

# Summary of SQA Course Reports for Advanced Higher Modern Languages 2018

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## Reading/Translation

### Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination, and there were some outstanding performances. Candidates were clearly well prepared for the exam and familiar with the format.

Candidates performed well in the reading, although some candidates lost marks by failing to provide sufficient detail in their answers.

There was an improvement in the overall purpose question with a number of good performances, particularly among the more able candidates. However, some candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers in which they repeated most of the information they had given in answer to the comprehension questions rather than addressing the question and highlighting the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the writer. Some included quotes from the text in their answer, but just repeated these in English instead of using them to develop their argument and some wrote answers in Chinese with no explanation in English.

The more able candidates performed well in translation, but some candidates lost marks through basic lack of accuracy in translating articles, conjunctions and tenses.

### French

In reading, candidates showed a good understanding of the comprehension questions, and there was an improvement in responses to the overall purpose question. Some candidates tackled the translation first which resulted in poor performances. It is important that candidates tackle the comprehension questions first as this will assist them in dealing with the more demanding aspects of translation.

### Gaelic

Most candidates coped very well with the reading paper and most managed to provide good answers to the overall purpose question and the translation. However, those candidates who tackled the translation before the comprehension questions did not achieve as highly as those who attempted the comprehension questions first.

### German

Candidates tackled reading questions well with only a few not attempting all questions. There was a slight improvement in translation this year. However, the overall purpose question and translation continue to be challenging for some candidates. A small number of candidates spent a disproportionate amount of time re-writing parts of the text and translating them in order to answer the overall purpose question. Some candidates lost marks in the translation due to basic errors in tense, number and gender.

### Italian

The question paper performed well, although performance in the overall purpose question was disappointing. The translation was better than in previous years.

## Spanish

Candidates responded fairly well to the comprehension questions paper, but did not respond as well to the overall purpose question, as they are still not providing a sufficiently reflective or analytical response. Many wrote at length but merely recounted the facts outlined in the text. In a number of cases, the quality of the English was poor, and answers tended to lack structure. Candidates tended to find it challenging to express their ideas using 'inferential' type language or to focus on the writer's techniques or issues such as tenses used, the structure of the text, the use of statistics/direct speech and real life examples. Some candidates did identify techniques, but failed to mention the intended impact on the reader.

A number of candidates found some of the sense units in the translation fairly demanding.

## Listening and Discursive Writing

### Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidates performed very well in the listening paper, although some candidates relied on guesswork or tried to predict answers. Other candidates were unable to retain sufficient details required to answer the questions accurately, often misunderstanding part of the information. In discursive writing, the most popular choices were questions 4 and 5, but question 6 was not attempted by any of the candidates. Essays were generally well structured and performance was very good with many outstanding pieces of writing. Candidates performed well when they used learned material appropriately and essays were relevant.

However, some candidates failed to answer the question appropriately.

### French

Candidates performed well in both items in listening, demonstrating sound comprehension of vocabulary and language structures. In discursive writing, candidates were able to adapt their knowledge of language to the topics addressed, although some candidates encountered difficulty where they misread the question or used learned material inappropriately.

### Gaelic

Some candidates performed very well in listening and there were some good examples of discursive writing. Those candidates whose responses were not discursive in style were put at a disadvantage.

### German

In listening, almost all candidates attempted to answer all the questions, although a number of candidates lost marks by failing to recognise basic vocabulary, such as numbers and comparatives. In discursive writing, more than half the candidates chose the first title. Although there were fewer irrelevant essays this year, there were some instances of grammatical inaccuracy in adjective endings, verb endings and word order.

### Italian

In listening, both items were well done and there was a significant number of higher pegged marks in discursive writing. However, some candidates demonstrated weakness in spelling and grammar.

### Spanish

Candidates performed reasonably well in the listening and overall performance in item 1 was slightly better than in item 2.

There were some very good essays in discursive writing, which demonstrated flair, appropriate use of idiomatic language and accurate expression of opinions. Questions 3 and 5 were the most popular choices. Overall, essays were fairly well structured and written in paragraphs. Candidates generally

achieved good results when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer and when their essays were relevant to the question.

However, some candidates did not address the question fully and relied instead on using learned material or on an irrelevant essay. Some candidates adopted a personal response approach and therefore struggled to sustain the level of sophistication required at Advanced Higher.

There were some issues with basic grammar such as errors in adjectival agreement; inappropriate use of infinitives; inability to conjugate verbs; missing articles and prepositions; unidiomatic translation from English. Essays, which were repetitive, rather achieved better than a borderline pass.

## **Portfolio**

### **Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)**

Candidate performance improved this year with some outstanding portfolios being submitted.

