

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

JUNE 2006

FRENCH

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FRENCH

GENERAL AND BASIC PROFICIENCY EXAMINATIONS

MAY/JUNE 2006

GENERAL COMMENTS

There were improved levels of performance in both proficiencies in which this subject was offered. Many candidates displayed acceptable to good levels of linguistic competence, spontaneity, and grammatical accuracy. Teachers are encouraged to continue exposing students to real-life situations, finding ways to be innovative in making the learning of the difficult aspects of the language enjoyable.

DETAILED COMMENTS

General and Basic Proficiencies

Paper 1 – Multiple Choice

This paper, comprising two sections, tested candidates' ability to listen to and understand a number of aural items in the target language and to read and understand a number of written items. Both sections of the paper require candidates to have sufficient mastery of essential grammar and vocabulary. The good performance at both the General and Basic Proficiencies mirrored the performance in previous years.

General Proficiency

Paper 02 – Free Response

Section I – Directed Situations

This section tested candidates' ability to respond in French to a series of situations described in English and requiring written responses.

The majority of candidates attempted to answer most of the questions. Even the weaker candidates were therefore able to gain between 5 and 9 marks, as a result. Many candidates scored between 13 and 16 marks. The top-scoring candidates gained between 21 and 25 marks.

All the situations drew on functions/notions and settings and topics (see the syllabus) that could be within the experience of a 16-year-old candidate. Five of the directed situations were common to the Basic and General Proficiencies, while five were addressed solely to the General Proficiency candidate.

Points to watch

- Candidates must read each situation carefully paying close attention to what is required by the situation.
- Candidates are reminded to number the situations as on the question paper, even if they answer the situations in random order.
- Candidates are STRONGLY ADVISED not to write each situation on a new page.

* An asterisk (*) indicates incorrect form, spelling or structure.

The following table represents a graphic description of the functions/notions as they relate to the settings and topics for each situation.

SITUATION	FUNCTION/NOTION	SETTING & TOPICS
1	Friendly request; time and place	Public place
2	Friendly request; urgency	Home
3	Asking questions: identifying someone	Email to a friend
4	Not working (mechanical object)	Notice in a public place
5	Offering congratulations; expressing a wish	Letter/note
6	Expressing lateness; supplying a cause for being late	School
7	Expressing prohibition + person/group	Notice in a public place
8	Expressing location in a past context: future + time	Home
9	Expressing a reminder; chore	Home
10	Expressing change of mind: proposing an alternative activity	Home

Situation 1

Candidates were expected to supply two elements in their answer: one expressing the friendly request, the second stating place and time. Many candidates were able to produce expressions such as “*rencontre-moi; retrouve-moi; cherche-moi; viens me chercher* etc.” The vocabulary item “*aéroport*” was misspelt by many candidates. There is still inconsistent use of “*tu*” and “*vous*”. Even those candidates who correctly used “*tu*” to address their pen-friend, sometimes concluded their request with the polite form “*s’il vous plaît*” instead of the familiar “*s’il te plaît*”.

Situation 2

Many candidates used “*téléphoner*” and “*appeler*” appropriately to convey “get in touch with”. However, a number of candidates omitted the preposition “*à*” after “*téléphoner*”. “*Aussitôt que possible*” and “*le plus tôt possible*” were supplied by many candidates. Surprisingly a number of candidates who opted to use “*maintenant*” to express immediacy and urgency were unable to produce the correct spelling of this high frequency word.

Situation 3

This item revealed that the formation of questions continues to pose problems to many candidates. A very common mistake was the rendering of who by “*Où?*” instead of “*Qui?*” A suitable answer would have been, “*Qui est le garçon aux lunettes?/Qui est la fille à côté de toi?*”

Situation 4

A fair number of candidates produced correct expressions to indicate that a mechanical object was not working. They tended however to stumble when it came to saying “take the stairs”.

