

FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/01

Reading

Key message

To do well in this paper:

Candidates should pay careful attention to the wording of each question and limit their answers accordingly.

In **Part 1** candidates should give just short, straightforward answers to the questions without lengthy comments (apart from **Question 1(j)**).

In **Part 2**, candidates should produce an extended response extracting only relevant information from both texts and avoiding retelling the stories or presenting merely a list of events.

General Comments

The quality of language for both parts was rather high, which is a definite improvement this year. Also pleasing was the thorough approach to comparing the two texts in **Part 2** undertaken by many candidates who tried to identify similarities as well as differences in their essay. It is important to consider timing when tackling the exam. Those candidates who tried to give unnecessary extended answers in **Part 1**, were disadvantaged in terms of time left for **Question 2** which was more challenging. On the other hand, some candidates were unable to score marks having given very short answers to **Question 1(j)**. In general, the clue for the length of an answer should be the value of the question which is expressed through its mark: a higher mark normally implies a more extended answer.

In some cases, the quality of the candidate's handwriting made the script difficult to read. Candidates should remember that only output which can be read can be credited.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Content

- (a) The overwhelming majority of candidates produced the correct answer with a few who mentioned only the mother's death but not her inheritance.
- (b) Only a short answer was required here. Some answers included a lengthy quote describing all the citizens' 'faults', which was not necessary.
- (c) Candidates were required to state both points for 1 mark: renting the premises and acquiring books, which were required to start the business.
- (d) The best answers presented a short explanation by simply paraphrasing the quote from the text that Sidorov had to expand the range of his products related *to education* due to the customers' demand. Instead, some candidates produced a detailed speculation on 'how, where and how often people in that town did their shopping', which was not required.
- (e) The best candidates realised that this question required some summarising and generalising rather than merely quoting. They spotted the progress in Sidorov's business – its expansion to products now *unrelated* to education. Weaker candidates just mentioned the lady coming to the shop to ask for toys.

- (f) The majority of candidates explained the key point, i.e. the books stopped being in demand but still occupied too much space needed for new goods that were in demand. Responses that simply described the incident of the books falling and hurting Sidorov, instead of *explaining* why could not gain full marks.
- (g) The best answers were those that simply stated the fact that Sidorov considerably expanded his business having stopped selling books. Many candidates gave unnecessary lengthy quotes for this 1-mark question, even including a long list of new products in the shop.
- (h) It was clear from the answers that the majority of candidates did not know what 'pud' is – an old-fashioned Russian unit of weight. The fact that Sidorov had sold the last books by weight would have contributed to candidates' understanding of his new, indifferent, attitude towards books. However, the majority still understood that he sold his books very cheaply.
- (i) This question yielded no difficulty in answering for the majority of candidates. Surprisingly though, for some candidates the name of the journal – "The European News" – appeared to be misleading, causing lengthy speculations about 'a Russian patriot Sidorov who did not want to know anything about Europe'.
- (j) The best answers included the evidence of how Sidorov's personality was gradually changing from his dedication to the idea of enlightenment of citizens to his complete indifference and even despising of books and of former friends, while gaining success in his business career. Some candidates demonstrated a deep understanding of the text including the evidence of Sidorov's practical, inhuman, reaction to another trader's arrest.

A few candidates who produced a very modern interpretation of the story, i.e. they were sincerely admiring Sidorov's business skills and his way of reacting to market demands promptly. Those candidates were using rather modern vocabulary, more appropriate for market economy («Сидоров стал креативным», «быстро отвечал на запросы рынка»). This may be true to some extent but is not what Chekhov wanted to say in this story.

- (k) (i) caused a lot of confusion: it required understanding of the text on a rather deep level and only a few candidates interpreted this quote correctly.

Most candidates were able to answer (ii) correctly.

(iii) was answered correctly by about 50% of candidates, with the most common mistake being merely a replacement of 'высших' in the quote with the synonym of 'высокие' in their explanation.

Language

The quality of language produced in **Part 1** was quite good, which seemed to demonstrate a significant improvement compared to the last year's overall performance.

