

Examiners' Report Summer 2007

GCE

GCE Chinese (8610/9610)

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AS Unit 1 (6261) – Reading and Writing

In this first year of the amended GCE syllabus, changes had been made on the assessment criteria of section 3, in which cultural references were no longer needed. Candidates were able to focus on making articulate their attitudes and opinions on some familiar matters regularly encountered in school and everyday life. This is believed to have increased the accessibility of the paper, and contributed to the average higher mark.

Section 1: Reading and Writing

All 3 questions worked well. They were well balanced with each consisting some sub-questions that were able to differentiate.

Passage 1

Q1 - The vast majority achieved full marks. Weak candidates were also able to earn marks on 2, 4, 6 and 7, showing reasonable ability to recognise and matching single lexical items of more basic levels (for example, university and teacher connected to further education and career; underground and vehicles connected to traffic; films and museum connected to entertainment; flu connected to health).

Q2 - again very well tackled; this question tested synonyms, and required greater attention to details or the task to negate other statements. Weak candidates were also able to score at least 1 out of the 3 marks available, most often C.

Passage 2

Q3 - was answered with a mixed degree of success and proved a good discriminator. Part (a) and (b) were meant to provide an accessible start, but on (a), more candidates than expected opted for the wrong answer 'not in text', which would suggest that they had not read the headline at the top.

Q4 - this question was answered well. Occasional problems occurred with part (a), which required candidates to extract and re-write details from a sentence of more sophisticated structure. A handful of candidates were not able to identify 飾物/饰物 as the object but wrote '追求時尚/追求时尚' and lost one mark.

Passage 3

Q5 - candidates in general achieved high marks on this question. Mistakes were only found occasionally when candidates confused '參加/参加' and '舉辦/举办' in (a) or '鎮江/镇江' and '中國/中国' in (d). Some misinterpreted '對中國有了認識 / 对中国有了认识' as '有更多' or '進一步/进一步' or '深刻' in (g). Neither of these answers could be credited. Examiners were disappointed that on (h), a sizeable number of candidates were not able to arrange the two key points into a simple proper sentence or phrase (國際慈善機構/国际慈善机构).

Section 2: Translation

Q6 - The question was in the main pleasingly done, with the second half more competently translated. This could be because the content, which was about a

foreign student explaining his reasons for working part-time as a family tutor, proved to be more familiar and predictable.

Certain items of vocabulary caused problems. A fair number of candidates misunderstood 外國留學生/外国留学生 as 'Chinese students who had studied abroad'. Some translated it as 'boarders'. A lot of candidates translated the notion of 越來越多/越来越多 as simply 'more' or 'a lot of'. Some candidates had difficulties finding the appropriate English words for '收入' and '工資/工资'. '口語/口语' and '唯一' were frequently omitted, which led to the meaning of the original sentences being distorted.

Again, like 'Shanghai' in last year's paper, some candidates were not able to give the correct transliteration of the Chinese capital 北京. Examiners were also bewildered when some candidates replaced David with other names such as Tom and Mr White.

Section 3: Continuous Writing

Q7 - candidates were asked to respond to a stimulus about their view on the choice of career, a topic and subject dear to many candidates' hearts. Although almost most candidates understood the requirements of the task, some rambled about various job-titles and allowed the first bullet point to take up too much of the letter. Candidates should try to identify the overall theme and the structural link among the bullets in order to organise the details sensibly. While in the main many candidates responded fully to the bullet points, and gave interesting responses, there was also evidence that some candidates, mainly native speakers, addressed the bullets in a perfunctory manner.

Lastly, a fair number of candidates failed to start and end their letter properly and appropriately. Some wrote '致' in front of the name (eg 致大明) at the opening greeting, showing a lack of genuine understanding of the function. Many at the end put the date before their own name. More training is clearly required to help candidates to understand the correct layout and presentation. Candidates are also advised to use or make up a proper name, and avoid the use of 某某 or 筆友/笔友.