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Situation 5

Candidates produced many interesting answers in response to this stimulus. Many candidates supplied an appropriate expression for congratulations—although in some instances “*félicitations*” was incorrectly spelt. Although the more obvious answer was congratulations + wish relating to the cousin’s endeavours, for example, “*Félicitations d’avoir gagné le prix et bon séjour.*” those candidates who supplied a wish relating to themselves e.g. *Achète-moi ___ à Paris* were not penalized for inappropriacy. A simple but correct and fully appropriate “*Je suis contente pour toi, bonnes vacances et bonne chance*” earned full marks.

Situation 6

In situation 6, proficient candidates produced answers such as the following “*Ma fille va être en retard parce qu’elle aura un rendez-vous demain chez la dentiste.*” Less proficient candidates had difficulty with **retard* vs. *être en retard*; the formation of the future tense; the vocabulary item “appointment” and so on.

Situation 7

Recently, candidates have demonstrated a very good command of the structure *interdit/défense de + infinitive*. Unfortunately, too few candidates seemed able to indicate interdiction/prohibition with a person – “*interdit à + person*”.

Situation 8

Situation 8 required candidates to demonstrate a mastery of tenses and time, expressing where they had gone and when they would be back. Candidates had difficulty both in producing an appropriate past tense (formation, conjugation and so on) and the future tense.

Situation 9

Many candidates did not include the element of reminder, e.g. *n’oublie pas de +* The most common chore was do the dishes “*faire la vaisselle*” (often incorrectly rendered by *faire la *vaiselle*).

Situation 10

A change of mind/plans, a frequently tested item often rendered by the use of *ne...plus* was one element in situation 10. Candidates who expressed the content in many creative ways were not penalized for the non-use of *ne...plus*.

Section II—Letter/Dialogue/Composition

This section tested candidates’ ability to produce a piece of French of about 130-150 words based on an outline given in English.

The answers in Section II ranged from excellent to poor. There were fewer ‘no responses’ recorded in this year’s scripts.

The letter was the most popular item. A number of very proficient candidates did the composition, while the dialogue continued to be the item of choice of some less proficient candidates. Each selection required candidates to produce vocabulary appropriate to the situation described.

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The recurring difficulty in the correct and sustained use of the appropriate second person pronoun requires teachers' urgent attention. Far too many candidates are using "tu" and "vous" to refer to the same person. Sometimes even very proficient candidates are inconsistent and use the correct address form e.g. *tu* in writing to a pen-friend, but then *err* in their choice of possessive adjectives, i.e. using "votre/vos" when "ton/ta/tes" are required; using "*s'il vous plaît*" instead of "*s'il te plaît*" and so on.

The following points must again be emphasized

- Candidates must be reminded to obey the limit of 130-150 Words. This warning needs to be addressed to all candidates, more and less proficient, since the practice of going beyond the word limit is very widespread. It is important that candidates plan their answers, making sure to pay attention to the outline given, and above all, making sure not to exceed the stipulated number of words. When candidates do not obey the word limit, they often have little time or space to develop the last element of their selection, within the 130-150 word limit. The candidate who only develops three out of the four elements given is therefore penalized.
- Candidates need to develop the habit of proofreading their written work. Frequent spelling errors and omissions could be avoided with just a little more care.
- Candidates must bear in mind the most common mistakes found at this level and try very hard to eliminate them from their writing.

Comments On Each Option

Letter

Evidently, many of those who chose the letter felt very comfortable talking about themselves and their likes and dislikes. While many candidates exhibited a high degree of proficiency, the occasional *"*mon nom s'appelle est*" was unfortunately still present in the scripts of the weaker candidates.

Once beyond the core personal information, candidates had varying degrees of success in forming questions; expressing anticipation and meeting the other structural and lexical demands of the item. Thus, while the opening paragraph was fair to excellent in most cases, candidates' deficiencies became very apparent in paragraphs two to four.

The formatting of the letter, specifically in the use of appropriate endings and beginnings, is still poorly handled by many candidates. While some candidates produced the correct date and address including all six elements required, for example, St. John's, *le 2 juin 2006*, too many still produced addresses that ran for five or six lines in imitation of the English formatting.

