

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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

JUNE 2004

FRENCH

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FRENCH

GENERAL AND BASIC PROFICIENCY EXAMINATIONS MAY / JUNE 2004

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

This paper, comprising two sections, tested candidates' ability to listen to and understand a number of aural items in the target language as well as to read and understand a number of written items. Both sections require candidates to have sufficient mastery of essential grammar and vocabulary. This year, the performance at the General Proficiency level was good, whereas at the Basic Proficiency level it was satisfactory.

DETAILED COMMENTS

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 requiring written responses.

This section was well done, with the majority of candidates scoring between 13 marks and the maximum 25 marks.

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

Points to watch

- Although this practice was not as prevalent as in previous years, some candidates still treat this item as a mini-letter requiring opening and closing greetings. This should be discouraged.
- Candidates should not try to produce literal translations. Instead, they should read each situation carefully to identify the essential elements to which they should respond.
- Candidates who do not respect the rubric in terms of length often go on to make additional errors. These errors would have been avoided if they had produced a single sentence for each situation as was required.
- Candidates are reminded to number the situations as on the question paper, even if they answer the questions in a random order.
- CANDIDATES MUST NOT WRITE EACH SITUATION ON A SEPARATE PAGE.

All situations should be written, as far as possible on a single page, since this is a single question with several elements. Scripts from one centre suggest that candidates were advised to the contrary in the examination room.

* An asterisk (*) indicates wrong 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	FUNCTIONS/NOTIONS	SETTINGS/TOPICS
1.	giving information; reason	note/school
2.	interdiction	school
3.	giving reasons	application form
4.	expressing command; urgency	note/home
5.	accepting invitation; specifying drink	restaurant
6.	expressing intention	note
7.	expressing change of plan; reason	home
8.	expressing success; desire	family
9.	giving information	store
10.	giving information; excuse	home/school

Situation 1

Candidates were expected to supply two elements in their answers; one giving information, and the other giving a reason. This situation was generally well managed, for example:

Je ne viendrai pas à l'école aujourd'hui parce que je suis malade.

Some candidates however experienced some difficulty with the 'future' tense and/or the negation.

Situation 2

A significant number of candidates did not handle the interdiction well and the verb **boire** was often misspelt or in some cases rejected in favour of the noun.

***Non mange et boisson dans ici.**

Situation 3

This situation was generally well done. Several candidates however could not find two appropriate adjectives to fulfil the requirements, resulting in answers such as:

Il est facile et *bien

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

Situation 4

This situation was generally well done. Some candidates however focused on the mother's anger as an essential element: ***je ne suis pas satisfait avec toi; *pas laisse-moi revenir ...** Others did not assess the sense of immediacy, thus gaining only a partial mark.

Situation 5

In this situation, a significant number of candidates seemed to substitute their 'real life' values for the detail given and asked for food rather than drink. It was however quite well done.

Situation 6

Most problems in this situation concerned the use of **visiter** instead of **rendre visite à**, and the rendering of the future tense in stating the intention to visit again. Many candidates lost marks, too, in stating the non-essential element that they were visiting in the aunt's absence.

Situation 7

The rendering of the negative of **pouvoir** as well as the two-verb pattern presented some difficulty here. There was also a problem with the rendering of 'the following day': ***le prochain jour; *l'après jour**. The situation was however usually well managed.

Situation 8

Many candidates used the verb **passer** to render pass an exam, and too many had difficulty with the word **examen**. There were however a pleasing number using expressions such as: **recevoir de bonnes notes; être reçu à; réussir à**. Some candidates experienced some difficulty with the second part of this situation as they seemed to try a literal translation of the English for example ***je veux venir chez vous pour Noël**.

Situation 9

This situation presented candidates with the greatest challenge of all, since many of them did not know the word **soldes (en solde)**. Many resorted to paraphrases with varying degrees of success: ***Tous les choses doivent aller! *Grand sale!** etc. There were however some good responses, for example:

**Moins 50% sur tous les vêtements dans le magasin!
Tous les vêtements en solde!**

Situation 10

The main difficulty encountered here involved the rendering of the negative of the 'passé composé', for example ***Elle ne peut fini pas**, and the verb **déménager** which many candidates did not seem to know. There were however some good answers. For example:

Monsieur Nicolas, je regrette mais nous avons déménagé pendant le week-end et alors, Rachel n'a pas pu faire tous ses devoirs.

