

MANDARIN CHINESE (Foreign Language)

Paper 0547/01

Listening

Key messages

In preparation for this paper, it is worth bearing in mind the following points:

- When answering in Chinese (whether characters or pinyin), full sentences are not required. Brief answers are frequently all that is required.
- Inaccuracies of Chinese (whether characters or pinyin) are tolerated provided that the message is clear and that the candidate's rendering of the answer does not give a different Chinese character/pinyin word with another meaning, which might confuse comprehension of the message.
- Answers should be written in black or blue ink. Answers should not be written first in pencil and then overwritten in ink as this makes them very difficult to read.
- In exercises where candidates are required to tick a certain number of boxes, such as **Exercise 2** in **Section 2**, candidates must not tick more/fewer than the required number of options. If a candidate makes a choice and then changes his/her mind, s/he must cross out the original choice very clearly.
- Although notes may be made on the question paper, any work that the candidate does not wish the Examiner to consider must be clearly crossed out. The mark cannot be awarded if the Examiner has to 'choose' the correct answer from a longer response provided by the candidate, which contains extra material that is incorrect, invented or contradictory.

General comments

On the whole, candidates seemed well prepared for the examination and there were many excellent responses to this paper. Most candidates were aware of the requirements.

Regrettably, a few candidates ticked more than one box in response to the multiple-choice questions in **Section 1**. When responding to questions requiring only one choice as the answer, if a candidate makes two choices (whether in pencil or in ink), the mark **cannot** be awarded. It is worth reminding candidates that any answers which they do not wish the Examiner to consider must be clearly crossed out.

In **Exercise 2** of **Section 2**, some candidates ticked fewer than the required number of boxes, while some ticked more. Candidates should be reminded that they must tick the number of boxes stated in the rubric. When preparing their candidates, Centres should ensure that their candidates clearly understand the rubrics, as such familiarity can only aid and reassure them in the examination.

This year, answers to **Exercise 2** of **Section 3** that were written in pinyin were less accurate in terms of spelling than those last year. There were some instances where the pinyin spellings contained so many mistakes that Examiners could not be sure that the candidate had understood what s/he had heard. When preparing their candidates, Centres should try to provide extra practice in using pinyin.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1, Questions 1–5

Candidates generally did well on this multiple-choice exercise, which tested the comprehension of very short

items of one or two sentences. The most frequent error in this exercise was selecting **A** (rather than **B**) as the answer to **Question 4**.

Exercise 2, Questions 6–10

This exercise featured a short conversation about Xiao Long's day spent with his younger brother. Candidates generally did well in this multiple-choice exercise. The most common errors in this exercise were selecting **C** (rather than **A**) as the answer to **Question 6** and selecting **C** (rather than **A**) as the answer to **Question 9**.

Section 2

Exercise 1, Question 11–15

This exercise tested candidates' comprehension of a short introduction given by a hotel receptionist concerning the location of some places near the hotel. Most candidates did very well in this exercise. Some candidates encountered difficulty with **Questions 13** and **14**.

Exercise 2, Question 16

Candidates heard a conversation between Ding Ding, a schoolboy, and a teacher in his new school, who were talking about the school facilities. Candidates generally performed very well in this exercise. The most common mistake in this exercise was ticking box **C** instead of **I**.

Section 3

Exercise 1, Questions 17–21

This exercise featured five young people talking about what they plan to do after they graduate from high school. On the whole, candidates performed very well in this exercise. **Question 20** proved problematic for a number of candidates, and some weaker candidates struggled with **Question 21**.

Exercise 2, Questions 22–25

Candidates heard an interview with a university entrance candidate, Wang Li, who achieved the highest marks in his province in the university entrance exam. As intended, this final exercise (targeted to test the top level IGCSE skills), elicited the widest range of performance.

Question 22 was not always answered according to the recording. Some candidates simply wrote '学习很好' or '考试很好', which did not mention anything about the university entrance exam or the fact that Wang Li came first in the province. Some candidates offered '全国第一' or '全校第一' as their answers; these were not appropriate because incorrect and/or undesirable additional information was added.

Question 23 was not always answered fully. The question asked for the two other things besides studying hard that one needs to do in order to get good test results. Some candidates wrote simply '好好读书' or similar, and some wrote down only one other thing besides studying hard. If a question asks for two details, candidates need to remember that they need to provide two points in order to have access to full marks for that question.