Dialogue

Some good dialogues, showing appropriate and correct usage were in marked contrast to the many that tended to flounder around with an exchange of greetings and very low level simple questions. Candidates must be reminded that the content of the dialogue is as important as the content of either of the two other free response items. Choosing the dialogue is not an excuse to say very little in a colloquial way.

Composition

The composition was the least popular selection this year. Yet, in a number of cases it was very well done and many proficient candidates produced rich, idiomatic writing.

The following is an example of an excellent composition:

* An asterisk (*) indicates incorrect form, spelling or structure.

C'était les vacances de Noël et, comme il faisait beau, mes voisins ont décidé de passer quelques jours au bord de la mer. Malheureusement, ils ne pouvaient pas emmener leurs chiens, Bonnie et Clyde. J'ai donc proposé de les garder, puisque j'adore les chiens, et mes voisins ont accepté de bon coeur.

Tout s'est bien passé les deux premiers jours. Par contre, le troisième jour, je n'arrivais pas à trouver Clyde. Quelle horreur! J'étais folle d'inquiétude et j'ai commencé à pleurer.

Sans perdre de temps, j'ai enfourché ma bicyclette et je suis sortie pour essayer de retrouver le chien. Mais, aucune chance. Je ne l'ai trouvé nulle part. Je suis rentrée chez moi accablée.

Et là, quelle surprise! Clyde était là, assis devant la porte. Quel bonheur! Quand les voisins sont rentrés de vacances, je ne leur ai rien dit, et ils m'ont félicitée d'avoir si bien gardé leurs chiens.

Section III - Reading Comprehension

This section tested candidates' ability to read and comprehend a short passage in the target language. The questions on the passage and the candidates' answers were in English.

The passage "The Family Computer" centred on a very familiar topic and encouraged candidates to draw on their "world" knowledge. Candidates need to be sensitized to the fact that although it is an excellent strategy to draw on one's world knowledge in a comprehension exercise, they must **confirm** their understanding by carefully deciphering the target language text.

Teachers should train their students to use a mixture of top-down strategies (using their general or world knowledge) and bottom-up strategies (paying close attention to the vocabulary and structure of the target language), since this combination of strategies is thought to be the best route to understanding texts. The reading skill is one that will be of great value to the "Internet generation" and so all opportunities must be taken to practise successful reading across the curriculum, including in the foreign language classroom.

Sometimes it appeared that candidates who may have understood the texts were hampered either in their English language proficiency or in their inability to respond clearly to the information sought by the questions. The passages used for testing comprehension are very concise texts that are generally between 100 and 150 words. There is therefore little room for redundancy with this restricted content. It would perhaps be helpful to give students practise in identifying the key words or elements in the questions, even before attempting to look for the correct answers. Candidates who are trained in this manner will perhaps be less inclined to "chunk" the information in the wrong way when answering the questions, introducing surplus and irrelevant information in one answer to the detriment of a subsequent answer, which in fact requires that information.

The following answers taken from candidates' scripts all gained full marks:

1. Many computers are sold at Christmas time because it is the preferred gift in many families.
2. Parents choose this gift for their children as they believe it would help them with their schoolwork.
3. Computers are so widespread in the working world because everyone, from bosses and office workers to farmers, needs them.
4. They use them as sophisticated typewriters.
5. Children like to use educational software because it is fun.
6. Reading on the computer is more interesting as it is more interactive due to the pictures, videos and music by which it is accompanied.
7. It is hard for the average family to afford a computer due to all the additional hardware that is needed, such as a printer, CD and DVD drives and CD burners.

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Section IV—Expanded Paragraph

This section tested candidates' ability to use written cues to produce a continuous and coherent paragraph of 80-100 words.

The performance of candidates in this section varied from fair to excellent. Some candidates produced paragraphs written in a logical manner. They used all the cues given and marked transitions with suitable link words. They also used appropriate vocabulary and idioms and showed mastery in the use of the structures they chose.