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Section II – Letter/Dialogue/Composition

This section tested candidates' ability to produce in French about 130 – 150 words based on an outline given in English.

This year there was a relatively even distribution of the choice between the letter, dialogue and composition. There was a marked improvement in the quality of the answers to this section although a great number of candidates wrote the complete answer in English or offered a response so garbled that it could only be deemed incomprehensible.

Letter

Many candidates seemed unaware of the correct format for letter-writing, that is, name of town and date, appropriate salutation and ending. The better candidates kept their answers within the word limit. However, there were some vocabulary difficulties which resulted in the use of English expressions or the coining of new 'French' words, such as ***un fund-raiseur**, ***un fund levé activité**, ***un voiture-laver**, ***une vaisselle de voitures**, ***un gâteau-sale**. There were however several instances of good French usage: For example ... **une sorte de séjour linguistique; je compte visiter les sites historiques; ... pour perfectionner ma connaissance de le langue française.**

Dialogue

The weaker candidates who attempted the dialogue generally managed better than those who attempted the letter or composition. On the other hand, the more able candidates who chose the dialogue failed to achieve the same standard as others of similar ability who preferred the other options. Some candidates are still of the impression that the dialogue requires very simple French. Consequently, the answers tend to be very banal with few redeeming features. Several candidates also used the questions and answers practised for the oral exam to the exclusion of a large portion of the rubric.

Essay

Most candidates addressed all aspects of the rubric, although some were confronted with other challenges. The area of greatest concern was vocabulary. Among the various translations for 'an old man' were: ***un vieille homme; un grand homme**. Similarly, a 'pocket' was rendered as: ***pôche; *pouche; *poshe; *poké** and a policeman: ***argent de police; *le gendarmerie; le pompier; le facteur**. There were also grammatical errors such as:

J'ai vu un garçon *mis la main dans le ...

***Il regarde méchant**

Among the excellent expressions observed were:

**Quant aux personnes dans le poste, ils se sont regardés complètement étonnées, and
J'étais le dernière en ligne et ce m'enbêtait beaucoup.**

Points to watch

- Candidates need to be reminded to address all points adequately in order to achieve the required balance in their effort. To achieve this, they should be given adequate practice in the three types of answers.

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- Candidates must be reminded of the need to respect the suggested 130 – 150 words to avoid being penalised for the length of their answers. It is important, therefore, that they plan their answers, paying attention to the outline given. Whereas answers which are too short almost automatically incur a penalty because the candidates have omitted some essential information, a far more frequent problem is the case of candidates who write too much and do not cover all the points within the word limit.
- Candidates must be advised to address the rubric as set out on the question paper. This year, some candidates wrote responses using topics of their personal choice rather than those given on the exam paper.
- The items in this section usually require candidates to use a range of tenses; present, past and future. The candidate who writes entirely in the present tense may unwittingly convey to the examiner that he/she is unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the use of the past and the future in French.

Areas requiring attention

- (1) Formation and use of the past tenses, especially the imperfect and ‘passé composé’
- (2) Formation and use of the future and conditional tenses
- (3) Correct placement of the negative particles with compound tenses
- (4) Use and position of the object pronouns.

Among the excellent essays was:

le vingt mai

Chère Charlotte,

Ça va? Ce matin j’ai eu l’agréable surprise de trouver ta carte dans ma boîte aux lettres.

Mes amies et moi, nous devons faire les préparatifs pour acheter des billets pour notre sortie scolaire à Paris. Ainsi, nous avons décidé de vendre beaucoup de gateaux à notre collège. Aussi, je me suis acheté un roman humoristique pour lire pendant le vol à Paris. Aussi, j’ai acheté des vêtements en vogue et aux couleurs vives.