Question 24 produced a mixed response. There were many excellent answers in pinyin; others were so muddled that the Examiner could not be sure that the candidate had understood what s/he had heard.

Question 25 was answered well by the majority of candidates. Some candidates included additional material which did not feature in the original transcript, or which distorted an otherwise correct answer. For example, some candidates added material such as '想学中国文字'. Candidates should be reminded that the inclusion of additional, incorrect material can invalidate an otherwise correct response.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Foreign Language)

Paper 0547/02

Reading and Directed Writing

Key messages

In their preparation for this paper, candidates should ensure that they can

- understand and use a range of vocabulary relating to topics encountered in daily life
- communicate information in the form of a note or brief letter/email, using straightforward vocabulary and structures.

General comments

Overall, candidates performed well in this examination. There were many candidates who tackled even the hardest part of the paper, **Section 3**, with confidence.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Exercise 1, Questions 1–5

The majority of candidates answered these discrete questions with ease. **Question 3** (which required candidates to link 葡萄 with D, a picture of grapes) was frequently answered incorrectly. A few candidates also encountered difficulty with **Question 4**, which asked them to identify the mode of transport used.

Exercise 2, Question 6–8

The questions in this true/false task were generally tackled well. A few candidates stumbled on **Question 8**, seeming unfamiliar with 体育活动.

Exercise 3, Question 9–11

Most candidates performed extremely well in this multiple-choice exercise.

Exercise 4, Question 12

Candidates were asked to write a short letter, giving three pieces of information: **(a)** where they are going on holiday, **(b)** with whom they are going, and **(c)** what they are going to do. There are three marks available for communication (1 mark for each element of the message) and two marks for the language used. Those parts of a candidate's answer which are not credited for communication are not considered for reward for language.

In general, candidates responded well to this question. A few candidates did not understand the meaning of 度假 and wrote instead about going to a book shop, hospital or other location.

Candidates should be advised that there is nothing to be gained from expanding their answers to this exercise. There are no additional marks to be gained by adding to the required information and any time spent adding such embellishment, which is ignored by the Examiner, could be allocated more profitably to **Sections 2** and **3**. The most successful answers are those which manage to communicate the required information briefly, yet accurately.

Section 2

Exercise 1, Questions 13–22

In this exercise, candidates were required to read a passage of Chinese and to answer questions on it, also in Chinese. The questions are asked in the same order as the information is presented in the passage. The passage took the form of a letter from Xiao Li to his friend Xiao Wang about his time spent in Yunnan. Often, a very brief answer was all that was needed, but provided that what the candidate had written contained the correct answer, additional material copied from the text was tolerated unless it was contradictory. The quality of written Chinese is considered only for the purposes of communication. The majority of candidates answered these questions correctly. Many candidates did not understand the meaning of 捕鱼 in **Question 21**. In **Question 22**, Examiners were looking for the answer 画风景. Several candidates offered 好玩 instead, which was incorrect. A small number of candidates wrote 看风景, which was also wrong.

Exercise 2, Question 23

In this writing task candidates were asked to write a letter to a pen friend, talking about their best friend. In their piece of writing they were asked to complete 5 tasks. 10 marks are available for communication of the required elements and 5 marks are available for language.

The majority of candidates produced good compositions which addressed all of the bullet points. Accuracy of language was generally good but there were some errors of grammar and time aspect. Some candidates wrote in the future tense, which was not very appropriate here. A small number of candidates struggled to understand the meaning of some parts of the bullet points, in particular 最好 and 体育活动.

In terms of the mark for communication, candidates should be reminded that they must address all of the required bullet points in order to have access to the top marks.

Section 3

Exercise 1, Question 24–28

In **Exercise 1**, candidates are required to read an extended passage in Chinese and then answer the multiple-choice questions that follow. Candidates should be reminded that for each question, they should answer by ticking one box only, unless specifically stated otherwise in the question.

Generally, candidates coped well with this exercise. Some weaker candidates could not answer **Questions 24** and **27**.

Exercise 2, Question 29–36

In this final exercise of the paper, candidates are required to read an extended passage in Chinese, and show their understanding of it by answering questions on it, also in Chinese. The questions are asked in the same order as the information is presented in the passage.