Many of the problems noted for the longer free response item in Section II re-appeared here, e.g. poor construction of the passé composé, poor command of tenses, even difficulty with some fundamental grammatical elements like subject pronouns and the French possessive. This lack of mastery is in sharp contrast to the work produced by more proficient candidates who used appropriate tense markers and a good range of idiomatic expressions.

Points to watch:

- Candidates must be careful to keep within the length stipulated (80-100 words) for the expanded paragraph. Candidates must not write an introduction to their paragraph, before beginning to use the cues, as they squander in this way, some of the words at their disposal. Candidates who do this find themselves unable to include all the cues, because of their long preamble, and are penalized for failing to complete their paragraph or include all the clues within the stipulated length.
- Candidates must try not to introduce unnecessary errors into their work by copying carelessly words that have been supplied to them in the cues.

The following is an example of a good extended paragraph:

*Vendredi dernier, c'était l'anniversaire de Pierre. Il avait 16 ans. Pour son anniversaire il a choisi d'aller au cinéma avec son copain Guillaume pour regarder un film d'action: Astérix. Quand il est rentré à la maison après * bien s'amuser, il a vu plusieurs voitures devant sa maison et il n'a rien entendu. Ensuite, Pierre est entré dans le salon et a eu la surprise de sa vie. Ses parents et ses amis étaient là en train d'écouter de la musique. Quand ils ont vu que Pierre *avait entré * la chambre, ils ont crié "Bon anniversaire, Pierre!"*

Basic Proficiency

Paper 02 - Free Response

Section I - Directed Situations

This section tested candidates' ability to respond in French to a series of situations described in English and requiring written responses.

The majority of candidates attempted to answer most of the questions. The more proficient candidates earned between 8 and 14 marks. There were, however, a few scripts where candidates scored between 0 and 1 mark.

* An asterisk (*) indicates incorrect form, spelling or structure.

All the situations drew on functions/notions and settings and topics that could be within the experience of a 16-year-old candidate. Five of the directed situations were common to both proficiencies; while five were addressed solely to the Basic Proficiency candidate.

The majority of candidates attempted to respond to nearly all the situations, although with varying degrees of success.

Points to watch

- Candidates must read each situation carefully paying close attention to what is required by the situation.
- Candidates are reminded to number the situations as on the question paper, even if they answer the situations in random order.
- Candidates are STRONGLY ADVISED not to write each situation on a new page.

The following table represents a graphic description of the functions/notions as they relate to the settings and topics for each situation.

SITUATION	FUNCTION/NOTION	SETTING & TOPICS
1	Ordering food and drink	In a café
2	Expressing closure	Notice in a public place
3	Inviting someone	Letter to pen pal
4	Expressing thanks and supplying a reason for liking a gift	Letter/note
5	Describing hobby	At school
6	Friendly request; time and place	Public place
7	Friendly request; urgency	Home
8	Asking questions: identifying someone	Email to a friend
9	Not working (mechanical object)	Notice in a public place
10	Offering congratulations; expressing a wish	Letter/note

Situation 1

This situation required two elements: something to eat and drink. A suitable answer was, “*Un omelette au fromage et un jus d’orange s’il vous plaît.*”

Situation 2

The candidate who wrote “**La musée fermera demain après-midi samedi le 14 janvier*” only attracted a penalty for the gender of *musée*.

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Situation 3

The candidate who wrote “*Je t’invite *passer * ton vacance avec moi*” was penalized for the omission of the preposition after inviter and the rendering of vacation by a masculine singular instead of a feminine plural.”

Situation 4

Most candidates were able to produce sentences of the type, “*Merci beaucoup pour le cadeaux, il est très beau.*”

Situation 5

This situation was fairly well done by many candidates. A good response was, “*La lecture est très *interessante*”. A number of candidates lost marks because they merely stated what their hobbies were.

Situations 6

“*Ramasse-moi à l’aéroport à trois heures, s’il te plaît*” was a commendable answer.

Situation 7

This situation was quite well done. Most candidates who lost marks did so because the element of urgency was omitted or inadequately expressed.