Candidates who selected an appropriate essay title performed best, particularly those who had chosen a literary text as their focus. However, selecting an appropriate title remains problematic for many candidates. Too many candidates had poorly worded titles or titles that were too vague or overcomplicated. Some candidates offered little in the way of analysis and simply retold the story of the text/film they had chosen to study.

The weaker performances were those where candidates were descriptive, rather than critical and analytical. This was often the result of a poor choice of essay title. Some candidates had not proofread their work effectively.

### **French**

There were a number of new literary texts chosen for the portfolio this year. Candidate response showed increased confidence in terms of type of essay titles used. Candidates performed best when tackling an essay title, which encouraged a critical, analytical approach. Most candidates adhered to the word count and there were few issues regarding bibliographies. However, candidates were less successful where they attempted essays which were too wide in scope, or where titles did not encourage a critical or analytical approach.

Very few candidates attempted a language in work portfolio. Where the approach was more similar to the study of a background topic, candidates tended to fare poorly.

Some candidates displayed a poor quality of written English. Others adopted an inappropriate informal and colloquial tone, which had a negative impact on candidate response.

### **Gaelic**

Most candidates performed well in the portfolio. Most were of a good standard but many of the portfolio essays did not contain sufficient analysis.

### **German**

Candidates performed slightly better in the portfolio than previously. There was an increasing number of more modern texts, but inappropriate essay titles disadvantaged some candidates.

### **Italian**

The portfolio was generally well done. There was a range of new texts and topics and candidates presented some interesting and well-devised titles. Many candidates took great care over presentation, ensuring that bibliographies and notes were well organised and integrated. In many cases, the essay title had been formulated with care in order to ensure adequate depth of treatment. However, some essay titles were unimaginative and generic which led to general responses lacking depth. Bibliographies were sometimes short and vague.

## Spanish

Presentation of portfolio work was good overall, although average scores were down on last year. The best essays were those that had a question/title which genuinely led candidates to adopt an analytical approach or allowed for two sides of an argument to be developed.

Essays that stood out were well structured, displayed a good level of English, and provided accurate and justified quotation from the text/screenplay which supported the arguments being presented. No candidates incurred a penalty for exceeding the word limit or failing to produce a bibliography, although some bibliographies were sparse and unsophisticated.

Many candidates had essay titles that were too vague, wordy or over-complicated.

Historical or media essays were inclined to be more informative and less investigative.

A significant number of candidates do not proofread their work or use appropriate, formal English.

Those candidates who use the third person tended to write a better critical evaluation of the subject matter.

## Talking

### Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

In the performance of talking, the vast majority of candidates had been well prepared and performance was very good with most candidates achieving full marks. They often performed strongly where an informative STL form had been received by the Visiting Assessor. However, some candidates still have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material and some were over-prepared which resulted in lack of spontaneity.

### French

Candidates were well prepared for the performance of talking and there were a number of outstanding performances, which achieved full marks. It is important that candidates take the time to complete the STL form carefully to allow for sufficient scope for the development of a spontaneous conversation with the visiting assessor. Some performances were affected because the STL forms had been either very sparsely completed or outlined specific questions designed to script the conversation.

### Gaelic

In talking, most candidates did well and there were some very good examples of candidates who were able to sustain detailed discussions using complex and sophisticated language. However, some candidates did not cope with the demands of the performance at this level and were unable to sustain the discussion. Candidates should not rely too much on pre-learned material.

### German

In talking, candidates were well prepared and confident and were able to talk about the themes and topics they had noted on the STL form. Candidates should avoid simply reciting learned material.

### Italian

Most candidates were well prepared for the performance of talking. In some cases, candidates relied heavily on pre-learned material and were not able to improvise. Some performances lacked depth and appropriate understanding of critical issues.

### Spanish

Candidates did very well in the performance of talking with the majority scoring 30 or more.

Overall, candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many appeared motivated to do well, made good use of learned material, were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal

responses, and incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation. However, some candidates still have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material to cope with questions they are asked. Some were unable to respond to topics listed on their STL form and found it challenging to sustain the discussion.

## Advice to Centres

### General

- Centres should encourage teachers to work with other modern languages colleagues/ departments to share best practice
- Centres should share detailed marking instructions, pegged-mark and performance descriptors, course reports and appropriate SQA documentation with candidates, including Understanding Standards materials.
- Candidates should be reminded that access to a suitable dictionary for this level is crucial.
- Candidates should be reminded that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure they do not lose marks.