Je compte visiter les plus beaux monuments de Paris. Plus particulièrement, La Grande Arche, parce que je voudrais rencontrer les gens du monde entier. Aussi, je voudrais goûter de la belle cuisine française.

J’attends mon voyage avec impatience! Je compte perfectionner ma connaissance de la langue française parce que je me passionne pour le français.

Je vais maintenant te quitter - je dois faire le ménage. Donne le bonjour de ma part à toute la famille.

Au revoir Nikita.

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 Healthy Habits provided a theme to which candidates could relate. The performance was generally good with the majority of candidates scoring between 9 and 14, and a significant number among them scoring the maximum 15 marks.

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

Points to watch

- Candidates must be encouraged to read the passage carefully before attempting to answer questions.
- Candidates must pay attention to the numbering of their answers, especially when they do not answer the questions in the order given on the question paper.
- Candidates must be reminded to read each question carefully before attempting to write an answer.
- Answers must be given in simple clear **ENGLISH**.

Vocabulary difficulties

Croissance; goût; affaire (sometimes translate as ‘business’)

An example of a good script:

1. Dairy products are recommended for young children because they are rich in calcium and are essential for building strong bones and for the brain.
2. The factors that influence a person’s dietary habits are tradition and taste.
3. Some persons are forced to change these habits because of certain pathological conditions.
4. This compulsory change can be avoided by increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables.
5. The inherent qualities of fruit that are mentioned are they are particularly rich in fibre and minerals, protect one from certain conditions and provide a source of Vitamin C.
6. Vitamin C offers effective protection from cardiovascular arrest (heart attack).
7. In order to develop and maintain a healthy body, one needs to consume dairy products, fruits and vegetables and also exercise regularly.

Section IV – Expanded Paragraph

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

This question presented a challenge to a greater proportion of candidates than last year. This was evidenced by the number of scripts where there was no response and a significant number with minimal responses only. There were however a good number of scripts which fell in the very good to excellent range, many of which received 19/20. On the whole, most candidates who scored above the 3 - 5 mark were in the range 9 - 14.

A clear understanding of the cues is essential in order to produce a reasonably good response. Many candidates did not understand a number of cues and were therefore unable to develop them in a logical and meaningful way. “**Fauteuil**” presented numerous problems. It was even used as a verb, or an adjective, and often inappropriately as a noun: for example:

- ***Pierre est un fauteuil**
- ***Pierre fauteuil dans sa chambre**
- ***Pierre est très fauteuil a regardé la télévision**

Other vocabulary problems surrounded the expressions

tirage loto; gagner gros lot; régler dettes; déception; réveil sonner.

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

Points to watch

- Candidates must not write an introduction to the expanded paragraph since in so doing, they use up their quota of words before finishing the paragraph.
- Skilful candidates sometimes manage to use the cues in a different order. However, all but the very best run into difficulties when they do this. Since the cues are given in a logical order, changing the order sometimes requires the use of the pluperfect, a tense which few candidates handle effectively.
- Candidates must copy the cues carefully and not introduce unnecessary errors into their work. This year **fauteuil** was frequently misspelt.
- Teachers and students alike must understand that this item tests different skills from the composition. Teachers must therefore allow the students enough practice in this exercise and every effort must be made to improve their general mastery of grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary.

The following is an example of a coherent and cohesive expanded paragraph where the cues are used in a logical manner.

Un soir, Pierre était à la maison toute seule. Il avait sommeil mais il n'a pas voulu s'endormir. Alors, il s'est assis sur le fauteuil pour regarder la télévision. Il regardait la tirage loto quand il a rendu compte qu'il a gagné le gros lot! Quelle chance! Pierre ne pouvait pas le croire. Il était très content parce qu'il pouvait se payer tous les choses dont il avait besoin. Il réglait ses dettes quand soudain un réveil a sonné et il s'est réveillé. Ce n'était qu'un rêve ... Une grande déception!

PAPER 03 - Oral Examination

Basic and General Proficiencies

At the General Proficiency level, the overall performance of candidates was good as most candidates seemed to have been adequately prepared. At the Basic Proficiency level, the performance fell below its usual standard.