Situation 8

A good response here and well within the reach of the Basic candidate would have been, “*Quel âge a la fille dans la photo?*”

Situation 9

This question was not well done. Vocabulary seemed the biggest obstacle for many candidates who routinely used ‘*travailler*’ instead of expressions such as, “*ne marche pas*”/“*ne fonctionne pas*”/“*hors service*”.

Situation 10

Many candidates produced appropriate responses to this situation. The major difficulty lay in the correct spelling of the vocabulary items.

Section II - Completion of Form or Questionnaire

This section tested candidates’ ability to complete a short questionnaire in the target language.

This question was generally well done. Many candidates scored full marks. A large majority gained 7 to 9 marks.

It was pleasing to note the number of candidates who produced the correct responses to *nom* and *prénom* this year. However, some candidates did not seem to know that Grenada is located in the Caribbean and so lost marks in items 5 and 6.

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Section III – Gapped Passage

This section tested candidates' ability to supply 10 lexical or grammatical items to complete a short passage in the target language.

A small number of candidates earned full marks and many scored between 5 and 8 marks. A number of candidates struggled with items 2, 6, 7, 8 and 10 and thus only averaged about 3 marks.

Bonjour Claudette

Comment vas-tu? Moi, je suis de bonne santé, ainsi que ma famille. Alors, les grandes vacances s'approchent. Je voudrais passer une semaine en Martinique. Que veux-tu faire? Ecris-moi bientôt. Grosses bises à toute la famille.

Simone

Section IV - Reading Comprehension

The performance in this question was good on the whole. A few candidates scored full marks. Many others scored between 8 and 14. The following answers would have gained the candidate full marks.

Question 1

She is not at school because of the one week mid-term break.

Question 2

She normally goes to her grandparents' home in the country.

Question 3

She finds it noisy.

Question 4

Her parents are at home.

Question 5

Her older brother will be there as well.

Question 6

He is funny.

Question 7

They often play cards together.

Question 8

She is going to miss her grandmother's stories.

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Question 9

She likes to talk about the good old days.

Question 10

Granddad likes to go walking with her in the little wood near their home.

Paper 03 – Oral Examination

Basic and General Proficiencies

This paper tested candidates' ability a) to read aloud a short passage in the target language; b) to produce appropriate responses in the target language in a number of simulations; and c) to respond in the target language to general questions based on 4 out of 6 topics indicated in the syllabus.

Performance in the oral examination ranged from excellent to poor, with a number of candidates scoring full marks in this paper.

Reading

At both proficiency levels, candidates' performance in reading demonstrated their level of comfort and familiarity with the target language. The oral examiners found that while some candidates read fluently, with mostly correct pronunciation, good expression and suitable intonation, many seemed not to understand what they were reading. Additionally, examiners commented on a) the pronunciation of the ending of verb forms in the third person plural b) the lack of liaisons in places where these were necessary and c) anglicization of certain French words.

Situations

In this part of the oral paper, examiners rated candidates' performance as excellent to unsatisfactory. Oral examiners felt that there were too many instances of candidates simply responding '*Je ne sais pas*' or '*Je ne comprends pas*' without making any attempt to provide an answer.

Conversation

Here again, performance ranged from excellent to unsatisfactory. A number of examiners commented on the spontaneity of candidates and said that the exam felt like a "real conversation". This statement often indicated that candidates spoke with confidence, used good vocabulary and found ways to elaborate on their answers even with closed questions.

General Comments

Teachers must remind their students that the oral examination is not a test of content information but a test of skill and their opportunity to show off their ability to communicate on a restricted number of topics in the target language.

Students who are comfortable speaking French bring a level of confidence to the oral examination and acquit themselves quite well. The oral examiners often report that the candidates' performance seems a reflection of the extent of their preparation. Thus while the examination caters to a range of mastery from less proficient to more proficient candidates, there is a strong feeling expressed by oral examiners as by their counterparts in the written examinations, that even the weaker candidates could perform better with more practice.

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