Candidates generally handled this exercise well. **Question 29** was not usually answered well and this was possibly due to candidates not understanding the meaning of 害怕. **Question 35** posed problems for some candidates as they did not know 书法课.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Foreign Language)

Paper 0547/03

Speaking

Key messages

In preparing for, and conducting, the IGCSE Mandarin Chinese Speaking test, Centres should bear the following pointers in mind.

- Careful preparation by Examiners is essential.
- Examiners should adhere to the role play tasks as set out in the Teachers' Notes.
- If an element of a Role Play task is omitted, an appropriate prompt may be given.
- Examiners should ask appropriate questions to allow candidates to demonstrate their abilities.
- The situations at the start of the Role plays should be read aloud in Chinese by the Examiner before commencing the test. This helps to reassure the candidate and establishes that s/he is playing a role.
- Examiners should make a clear distinction between Test 2 (Topic presentation & conversation) and Test 3 (General conversation).
- Examiners must adhere to the timings stipulated in the Teachers' Notes booklet.
- Examiners should vary the topics covered and should not ask all candidates the same series of questions.
- Candidates should be asked both expected and unexpected questions.
- To achieve high marks, candidates do not have to be of native speaker standard.
- Candidates should not be corrected during the Speaking test.
- It is advisable to conduct the tests in a small room in which phones have been switched off and which is not situated close to noisy areas.

General comments

This paper is common to all candidates, whether they had followed the Core curriculum or the Extended curriculum. The full range of marks was available to all candidates and, as in previous years, the full range of performance was heard by Moderators.

Most Centres administered and carried out the tests very well, but in a small number of cases the instructions given in the Teachers' Notes booklet were not followed. The Teachers' Notes booklet should be read carefully to ensure that both test and relevant administration are carried out correctly.

Candidate performance

The best performances from candidates of all abilities were heard in Centres where it was clear that oral work was a regular part of classroom activity and where candidates were familiar with the requirements of the Speaking test. In such Centres, the Examiner conducting the test had prepared the Role plays well, enabling candidates to show that they could communicate in a variety of everyday situations. Candidates gained marks by answering concisely and appropriately. The Examiner managed a smooth transition to the conversation sections and then pitched questions at a level appropriate to the candidate, while bearing in

mind the descriptors of the mark scheme. Conversations were natural and candidates were given the opportunity to demonstrate a range of structures and vocabulary, covering a selection of different topics across both conversation sections.

In general, Examiners were aware of the need for spontaneity and conversations featured both predictable and unexpected questions. Candidates were given the opportunity to show that they could respond to questions on topics with which they may have been familiar, but which they had not over prepared. A few Centres need to work towards achieving greater spontaneity during the test. The use of question banks is of course useful during the learning process. Then, once vocabulary and structures have been acquired, candidates should be encouraged to move gradually away from predictable banks of questions. If the same banks of questions which have been used in class are used in the test room there is little opportunity for spontaneous conversation. A more effective approach is for Examiners to keep eye contact with candidates, listen to what they have to say and respond accordingly.

Conduct of the test

From the evidence heard on the recorded samples, many Examiners are clearly at ease in their role and familiar with the requirements of the IGCSE Mandarin Chinese Speaking test. The role of the conducting Examiner remains crucial in terms of putting the candidate at ease and enabling him/her to work for the available marks. Examiners who have prepared their own roles fully and are confident in what they are doing are better able to help candidates who experience any difficulty. A well-prepared Examiner ensures that his/her candidates are given ample opportunity to demonstrate the full range of their abilities. The following list of comments is intended to help all Examiners elicit the best possible performance from their candidates:

- **Preparation time**

The best examples of examining were in Centres which had clearly made good use of the 4 days available for preparation by the Examiner. During this time, Examiners had become familiar with the instructions, the paperwork, the Role play situations and their role in them. As a result, they followed the Role play cues/script provided in the Teachers' Notes booklet and did not confuse candidates by omitting one or more of the prescribed tasks and/or inserting extra tasks.

Examiners are reminded that they should cue all tasks as specified in the Role plays, that no section of the test should be omitted, that they should keep to the stipulated timings of 5 minutes per conversation section, and that they should give candidates the opportunity to respond to unexpected as well as predictable questions in both conversation sections.