A2 Unit 1 (6262) - Reading and Writing

Section 1: Reading and Writing

Passage 1

Total marks for this passage is 10. Almost all achieved 8 marks or above. There were few, if any, who were not able to respond to question 1, 2, 3 and 5 correctly. Question 4 and 6 proved a good discriminator. A noticeable small number of candidates did not respond to the first part of question 4 (what is similar), either because of a lack of comprehension and unable to recognise '大多' as meaning both boys and girls, or because of a lack of adequate reading of the question. On question 6, the vast majority correctly recognised '儲蓄觀念強/储蓄观念强' as one of the reasons. However, about half of the candidates offered 'need to do housework for their money' as the other reason, ignoring the detail that the same applied to children of Guangzhou. This was evidence of insufficient reading of the text.

Passage 2

Candidates clearly appreciated the accessibility of this passage. There were very few really weak attempts. It could also be that more candidates were aware of the vocabulary support provided in passage one.

There were certain points that caused problems. 'In Britain' became 'British'. 'Washing up' was translated as 'laundry'. Many did not know the Chinese equivalent for 'vacuuming' or did not know how to write '塵/' 尘'. 'Spend all the money in the week that they get it' was mistranslated as 'spend all money in one week'. In some cases, this sentence was misunderstood as 'spend all the money on sweets and chocolates'.

Marks were also lost due to inattention to detail; for example, not taking note of the punctuation 'dash' (in the first paragraph), leaving out the notion of 'almost', 'over' and 'about' (in the second paragraph) and 'however' (in the third paragraph).

Candidates should be trained to pay close attention. They should also be reminded to take advantage of the vocabulary support.

Section 2: Research-based essay

Candidates are required to write a piece of essay in Chinese on a topic chosen from the prescribed list of topics and texts. The piece of essay should be between 500 - 1000 characters in length. Candidates are expected to choose and research their own individual topics, devise the title for the essay and provide a plan together with a list of sources and bibliography.

Rationale

It is believed that candidates, both learners and native-speakers, will benefit from the introduction of research-based essay. The question and answer type of topics and texts was found unrealistic for learners. In the process of preparing the essay, candidates are expected to go through some exercises in reading, thinking and writing. Candidates work from the first draft to the final version and this process involves continuously some useful practices in writing. This kind of exercise and practice is understood to be essential for learning a language.

All subjects alike require and involve memorization to certain extent during the process of learning. Candidates pre-learning their own work should not be dismissed as meaningless and sheer memorization. All candidates had to pre-learn something related to the chosen topics in order to respond to the questions set for them under the previous question-and-answer-type topics and texts. But to present it in an organised way with relevance to the question asked proved to be too demanding for learners. Even native speakers might have the problem of discovering the question set not the part they emphasised during the year's classroom learning. The stress on candidates was understandable. It is genuinely hope that the introduction of research-based essay will help to solve or reduce some of these problems; and to give candidates, both learners and native speakers, more meaningful support. That is the reason why plagiarism is totally unacceptable.

Candidate performances

In this first year of the introduction of research-based essay, there was some really good work that heartened and impressed examiners. However, there was also a sizeable number of candidates who treated the task in a perfunctory manner. The overall average mark on this section had only risen very slightly compared to last year. Examiners could not hide their disappointment that a significant number of pieces of essay produced were sub-standard. There was also evidence of some wholesale copying of material. These candidates did not seem to have benefited from the whole exercise regarding the learning of knowledge.

Plan

Only a limited few seemed to have given regard to the production of a plan. Examiners were aware of the fact that some candidates and centres did not realise the change and therefore had taken a sympathetic approach.

A good essay begins with a good plan. Candidates are reminded that the plan also contributes to the awarding of marks for development and organisation. The plan must be more than single words for each point but not too long. It should not exceed 100 characters overall.

Bibliography and sources

An even greater number of candidates did not provide the sources consulted. For those who did, many only gave an address of one website. First, how could an essay that meant to be evaluative and analytical rely on only one source? Second, an address of one website with no full details of the article consulted and its author is not valid.

Candidates are advised to attach the plan form to the back of the answer book. It should **not** be put on top of the front cover of the answer book.

Titles

Candidates must devise a title of the essay. Many candidates did not give a title.

