

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

<p>Paper 0507/02 Reading and Directed Writing</p>

Key messages

In order to do well in **Part 1** of this paper, candidates need to:

- ensure that the content is relevant to the question, and focussed on the theme of the two passages.
- ensure that their composition is coherent and includes a brief introduction and conclusion.
- show a confident grasp of the issues, taking ideas from the passages and developing them to relate to the task set.
- produce a clearly structured argument.
- display accurate grammar, well-formed sentence structures, effective linking between sentences and paragraphs, appropriate style for the genre with consistency throughout the prose, and good
- knowledge of kanji.
- observe the word limit

In order to succeed in **Part 2** candidates need to display a confident grasp of grammar and vocabulary situated in a context and as a practical tool for communicating a message.

For both **Questions 1** and **2** the content of the essay must answer the questions directly. A confident grasp of the issues is crucial and candidates need to demonstrate this by the maturity of content and coherence of the prose. Linguistic knowledge and competence are evidenced through the candidate's use of accurate grammar, a wide-ranging vocabulary and appropriate expressions, well-formed sentence structures, and a set of discourse strategies that include: effective linking between sentences and paragraphs, appropriate style for the genre, as well as consistency of the writing style throughout the prose. Accurate and varied use of kanji is also examined. The word limit must be strictly observed, which requires good planning prior to starting writing the essays. To achieve the above, good time-management is essential.

Part 2 tests both the accuracy and appropriateness in language use. The questions in this section vary from multiple-choice questions to context-aided paraphrasing, and to metalinguistic questions for a better syntactic understanding. Candidates are encouraged to study grammar and vocabulary always in context. Practicing paraphrasing as often as possible will help enhance flexibility and variety in language use.

General comments

Candidates performed particularly well this year. They typically demonstrated a high level of accuracy and fluency as well as readability of prose.

Most candidates attempted to answer all questions in both **Parts 1** and **2**. Candidates were well prepared for the examination, and were able to allocate time efficiently to complete each section of the paper.

Stronger candidates successfully summarised the main points in passages A and B, describing the common themes and incorporating all the important issues. Characteristically, stronger candidates were able to depict contrasting features in passages A and B in an analytical and succinct manner in coherent prose. In contrast, weaker candidates often lifted small sections directly from the passages without developing the points any further. Generally, stronger candidates demonstrated logical, evaluative, analytical skills, while weaker candidates tended to dwell on their emotional reaction to a given theme without producing a clear structured response. Successful candidates answered **Questions 1** and **2** directly with relevant content. For example, to answer **Question 1** they summarised passages A and B giving a selection of details to show the passages' contrasting contents. To answer **Question 2**, they chose the theme of either A or B and gave an original opinion in coherent prose, supporting their own arguments with concrete examples. Weaker

candidates had a tendency to discuss their own opinions in **Question 1** rather than drawing from the ideas expressed in the passages. This often led to them repeating similar content in **Question 2**.

This paper requires candidates to produce a coherent discourse using longer sentences and structured paragraphs. Weaker candidates typically used shorter sentences in simple structures without utilising conjunctive expressions. Such candidates needed to take care to include particles where needed, complete sentences, and use consistent sentence-ending styles. Idiosyncratic syntactic structures were also common among weaker candidates. Candidates need to ensure that their writing style is appropriate to the task; in some cases responses were written in the style of SNS or *anime*, which does not show awareness of audience. Regular exposure to a selection of good literature across genres will help enhancing students' balanced writing skills.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1 tests the ability to describe the common theme in reading passages A and B and to extract the main messages for comparison and contrast in a short essay. This section is also designed to assess the skills in selecting, comparing and summarising specific information taken from the two reading passages. Candidates should strive to demonstrate higher language proficiency and originality. Compositions should not be a mere list of the main points, but should rather be a coherent prose that narrates the main theme of the passages. Materials must be developed and expanded through clear logical and coherent discussion. Repetitions and circumlocution should be avoided so as to keep to within the word limit. This year's topic was the Japanese government's lowering the age of voting rights to eighteen years old.