Examiners should ensure that they are familiar with the requirements of the Speaking test before embarking on any examining. The IGCSE Mandarin Chinese Speaking test consists of three sections: **Part One** of the examination is two role plays. **Part Two** of the examination starts with a presentation by the candidate on a topic of his/her choice. The Examiner must allow the candidate to speak for 1–2 minutes on his/her prepared topic and then follow this up with specific spontaneous questions related to the topic. This section of the examination should last **about five minutes** in total. **Part Three** of the examination is a spontaneous conversation of a more general nature and should last **about five minutes**.

- **Timings**

It is helpful to candidates to know before the test that each of the two conversation sections will last for 5 minutes. Examiners should then adhere to these timings during the test. In the Topic presentation, it is always good practice to stop a candidate after they have presented for 2 minutes and to start to ask questions. The stipulated timings were often not observed and this can have a detrimental effect on candidates' performance: a Speaking test that is too short may not allow a candidate enough time to demonstrate his/her abilities, and a Speaking test that is too long may cause the candidate to become tired and therefore increase his/her chance of making errors.

- **Transition between different sections of the Speaking test**

Many Examiners made it clear to candidates when they were moving from one section of the test to the next. This helps to put candidates at their ease and Examiners should aim to include such transitions in all the IGCSE Mandarin Chinese Speaking tests that they conduct. The transitions can be handled by saying, for example, 现在进行情景对话 A。 , 现在进入第二部分。 , 现在进行自由对话 吧。 etc. These transitions should be in Mandarin Chinese rather than in English, as it can be confusing for candidates to be obliged to switch between languages.

- **Recorded sample: quality and composition**

The recorded sample should be selected to represent the **full** spread of performance in the Centre. This enables the Moderator to check that the application of the scheme is fair and accurate throughout the Centre's mark range. The recorded sample should be selected to represent the whole Centre. Where more than one Examiner is used, the sample should, wherever possible, include examples from each Examiner. Centres should not select and submit a full recorded sample per Examiner.

In a small number of cases, the cassette/CD submitted by the Centre was blank or inaudible. Centres are reminded of the importance of checking that the recordings are present on the cassette/CD, that all parts of the test have been recorded and that all recordings are audible before sending to CIE. Please ensure that the cassettes/CDs are well packaged for sending to CIE.

It is very important to check the position of microphones and the quality of the recording, both during the tests (between candidates) and before samples are despatched to CIE. The best quality recordings were produced in small rooms in which phones had been switched off and which were not situated close to noisy areas. Where recordings are saved as .mp3 files, please ensure that these have been labelled in accordance with the naming convention stipulated in the Teachers' Notes booklet. The Examiner should introduce the candidate: the candidate should not introduce him/herself. **Please note that 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.**

- **Coversheet for moderation sample**

Some Centres did not include the cover sheet for the sample. This is provided in the Teachers' Notes booklet and should be completed in the Centre and submitted together with the recorded sample and other paperwork.

- **Internal moderation**

Where a Centre has a large number of candidates and wishes to use more than one Examiner to carry out the Speaking tests, the Centre **must** seek permission from CIE to use more than one Examiner **before** the start of the Speaking test period.

Where Centres with large numbers of candidates have been granted permission by CIE to use more than one Examiner to conduct and assess Speaking tests, the coordinating Examiner is responsible for checking that the mark scheme has been applied consistently by all of the Examiners in the Centre. If a particular Examiner's marking is judged by his/her colleagues to be out of line with the other marking at the Centre, the marks for candidates examined by that Examiner must be adjusted before paperwork is submitted to CIE. **Details of the Centre's Internal moderation procedures must also be sent to CIE**, as specified on the 'Cover sheet for moderation sample'. Guidelines for the Internal Standardisation/Moderation of Cambridge IGCSE foreign language Speaking tests are available from CIE. Guidelines on how to carry out

- **Clerical errors**

A number of clerical errors were noted this year. Centres are reminded to check all additions and transcriptions very carefully before submitting their materials to CIE.

- **Administration**

On the whole, the administrative work was carried out well. Examiners should remember to complete the Working Mark Sheet with each candidate's full name, candidate number and number of the Role play card attempted, and to sign and date it.

