidates did not follow the rubrics closely enough. Candidates should be reminded to read all the instructions carefully.

A large number of candidates displayed pleasing levels of competence in both specific and general comprehension tasks. A small number of candidates found themselves more comfortable with those exercises that required ticking and matching instead of giving answers in the target language. In the writing exercises (Part 1, Exercise 4 and Part 2, Exercise 2), most candidates followed the rubric and addressed themselves to the required bullet points. While marks are available in these two exercises for accuracy in the target language, the rest of the paper is marked primarily for successful communication.

Candidates finding themselves with any spare time could profitably spend time checking through their work to correct inaccuracies, such as mis-copied words from the texts. Candidates would do well to be guided by the length of space allocated for an answer – if there is only one line shown, the answer is expected to fit into that space.

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Paper 0544/03

Speaking

General comments

This paper is common to all candidates who followed both the Core and Extended Curriculum and contains three elements: Role plays, Topic Conversation and General Conversation. The full range of marks is available to all candidates. Teachers/examiners and candidates are reminded that MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) should be used during the speaking test. In the interest of fairness to all candidates using colloquial or slang language is not appropriate and can cause confusion.

The success of this test depends on the Teacher/examiner and the candidate understanding their reciprocal roles. A well-trained Examiner helps his/her candidates to demonstrate the full range of their abilities. In general, the candidates displayed a high level of speaking skills and communicated well. It was pleasing to note the enthusiasm of candidates, many of whom, as a result of good examining and careful preparation in Centres, were able to show how well they could communicate. The ability of candidates to communicate via the spoken word is central to the IGCSE Arabic examination and, indeed, this speaking test carries equal weighting to the other components of the syllabus.

Administration

On the whole administration of the test was completed successfully. However a few Centres did not submit the Moderator copies of the MS1 forms, thus delaying the moderation process. Most Centres had successfully completed the MS1 forms. A few Centres however did not write in the total marks but shaded the lozenges. Some Centres failed to check additions and transcriptions. It is important to remember that it is the Centre's responsibility to check that all clerical work is correct. Please make sure that both cassettes and boxes are labelled with examination details and that labels clearly state which candidates are to be found on which side of each cassette. Please remember to write the Role Play card number for each candidate on the mark sheet. Please also ensure that all candidates are identified on both the tape and the mark sheet and that their candidate number and Role play card numbers are the same on both the mark sheet and the tape.

Thank you very much to those Centres who sent their speaking tests on CD. It was especially helpful to the moderation process when Centres marked the tracks with the candidates' numbers.

Quality of recording

Although most Centres sent audible and clearly recorded tapes/CDs, in a few instances the sound was not clear enough. Please make a brief test recording before conducting the speaking test and listen to the recording to check that the microphone is suitably positioned on the desk to clearly capture the voices of both yourself and the candidate. Also, after recording the first candidate, listen to the quality of the recorded sound to confirm that it is clear and comprehensible. Most Centres recorded the speaking test for each candidate successfully. A few Centres however stopped the recording between parts of the test. Please note, once an examination has begun, the recording should not be stopped or paused between elements of the examination, but should run continuously until the end of that candidate's examination. Please make sure that for each test you record: the Centre number/ Centre name/ examination number/ name of Examiner/ date of exam/ candidate number/ candidate name and Role play card number.

Preparation

Most Teachers/examiners are to be commended on their careful preparation of the Role plays. Some, however, had not familiarised themselves adequately with the Role plays and either miscued or missed out certain tasks. In such cases, candidates cannot be awarded marks for tasks they have not attempted. Teachers/examiners should also ensure that all three sections of the test are completed. Marks cannot be

awarded for a section of the test that is not attempted and Teachers/examiners who combine the Role plays with the General Conversation, or completely missed out one of the sections: either the Role plays, the Topic Conversation or the General Conversation, disadvantage their candidates.

Application of the mark scheme

Generally, marking in Centres was close to the agreed standard and if adjustments were necessary, these tended to be small. Where Centres required larger adjustments this was usually due to one of the following:

- Failure to complete all the tasks in the Role plays.
- Only Role plays sections were submitted for the whole test.
- Topic and General Conversations that were shorter than the required length.
- Failure to give candidates the opportunity to use past, present and future time frames in both the Topic Conversation and General Conversation sections. Candidates who do not show they can do this cannot score more than 6 marks in scale b (linguistic quality).
- Failure to give the candidates the opportunity to present a topic of their own for one or two minutes before their Teacher/examiner begins to ask them questions about it.