The strongest responses were clear and well thought-out and showed evidence of pre-writing planning. Such responses included a succinct summary of the two passages, identifying and comparing their main points. They depicted the contrasting attitudes and views described in each of the two passages clearly. Weaker responses often needed to show more varied use of sentence structures and vocabulary. Some candidates managed to communicate messages sufficiently using very simple but accurate language. Essays of these linguistically weaker, but creatively successful, candidates displayed good paragraphing skills, accurate basic grammar, and effective use of conjunctive expressions.

Question 2 requires candidates to write creatively and communicatively in a given genre. It invites candidates' responses to the passages in a variety of forms (e.g. a selective summary, a letter, a report, a speech, a script of a conversation or broadcast) that is different each year. The composition must be relevant to the topic and it should be logically consistent, coherent and succinct, but at the same time it should follow a specific type of register (style and level of language) and format that are accepted for that genre. As in **Question 1**, accurate and appropriate use of *Kanji*, *katakana*, *hiragana*, punctuation and *Genkō-Yōshi* are also assessed.

This year, candidates were asked to write a brief article to the readers' column in a newspaper responding to the news articles A or B. Unlike **Question 1**, candidates were invited to give a personal response from any aspect for **Question 2**. This year's topic was the new Japanese law to lower the voting age from 20 to 18 and its consequences. Candidates were invited to discuss the issue and support their personal opinion by giving a reason and/or a concrete example.

Generally, this year's candidates demonstrated positive and original responses, actively engaging with the main topic. They clarified which opinion(s) of the protagonists of either A or B that they adhere to and clarified any similarities and/or differences to their own experience or a relevant situation that they are aware of. Stronger candidates argued for or against the decision to give voting rights to the younger generation and the reasons why. Examples they provided to support their arguments often illustrated their perspectives in real-life situations.

Part 2

Questions 3–17 test the candidates' linguistic knowledge, which forms the basis of good writing. The candidates' ability to express their messages in a variety of ways is tested through rephrasing and paraphrasing as well as the use of appropriate wording, accurate grammar and expressions, etc.

Part 2 consists of four subsections. The questions test:

- 1 Semantic and grammatical knowledge,
- 2 Lexical and semantic knowledge,
- 3 Synonyms and *Kanji*, and
- 4 Grammatical knowledge and relevant metalanguage.

FIRST LANGUAGE JAPANESE

Paper 0507/03
Continuous Writing

Key messages

In order to do well on this paper, candidates need to show that they can:

- exercise control of appropriate grammatical structures,
- demonstrate an awareness of the conventions of paragraphing, sentence structure and punctuation,
- understand and employ a range of appropriate vocabulary,
- show a sense of audience and an awareness of register and style in both formal and informal situations.

Candidates must also demonstrate competence in the following four areas of writing skills:

1. Material presented should be relevant, appropriate and accurate.
2. The structure should be coherent and cohesive, in particular with regards to paragraphing and sentence structure, and candidates should include an introduction and conclusion.
3. The style should be appropriate to the audience and should include a varied range of vocabulary and sentence structure.
4. Candidates' work should be accurate, particularly regarding grammar, punctuation, and usage of Genkō Yōshi.

Candidates should also make sure that they keep to the word limit.

General comments

Generally, this year's candidates produced well-structured, readable, and competent essays. Stronger candidates consistently demonstrated a higher level of linguistic competency. More than half the candidates chose a topic that requires analytical writing skills and a wider range of vocabulary. They managed to produce an essay with clear and convincing arguments to make a case for their stance on the chosen topic. In contrast, weaker candidates appeared to prefer narrative compositions. Many wrote a prose in the style of a monologue with run-on sentences, but some managed to create an original story. Successful candidates chose a topic wisely, opting for a type of genre that is complementary to their own linguistic level and personal writing style. This included some candidates whose range of vocabulary may be less wide than the top candidates, but who showed creativity in using paraphrases and a good discourse structure (three or four parts including introduction and conclusion) with a style that is appropriate to the genre and the content. With such strategy candidates can maximise their competency in writing. Clear paragraphing and good linking between paragraphs are also needed.

Generally, stronger candidates chose a topic requiring an analytical and argumentative writing approach. These are topic items **2, 3, 4, 5, and 8**. Typically, they used a wide range of vocabulary and employed complex sentence structures. They also produced a coherent narrative using a clear three-part (Introduction-Content-Conclusion) frame of discourse structure.