- **Application of the mark scheme**

The mark scheme was well understood in many Centres. Where Centres required large downward adjustments to their marks this was often as a result of issues related to the way in which the Speaking test was conducted. Examiners are reminded that they should cue all tasks as specified in the Role plays, that no section of the test should be omitted, and that they should keep to the stipulated timings of 5 minutes per conversation section.

Comments on specific questions

Role plays

Examiners are reminded of the need for careful preparation. Where the stipulated tasks are changed, omitted and/or extra tasks are added this will confuse candidates. Marks can only be awarded for completing the tasks as presented on the Role play cards. Candidates should be trained to include a greeting and thanks where appropriate. Centres are reminded that on some tasks a short response may be sufficient to attract a mark of three. Dubious pronunciation should be queried as communication may be affected when pronunciation is unclear. Candidates are allowed to self-correct but cannot be given marks if the Examiner completes the task for them (e.g. if the Examiner provides an item of vocabulary which the candidate merely repeats).

If a candidate misses out a task, the Examiner should try to guide him/her back to it, in as natural a way as possible. It is good practice for the Examiner to read aloud the introduction to each Role play in Chinese, as this helps to set the scene for candidates. In the interests of international standards, and in fairness to candidates, Examiners should not miss out parts of the Role play tasks nor replace parts with alternative or different tasks.

Please remember that the mark scheme does not contain any half marks and that a maximum of 3 marks can be awarded for each task in the Role play. Where a candidate makes no response to a task, no marks can be awarded for that task. The Examiner should not offer vocabulary items or options, unless these appear in the Teachers' Notes – candidates must be allowed to work for their marks.

Each candidate should be examined in two Role play situations (one 'A' Role play and one 'B' Role play), using one Role play card only, which should be selected at random by the Examiner from the cards supplied by CIE. Please write the number of the selected Role play card in the appropriate space on the Working Mark Sheet.

Some candidates did not seem to be familiar with what is required for the Role play tasks: they answered the questions relating to themselves, rather than relating to the role stipulated on the Role play card. It is worth practising this type of activity in class to help candidates understand what is required.

'Neutral' answers that candidates give in response to Role play tasks, such as 对了 ('yes') or 不知道 ('I don't know') should not be awarded any marks, as they give no indication that the candidate has understood the question.

A Role Plays

In general, most Centres conducted this part of the exam successfully.

In a shop buying writing equipment

In a few cases Examiners awarded a mark for "white ink", which was expressly excluded in the Teachers' Notes.

At the railway station buying a ticket

Most candidates managed this very well.

Discussing sport with a Chinese friend

Some candidates seemed unfamiliar with 次 (time). Otherwise it was carried out well.

B Role Plays

Again, most Centres conducted this part of the exam well.

Talking with a doctor after being bitten by a snake

Many of the weaker candidates did not know how to say 右 (right) or 左 (left). The rest of the Role play was carried out smoothly in most cases.

Talking to a librarian in Beijing

Weaker candidates were confused by 几本书 (How many books?). Many candidates confused 习惯 (accustomed) with 喜欢 (to like): 习惯 is a very common verb which candidates at IGCSE level should know.

Looking for work at a company in Beijing

Most candidates carried out this Role play well.

Topic Presentation & Conversation

Candidates had chosen a wide range of topics for their presentation. Popular topics included 'My family', 'My hobby', 'Sport', 'School life' and 'My future'. Able candidates often chose to present a more ambitious topic, such as 日本的寿司 (Japanese sushi), 意大利的披萨饼 (Italian pizza), 自然灾害频繁发生的原因 (The causes of natural disasters), 我最倒霉的一天 (My unluckiest day), 动物园和游乐场 (Zoos and theme parks), 烟台的一年四季 (The four seasons in Yantai), 我最喜欢的音乐家 (My favourite musician), 我最喜欢的体育明星 (My favourite sports star), 汉语与我 (Chinese and me), 我的汉语老师 (My Chinese teacher), 我的志愿: 我的梦想 (My ambition) and 我家人怎么过新年 (How my family celebrates Chinese New Year). Candidates should be discouraged from choosing 'Myself' or 'My life' as their topic, as this can seriously limit the possibilities for General conversation.