Section I

This section tested candidates' ability to read a passage aloud.

Comments by oral examiners suggest that there was again some disparity in this year's performance. Whereas some candidates made a serious effort to read with expression, even if there were at times flaws in pronunciation, there were others particularly at the Basic Proficiency level who seemed unprepared for this exercise. This paper was however generally well done by both proficiencies.

Section II

This section tested candidates' ability to respond orally to situations and/or instructions given in English.

The situations emphasize the functional use of language. Candidates who performed well are those whose preparation covered the functions, notions, settings, topics, grammar and lexis outlined in the syllabus.

This year's performance at the General Proficiency level was commendable, but there was a drop in the performance at the Basic Proficiency level when compared with the year 2003. Some candidates however made no attempt at giving the responses.

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

Section III

This section tested candidates' ability to participate in a conversation by responding to four questions on four topics (out of six identified in the syllabus).

Students who are comfortable with survival level French should approach the oral examination in a confident manner. Even if a bit nervous, they should not be unduly traumatized when interviewed by an external examiner. In the oral, as in the written paper, a range of performance is expected. But all candidates who have been learning French for four to five years should acquit themselves adequately in this ten to fifteen minute examination. Students must be helped to understand as candidates in the oral examination, that this is a natural progression from the kind of oral activity in which they have been engaged since their first lessons in French.

The topics discussed are all within their areas of experience. Questions of identity, preferences, descriptions of themselves, relatives, and their surroundings are well within the competence of a 16+ candidate.

Candidates must be prepared to expand on their answers, as happens in normal conversation, even when the question posed is a closed question. The candidate who in reply to **Tu as combien de sœurs?** answers **deux**, is losing the opportunity to show his/her proficiency by stating their names, for example, as would easily be the case in normal conversation.

BASIC PROFICIENCY

Paper 2 – 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 performance on this section was average.

The five (5) situations addressed only to this proficiency were straight forward, and several candidates performed creditably not only on these situations but also on those situations that were common to both proficiencies. As is usually the case, a significant number of candidates was awarded partial marks because of the omission of required elements. The better scripts ranged from 9 marks to 13 marks out of the maximum 15.

Points to watch

- Candidates must **not** write each situation on a separate page.
- Candidates should not try to produce literal translations. Instead, they should read each situation carefully to identify the essential elements to which they should respond.
- Candidates who do not respect the rubric in terms of length often go on to make additional errors. These errors would have been avoided if they had produced a single sentence for each situation as was required.
- Candidates are reminded to number the situations as on the question paper even if they answer the situations in a random order.

* An asterisk (*) indicates wrong 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 & TOPIC
1.	apology; reason	class
2.	expressing good wishes	home
3.	accepting invitation; refusing invitation	note
4.	making reservations	home
5.	expressing opinion	school
6.	expressing intention	note
7.	expressing change of plan; reason	home
8.	expressing success; desire	family
9.	giving information	store
10.	giving information; excuse	home/school

Situation 1

Candidates were expected to supply two (2) elements and this was generally attempted. Errors were however made especially in the tenses that would indicate ‘what was done’ or ‘what was being done’. In some cases, candidates tried to write too much and therefore made several errors.

Situation 2

Candidates generally knew how to express good wishes. Many correctly wrote **Bonne Chance**, but in some instances, only **Bon** was offered. Some candidates omitted ... **dans tes études**. **Etudes** was usually incorrectly written.

Situation 3

Some candidates attempted structures beyond their grasp, instead of using the simple forms. The words **piscine** and **déjeuner** were not widely known and were often misspelt. Some substitutes noted were: **swimming pool; la natation; *le nege; la plage;** and **petit déjeuner; dîner, repas, *le mange** respectively. The more capable candidates used expressions such as **Merci pour l’invitation** or **Merci de m’inviter**.

Situation 4

This situation was usually well done. Problems noted here were in the plural agreement of **chambre** — For instance, **Je voudrais deux *chambre**, the word **semaine** was unfamiliar or misspelt, sometimes rendered by ***le week** or **le week-end**.