Most Teachers/examiners marked consistently across the range and this is important as inconsistent/ erratic marking poses problems for Moderators.

Sampling

Not all samples were representative and covered a good mark range. Some Centres sent in all their speaking test cassettes rather than the six samples required covering as wide a range of ability as possible. In a few cases Centres only sent marks of the top and middle ability candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Role plays

Each candidate should be examined in two Role play situations (one card only) selected at random by the Teacher/examiner from the cards supplied.

Section A

Most of the Centres completed this part of the exam successfully. Some Centres did not introduce each Role play. Others created their own additional Role play tasks. Please note, in the interests of international standards, Teachers/examiners should not miss out parts of the Role play tasks nor replace parts with alternative or different tasks. Candidates should be given 15 minutes preparation just before the exam to allow them to read the settings for the Role plays as they provide a contextualising framework. Teachers/examiners are reminded of the need for careful preparation of the Role plays; if incorrect cues are given, it is impossible for candidates to complete the final task which depends on what the Teacher/examiner has just said.

If only one part of a task is completed, only one mark can be awarded. Please remember, the mark scheme does not contain any half marks and that the maximum mark for each task in the Role play is three, but where a candidate makes no response, no marks can be awarded. The Teacher/examiner should not offer vocabulary items or options, unless these appear in the Teachers' Notes – please let candidates work for their marks.

Section B

Role plays are more demanding as they required the ability to use different time frames and to give explanations and justifications where necessary. Please note; if a candidate miss out a task, the Teacher/examiner should try to guide him/her back to it, in as natural a way as possible.

Question 2**Topic Conversation (prepared)**

It was a pleasure to hear a range of interesting and lively topics some of which were fairly ambitious, with candidates showing a clear mastery of the language. Few Teachers/examiners correctly stopped candidates after a minute or so, and then asked questions. Some Teachers/examiners left the candidate to talk for most of the time; others suggested some topics for the candidate to choose from then asked them a few questions. Some Teachers/examiners were well aware of the need to ask questions which could elicit past and future tenses and did so to good advantage. Others however tended to interrupt the candidate after each sentence with a relatively low level question about what he/she had just said. One teacher misunderstood this part and started to ask the candidate grammatical questions. In a few cases Centres did not conduct this part of the test at all and therefore disadvantaged their candidates.

On the whole the time for the topic conversation was either too short or much longer than five minutes. In some instances the topic conversation was not chosen by the candidate and was turned into a general conversation.

Question 3**General Conversation (unprepared)**

It is recommended that the General Conversation covers a wide range of topic areas that are different from the one chosen by the candidate for the topic conversation. It is better to let the conversation flow rather than asking a series of unconnected questions.

As with the topic conversation, a very pleasing level of performance was heard from candidates. Some Teachers/examiners correctly covered at least two or three topics and often managed to guide candidates beyond factual information, seeking opinions and exploring the topic where possible. Candidates in general had been well prepared for this section of the test, however there were some very short general conversations which did not allow candidates to demonstrate the full range of their ability. Teachers/examiners should remember that it is helpful if there is a clear distinction between the topic and the general conversations.

Regrettably, a few Centres missed this final section. Please remember, it is useful for the Teacher/examiner to have a bank of questions prepared so that candidates may be offered different topics for conversation. On the whole, the time for the general conversation was too short and some Centres either asked the candidates similar questions or on one topic only.

Question 4**Impression**

At the end of the test the Teacher/examiner makes an assessment of the candidate's pronunciation, accent, fluency and his/her overall performance; following the guidelines given in the marking instructions.

Most of the Teachers/examiners coped well with this question; few of them were too generous or too harsh.

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Paper 0544/04
Continuous Writing

General comments

The question paper gave a choice of two essays, each marked out of 25: 5 marks for communication, 15 marks for language and 5 marks for general impression. The total mark for the paper was 50. The performance of the candidates spanned a wide range of ability, but the majority achieved results that were satisfactory and in a few cases there were some very good pieces of writing, remarkable for their style and accuracy and the inclusion of a wide variety of sophisticated constructions. Most essays were adequately focused on the topic in question and were satisfactorily structured.

Most candidates appeared to have sufficient knowledge of Arabic grammatical structures to enable them to complete the paper without undue difficulty. As in previous years, the poor quality of some candidates' handwriting (in a few cases, verging on illegibility) gave cause for concern. Linguistic accuracy is crucial on this paper: candidates are advised to check their work carefully.

Candidates are reminded that essays should not exceed the requisite number of words as this can be to their disadvantage. Most kept within the word limit at this session of 130–140.