Some Examiners forgot to allow their candidates to present their topic, and some Examiners did not ask candidates questions on their topic presentation. It is very important that no part of the test is omitted, as this can severely limit a candidate's marks. Some candidates did not seem to have prepared a topic to present.

Examiners are reminded that, where a candidate presents his topic for two minutes and shows no sign of finishing his/her Topic presentation, the Examiner must interrupt and start the Topic conversation.

In the best Centres, the Examiner listened carefully to the candidates' presentations and then led them skilfully through the Topic conversation by asking appropriate questions, allowing them both to develop their topic and to demonstrate their language skills. In a few cases the Examiner did not pay close enough attention to what the candidate had said and asked a pre-prepared question to which the candidate had already given an answer.

Unfortunately, a number of the Topic conversations heard by the Moderators were too brief to warrant the award of the highest marks. Examiners are reminded that this section of the examination should last approximately **5 minutes**. A Speaking test that is too short may not allow a candidate enough time to demonstrate his/her abilities.

Examiners are reminded of the importance of indicating to candidates that the Topic conversation has finished and the General conversation is about to begin. This can be simply done by saying, for example, 现在进入第三部分。 or 现在进行自由对话吧。

General Conversation

Overall, performance was very good in this section of the test.

Many Examiners were aware of the need to cover 2 or 3 different topics in this section of the test, though it is worth bearing in mind that it may be necessary to cover more topics with weaker candidates who will not be able to answer in as much depth. The topics discussed in this part of the test should not be the same as those discussed in the Topic conversation and should be chosen by the Examiner, rather than by the candidate.

It is helpful to the candidate if the Examiner guides him/her smoothly between topics. Questioning that moves abruptly from topic to topic can be confusing or unsettling for candidates. It is better to let the conversation flow rather than asking a series of unconnected questions.

Questions should invite candidates to talk. Where questioning restricts candidates to short or 'yes'/'no' responses, they will not have the opportunity to use the range of structures necessary for access to the higher mark bands.

The same set of questions should not be asked of all candidates in a Centre. The Examiner needs to ensure that s/he has prepared a number of different sets of questions for use with different candidates. The conversation is intended to be a spontaneous interaction between candidate and Examiner; using the same set of questions with each candidate can lead to conversations that are rather lacking in spontaneity. As the conversation is underway, the General conversation should be based on the individual candidates' responses and so should not be overly rehearsed beforehand.

Regrettably, many of the general conversations heard by the Moderators were too brief to warrant the award of the highest marks. Examiners are reminded that this section of the examination should last approximately **5 minutes**.

Impression

At the end of the test the Examiner must make an assessment of the candidate's pronunciation, accent and fluency based on his/her overall performance. Banded descriptors are enclosed in Table C of the Marking Instructions in the Teachers' Notes booklet. In general, Examiners awarded appropriate marks for this aspect of the test.

MANDARIN CHINESE (Foreign Language)

Paper 0547/04
Continuous Writing

Key messages

In order to do well in this paper, candidates need to demonstrate that they can communicate in writing, showing knowledge of a range and variety of vocabulary and applying the grammar and structures of the target language accurately.

There is no need for candidates to be unduly concerned about forgetting how to write the occasional character. The questions are intended to enable candidates to show what they know and the guidelines are deliberately left as open as possible in order to allow candidates to choose the vocabulary that they wish to use. They should, therefore, avoid embarking on topics for which they know very few of the characters involved.

Candidates should write compositions which has some sort of short introduction and ending with proper paragraphing and punctuation. Letters should have an appropriate beginning and ending and should also be punctuated correctly. Punctuation and paragraphing add clarity to a piece of writing and ensure that the Examiner does not have to 'guess' the meaning that the author intended.

General comments

The overall standard of candidates' work is to be commended. Many of the letters and also the story about how the money was spent and what happened encompassed a wide range of vocabulary (including idioms) and sentence structure, e.g. verb complements and comparisons. The compositions were interesting and lively to read and showed that candidates had been very well prepared for the examination. The stories in **Question 2** were sometimes very imaginative.

As in previous years, the mark scheme for each essay was divided into marks for Relevant Communication (5 marks), Accuracy of Characters (5 marks), Accuracy of Grammar and Structures (10 marks) and Impression (5 marks).