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

Situation 5

It was generally well managed by candidates who mentioned either physical attributes or personality traits of friends. Some noteworthy examples of vocabulary used are:

travailleur; génèreuse; drôle; fiable; sympathique.

A small number of candidates used synonyms in their description and therefore could not be fully compensated for their efforts: For example, **Mon amie est belle et jolie.**

Situations 6

This situation created some difficulty as both the present and the future tenses used to respond to ‘you will be absent today’ seemed problematic. A number of candidates, too, wrote **demain** for ‘today’. The reason for the absence was much better managed.

Situation 7

Candidates generally overcame the interdiction, **Il est interdit de ...; Défense de ...; Ne mangez pas ...**, but several grammatical and spelling errors were noted in the second element: ...***de mange, *de boit / *boîte / *boisson / *soif dans le *lab / *labotoir.**

Situation 8

This was also well managed. A small number of candidates misspelt **français**, and some difficulty was also observed with the appropriate form of the present tense of **choisir**.

Situation 9

Candidates experienced some difficulty with the imperative forms using **Fait** or **Faire** instead of **Fais**, and **nettoyer / nettoye** instead of **nettoie** in several instances. There were some attempts to paraphrase the imperative forms and the element of immediacy was often omitted.

Situation 10

Many candidates responded appropriately, including both elements. Generally errors were made in the spelling of words such as **jus; coca; boisson** often rendered as ***juis; coco; buisson** respectively.

Section II – Completion of Form or Questionnaire

This section tested candidates’ ability to respond as directed to a questionnaire.

When compared to previous years, the performance on this section was generally only average. Marks ranged from one (1) to ten (10) out of ten (10), but it must be noted that a significant number of candidates scored 3/10.

It is disappointing that after four or five years of French, some candidates still misinterpret **NOM** and **PRENOM**. It seems, too, as if some candidates either disregarded or failed to read the rubric, using names that were not recommended.

Items 3 and 4 were generally correctly answered, but 6 to 9 proved difficult since many candidates were unfamiliar with vocabulary such as **Espèces; Collégiens; Linguistique**. Also reason for concern is the inability of so many candidates to correctly produce a date in French. Among the incorrect expressions observed were: ***la une de octobre; *Octobre un/une; *octobre de premier; *1st le octobre; *le un octobre.**

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

Section III – Gapped Passage

This section tested candidates' ability to respond to a short completion item.

Candidates were required to show knowledge of simple vocabulary items in some cases, and a combination of vocabulary and grammar in others. The overall performance in this section was fairly good, with the majority of candidates scoring above 5/10. Several grammatical weaknesses were however evident, such as the form of the 'emphatic pronoun'; agreement of adjectives and nouns; the present tense of the verbs **devoir** and **obliger**; the use of the form **ton** before **amie**.

Section IV – Reading Comprehension

This section tested candidates' ability to answer questions on a Reading Comprehension selection based on graphic or written material.

Candidates did not fare very well in this section since many of them seemed unfamiliar with some key words such as **modéliste**, **couturiers** and **bourse**. A substantial number was however able to score between ten (10) and thirteen (13) out of fifteen (15).

Questions 1 + 2

Very few candidates answered the questions correctly.

Question 3

The minority of candidates scored full marks on this question.

Question 4

Only a small number of candidates produced satisfactory answers. The word **couturiers** was generally incorrectly interpreted.

Question 5

A large number of candidates answered this question correctly.

Question 6

This question was fairly well done. Some candidates received only a partial mark because they omitted '**Alliance Française**' from their answer.

Question 7

Answers were generally correct.

Question 8

There were very few correct answers. The misinterpretation of **bourse** was widespread.

Questions 9 + 10

There were not many accurate answers. Many candidates gave information needed for question 9 as question 10 and vice versa.

To improve performance in this section, candidates must be exposed from early to a wide variety of reading passages. Candidates must also be familiarized with comprehension skills and techniques. Teachers practising this skill with candidates should emphasize that precision and clarity of expression are fundamental requirements.

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