### Reading/Translation

- Candidates should ensure that they pay attention to the number of marks for each question and answer the comprehension questions succinctly with relevant detail. Candidates should avoid the temptation to translate chunks of language.
- Candidates should be advised to answer the questions in the order in which they come and should not be tempted to start with the translation or the overall purpose question.
- Candidates should divide time equally between the comprehension questions, the overall purpose question and the translation.
- Candidates should be reminded of the importance of how they express answers to the comprehension questions in order to ensure the standard of English is appropriate
- Centres should ensure candidates develop dictionary skills, particularly for translation, so that they choose the meaning that best fits the context.
- For the overall purpose question, centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the text and not just provide factual information; repeat answers to the comprehension questions; or translate large parts of the text
- Answers to the overall purpose question should provide a balance between identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques used. Answers should be well structured and quotations should be appropriate and relevant.
- More attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, ways of translating idiomatic phrases. Care should be taken with recognising tenses and translating them accurately.
- Candidates should be reminded that information from the translation section should not be included in answers to the comprehension questions.
- In the translation, candidates should also check carefully for accuracy and possible omissions, especially of single words, as these can often incur a penalty.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read and review their translation when they complete it, to ensure it makes sense in English.

## Listening and Discursive Writing

- Candidates should be encouraged to develop and practise listening skills by accessing materials on-line, especially short news items, and by being given opportunities to practise listening in class.
- Teachers are advised to use the target language in the classroom as much as possible
- Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible. They should try to avoid prejudging the content. They should pay close attention to numbers, dates and comparatives.
- Teachers should advise candidates on how they should use the time they have when looking at questions before they hear the recording and discuss strategies for note-taking
- Candidates should read the discursive writing title carefully and plan the essay to ensure their writing is relevant, appropriate and accurate
- Centres should encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully and to construct a relevant and personal response in which they may draw upon learned material – but this must be relevant to the essay title.
- Candidates should be encouraged to avoid high-frequency language and to adopt a strategy to incorporate sophisticated language appropriate to Advanced Higher level and to the subject matter of the essay.
- Candidates should be encouraged to build up word banks of phrases for use in their essays.
- Candidates should be reminded that accuracy is important in discursive writing. Candidates should proof read essays to check for basic errors in verb tenses and endings, adjectival agreement, genders, spelling and accents. Teachers should ensure that candidates have more detailed and frequent grammar input.
- In discursive writing, candidates must ensure that the statement is clearly addressed and that a conclusion is provided. Candidates should focus on structure and reveal their conclusions and personal opinions at the end of the essay and not the start of the essay.

## Portfolio

- Centres should note that the essay title is of crucial importance and should generate a discursive, evaluative approach.
- Essay titles should not be too contrived, vague, over-ambitious or incapable of being properly addressed within the prescribed word-limit.
- Centres should negotiate appropriate essay titles, not impose the same title for all candidates.
- Candidates should try to make their essay title as specific as possible and to research the area as deeply as possible. They should avoid inappropriate comparisons between works which do not share common themes, or choosing two very similar pieces of literature, as that will limit their ability to compare and contrast.
- Bibliographies should be of an appropriate level and should not be limited to the minimum number of entries specified.
- Candidates should be reminded that using Wikipedia or university notes provided by the teacher are not appropriate items for inclusion in the bibliography.
- Bibliographies should be presented in a professional and systematic format.
- Candidates should attempt to integrate material from sources into the portfolio essay.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have read the original text and not the English translation.
- The quality of many of the portfolio pieces would benefit from the inclusion of more quotations in the target language to support the arguments being developed. Translating these quotes into English should be avoided. Quotations from a literary texts or films or any other source, which are solely in English, could detract from the content and may even lead to the candidate being awarded 0.

- Centres should discuss the use of critical terminology with candidates to enable them to improve the quality of their expression in English.
- Candidates should be reminded to use formal, accurate English in their essays and maintain an objective tone. Careful attention should be paid to spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quoting from literary texts.

### Talking

- Centres should ensure that candidates provide an informative STL form to allow Visiting Assessors to prepare well in advance of the assessment.
- Centres should ensure that recording equipment is properly set up on the day of the Visiting Assessor's visit. External microphones should be used, if possible, to ensure recordings are of good quality.
- Centres should ensure that any notes used by the candidate are of an appropriate length.
- Centres should continue to train candidates in discussion techniques in the language to enable them to deal with questions that go beyond learned material.
- Centres should ensure that candidates do not rely too much on pre-learned material to avoid a tendency to deliver mini-speeches.
- Centres should sustain the good work in preparing candidates for this assessment, but should focus on grammatical accuracy, particularly with regard to use of verbs (especially the preterite and the perfect), gender of nouns, adjectival agreements and the subjunctive.
- Candidates should be encouraged to build up banks of phrases for use in their talk assessment
- Centres should ensure that candidates have opportunities to practise talking to be able to respond appropriately to the spontaneous nature of the conversation and to develop the natural element of interaction.