Candidates were not penalised for writing too much. Whilst there is no need for candidates to count the number of characters written, it should be remembered that variety of vocabulary and sentence structure is rewarded. Therefore, a long but less varied essay will not be awarded as many marks as a shorter one with greater variety and interest. However, candidates should be reminded that if they write significantly fewer than 150 characters they will not produce enough evidence of their ability to gain access to the highest marks.

The compositions of many candidates displayed an impressively wide range of characters. Characters with the same sound but different meanings (别字) were a problem for some candidates, along with characters being written incorrectly (错字). The most frequent problems in terms of character-writing were:

- confusion between 买 and 卖
- confusion about the meaning of 明天 and 第二天
- the writing of 采 instead of 菜; 长诚 instead of 长城; 一快钱 instead of 一块钱; 更宜 instead of 便宜

The most common mistakes were: 以候 (后), 一 (以) 前, 电景 (影) 阮 (院), 玩的 (得) 高心 (兴), 开兴 (心)

Candidates generally showed a good knowledge of Chinese grammar. The most frequent problems were:

- confusion over the use of 的, 得 and 地 – although this had improved over previous years
- Some candidates found measure words hard and used the same one throughout, e.g. 两个衬衫; 一个手套; 一个饭馆; 三个小说.
- Many candidates found it hard to use 了 correctly. Most candidates were able to use 了 correctly some of the time, but not all the time.
- There was too much use of 在 before 'time when' phrases. There was also often an inversion of the time phrase, e.g. 三点下午 instead of 下午三点.
- Many candidates did not know that 'time how long' comes after the verb.
- There was an overuse of 是 when it was not needed (i.e. when there was no particular emphasis intended), as in 我是很忙, 我是很好. There had been noticeable improvement here over previous years.
- Some candidates should try to reduce the use of 有 when referring to a past timeframe i.e. 有做什么.
- Some Anglicisation occurred, e.g. as in 我 '做' 了两个朋友 for 'I made two friends' or '我要吃饭在学校' for 'I want to eat at school'. These kinds of errors are the result of literal translation from English into Chinese.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

There were some very well-written letters in response to this question. The majority of candidates chose the letter to their pen friend about their favourite hobby; they covered all the guidelines and wrote a suitable beginning and ending to their letters, thereby achieving the full 5 marks for Relevant Communication. Where a candidate misunderstood one of the guidelines, s/he lost only one mark for Communication.

Some candidates lost marks because of a very limited range of vocabulary and sentence structure.

- (a) Candidates wrote some good letters about their favourite hobby, covering all the bullet points in excellent detail. Some candidates encountered difficulty in interpreting the meaning of the second bullet point (你从什么时候开始有这个爱好). A small number of candidates wrote about all their hobbies rather than focusing on their favourite one, and many were confused about the difference between 了解 and 介绍, using one when in fact they meant the other. A number of candidates could not write 因为 correctly.
- (b) A smaller number of candidates answered **Question 1(b)**. Confident candidates who did so generally wrote well and presented convincing and well-written arguments about the merits of working and studying at the weekend. Almost all remembered to use the format of a letter. Those who opted to answer this question did not seem to find it hard to express opinions that were related to their everyday lives.

Question 2

Question 2 provided a platform for the candidates to demonstrate their skills in story telling, developing interesting storylines from the original scenario. There were some excellent, entertaining stories, although many candidates had the language ability to develop a story more thoroughly/imaginatively, but did not take the opportunity to do so, limiting themselves to a list of items purchased with the money.

Some candidates lost grammar marks or impression marks by ignoring the timeframe. This should have been an account of what had happened in the past, but some candidates used “要” and referred to future expenditure throughout. Others misunderstood the rubric taking 一大笔钱 to mean some sort of pen.

However, they did not lose many marks as long as their story was good and there was a range of vocabulary and structures in evidence.

It was pleasing to note that there was less confusion over the meaning of 发生 this year. It is not intended that a misunderstanding of one character in the essay question should unduly affect a candidate's score, nor is it intended that candidates should be able to pre-learn a story and reproduce it in the examination room.

All candidates should remember that writing in Chinese still requires a story structure with a proper concluding paragraph to round off events. The ability to use 了 correctly and the ability to sequence actions would have improved the quality of many essays.