Successful candidates characteristically demonstrated the skills for writing in a traditional Japanese four-part discourse structure to maintain coherence in an authentic Japanese style. This structural style consists of the following four parts: KI (Introduction of a topic), SHŌ (Development on the topic), TEN (Surprise Turn – a literary device unique to Japanese composition), and KETSU (Conclusion). The four-part structure is used to invite the audience to share a particular world-view that is proposed by the author. Therefore, it is effective in a prose with social, emotive, or literary contents as in Topics **1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8**. In contrast, weaker candidates generally opted for fantastical stories and a free narrative as in Topics **1 and 9**. Expressions of emotional responses to a theme were common among them. They also wrote in a more simple style with limited variety of vocabulary and grammatical structures.

The best responses maintained relevance of content to the chosen topic, clarity of argument, adequacy and appropriateness of lexical choices, coherence of the narrative, grammatical accuracy, and paragraph links. The strongest candidates distinguished themselves in the areas of originality, use of *Kanji*, and effective and economical choice of vocabulary to carry the message of the composition.

Comments on specific questions

Candidates choose one essay from a choice of nine. Each topic calls for a different writing style including imaginative, descriptive, argumentative, and analytical. The following is a list of this year's titles.

- 1 I thought I saw a familiar face in the crowd at the station. Just when I thought it was my imagination, suddenly, someone called: 'Hi, how are you doing?! It's been a long time!' I turned around to look and... Continue the story.
- 2 Should printed teaching materials be replaced by tablets at schools? State your opinion and give reasons and examples to substantiate your argument.
- 3 Discuss the differences and similarities between the two words, 'Byodo (equality)' and 'Kohei (equity-fairness)'.
- 4 Discuss the cause(s) of 'influx of population to metropolitan areas' and suggest a solution to the problem.
- 5 Do you think it is possible to 'maintain a good balance between study and after-school-hours club activities'? Discuss the reason why you think so and support it with concrete examples. You may wish to suggest what can be done to make it work.
- 6 Write a composition using the Japanese four-character-idiom, '*iccho-ichiyu* (in a brief space of time)' as appropriate.
- 7 Write your thoughts using the expression, 'Tenkanki (a turning point)'.
- 8 Some say: 'students will benefit from the experience of a part-time job while still at a school'. State if you agree or disagree with this comment and discuss why, giving concrete examples to support your argument.
- 9 Write freely about your response to the photograph below. You can approach it from any aspect. (This year's photo shows a child inspecting leaves on shrubs with a magnifying glass).

Topic 1 gives candidates the opportunity to write in the genre of fantasy writing and thus, coherence, creativity, and effective story-telling skills are essential. The story must follow naturally from the lead-in section given in the question itself, using the same style and register. Students who chose this topic generally told a story about a student meeting another student after some year's separation. Some wrote in a satisfactorily sci-fi style, but not everyone managed to create a coherent story with a clear ending.

Topic 9 is also a creative writing, but it uses a visual stimulus (a photo). Candidates are expected to describe what they see in the picture and to develop the material by supplying an original story or by discussing issues arising from the photo. This year's photo showed a child with a magnifying glass examining shrubs intently. Interpretation is entirely open to the candidates and some who chose this topic produced an original story of growing up with scientific curiosity.

For **Topics 2, 4, 5** and **8** candidates are expected to indicate their standpoint first, and then to develop analytical and logical arguments in a consistent and coherent manner. This requires an appropriate three-part discourse structure, which consists of Introduction, Content and Conclusion or traditional four-part structure depending on the candidate's approach to discussion. Stronger candidates managed to successfully utilise a range of vocabulary and phrases appropriate for an analytical piece.

Topic 3 tests the candidates' creativity and effective use of language to express personal opinions on a given topic in a free essay. Successful candidates discussed the concepts of 'equality and fairness' by comparing them and applying the concepts in a real-life situation, drawing examples from social affairs or personal experience. Some candidates who chose this topic produced exceptionally successful essays.

For **Topics 6** and **7** candidates were expected to write an explanation of an idiom/proverb clearly and succinctly. Examples of successful essays often included a paraphrase of the idiom/proverb into a more ordinary language with an example from a daily-life situation, followed by a discussion about the idiom/proverb in a coherent manner.

Candidates are strongly encouraged to plan the contents and structure of their compositions before they start to write, paying attention to the clarity of storyline, message or argument. Good time management is also essential for a successful outcome.