Some simply copied a sub-topic or the name of the literary text from the specification or the question booklet. For example:

儒家學說; 王蒙說客盈門; 南海十三郎; 黃河;
文化大革命; 上海在環境、經濟、城市發展規劃或文化等方面的現狀與問題
儒家学说; 王蒙说客盈门; 南海十三郎; 黄河;
文化大革命; 上海在环境、经济、城市发展规划或文化等方面的现状与问题

They were not an appropriate title.

For those who had given a title, a lot of the titles were inappropriate and unhelpful. They either lacked focus or lacked an evaluative slant. For example

台北的認識和了解 / 台北的认识和了解
讀後感/读后感

A few gave titles that were not related to any of the sub-topics prescribed. This mostly happened in the topic area of history.

Candidates are reminded that they should write the same title twice - one on the space provided in the plan form and repeat it in the answer book before they begin writing their essay.

Topics and Texts

History

A noticeable increase of number of candidates chose this area of study. However, the result was disappointing and there was evidence that some candidates viewed it as an 'easy' target. These candidates very often relied on one and only one school text book. There was no evidence showing that research had been done at all. Some candidates might find their pieces of essay not being awarded good marks because they had devised a title that was outside the prescribed list. For example,

孫中山對歷史的影響是什麼? / 孙中山对历史的影响是什么?

Which sub-topics is this title related to? Some marks might be awarded if some details were found to have related to the warlord period.

周恩來為了新中國的發展做了哪些貢獻? 他為什麼起了重要作用?
周恩来为了新中国的发展做了哪些贡献? 他为什么起了重要作用?

Again this is problematic. A more successful and appropriate title would have to look at his influence or action in Cultural Revolution or the great leap forward.

Geography

Most of the essays produced were descriptive, largely resembling the work produced by an official tourism board. A lot of candidates used too much space in their essay rambling about the history of either the city or the river, which was unnecessary and unhelpful. Many seemed unaware that it was essential to choose an issue that involved one or more of the features listed under the topic of cities. There was a typo error in both the specification and the question paper. It should read as 'developmental or cultural features' not 'and'. The team responsible for the production of the specification apologise for the mistake.

Society

Festivals - Most of the pieces were overly detailed about the tales and legends with little understanding of the implication of the story and events mentioned. Some of the details candidates taken from website contained errors.

Women issues - This did not seem to have improved much from previous years. The answers remained too general with no reference to Chinese society.

Confucianism and Taoism - Considering contrasting views or question commonplace would contribute to a successful essay. However, candidates chose this two topics showed no intention to do that. Instead, points given were usually naive and over simplified.

Films

Mostly take the approach of re-telling the stories which was completely inappropriate.

Literary texts

There were some good works but still a lot of candidates engaged in the exercise of telling stories indiscriminately. A lot of candidates used '讀後感/读后感'. Candidates are advised to make specific the issue(s) they are to discuss in the title.

Word Count

The vast majority were able to adhere to the word count.

The role of the teacher

It seemed to the examiners that some teachers did not realise that they could and should give advice and support to the candidates from the stage the candidate devised his/her title. Teacher could encourage and support them by posing short questions upon the materials they collected and the content they prepared at various stages. Teacher could also comment on some of the language problems, if any. This is how candidates actually learn and improve, in both knowledge and language, through the study of research-based essay.

Conclusion

As explained at the beginning, the introduction of research-based essay aims to provide a more realistic and effective learning environment for candidates, and hope to achieve at the end a raise of standard. With the support of teachers and centres, we should be able to achieve this aim – children are able to learn something through this exercise.

Statistics

Unit 1 (6261) Reading and Writing

| Grade | Max. Mark | A | B | C | D | E |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Raw boundary mark | 100 | 81 | 68 | 55 | 42 | 30 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 300 | 240 | 210 | 180 | 150 | 120 |

Unit 2 (6262) Reading and Writing; Topics and Texts

| Grade | Max. Mark | A | B | C | D | E |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Raw boundary mark | 100 | 71 | 62 | 54 | 46 | 38 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 300 | 240 | 210 | 180 | 150 | 120 |

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