Question 2

Content

The majority of candidates demonstrated a good level of comprehension of both texts. They first found some similarities but mainly differences between the characters and then gave a summary of their findings on the subject matter - the characters' attitude towards books. In the best answers, candidates extracted relevant information from both texts, avoiding retelling and used factual details only as evidence to support their opinion. The majority of candidates identified the key difference between the characters' attitudes towards books not as static but developing, and in opposite directions. Their summary of the key ideas was succinct and based solely on the texts, without irrelevant general speculations.

Text 2 seemed to give rise to a variety of interpretation. Some candidates did not seem to fully realise the war-time hardships and presented the boy as 'a regular market stall-holder' describing him as 'an ignorant failure' compared to the character from Text 1. Also, only a few candidates actually acknowledged the significance of the book the boy happened to buy and its author Pushkin as the greatest Russian writer. The establishing of those connections would have helped those candidates to identify the key factor that determined the boy's further life and career as a writer.

Style, Organisation and Language

The level of reading comprehension in this paper could be demonstrated through carefully selected vocabulary and complex syntax as well as through a clear presentation with a robust structure, appropriate for the format of **Question 2** as a comparative essay.

About 40% of candidates produced a high or very good standard of language with quite a high level of accuracy and complexity. The most challenging for many candidates seemed to be to structure their presentation appropriately. The best responses were those where candidates structured their essay in the way that neither of the texts was disadvantaged in the process of contrasting and where a well-balanced account of their interpretation of the authors' ideas was given.

Some candidates focused more on Text 1, only briefly mentioning Text 2 in their comparative analysis. Others described the boy's step-by-step actions in much detail giving only a short statement about the effects the book produced on him in the end. Both approaches resulted in essays being unbalanced.

FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

Paper 0516/02

Writing

Key message

To do well on this paper, essays should be accurate, use a wide range of vocabulary and structures, be well organised and coherent, with well-developed ideas.

In **Part 1** discussion should be logical, consistent and may require complex arguments. In **Part 2** the Descriptive tasks need well-developed ideas and images, using vivid details. The Narrative tasks require a gripping opening, careful development and a well-thought-out ending.

General comments

Paper 2 consists of two sections: **Part 1: Discussion and Argument** and **Part 2: Description and Narrative**. Candidates are required to write two compositions, one from each section. In the first section four argumentative/discursive titles are set, from which candidates choose one. In the second section four titles are set (two descriptive and two narrative) from which candidates choose one.

In successful answers, the candidates will have read all the titles carefully before choosing the ones on which they wish to write. Writing out the task title and underlining key words will help candidates focus on the question being asked and avoid writing irrelevant material. Before writing the essay candidates should spend time planning their essay to avoid repetition and achieve a logical structure.

Most candidates wrote between 350-500 words for each composition; the compositions were divided up into paragraphs. Very short answers due to lack of time or skill affected their overall result for the paper; careful, logical argument focusing on the main points, can achieve an excellent answer without excessive length.

The best candidates carefully constructed their writing to ensure clarity of expression and fluency of style. The best answers in Discussion and Argument were able to call on a wide range of vocabulary that was clear and which conveyed exact meaning; in Description appropriate vocabulary was especially important, in order to create images in the reader's mind; in Narrative a wide vocabulary helped to achieve particular effects, and added to the enjoyment and entertainment of the writing.

In Discussion many excellent responses contained well-developed paragraphs without repetition, supported by the use of appropriate connectives, with detailed, clearly structured, sequenced arguments on either side of the debate. Others needed to develop more detailed and balanced arguments in order to achieve high marks. Candidates need to avoid informal or colloquial style in the argumentative essay. Many successful responses in Description created some wonderful, imaginative, often heart-rending scenes, focusing attention on details, which reflected the emotions of the narrator. Some candidates needed to emphasize description rather than narrative. Many excellent stories in Narrative were well structured, with a gripping beginning, a middle with key events of a plot, including characters and climax, and, what is very important, an interesting ending. Others needed to plan their stories carefully, using straightforward narratives, character development and an effective ending.

The quality of the handwriting was on the whole very good, and many candidates had prepared well for the examination. The majority of candidates wrote in fluent, correct Russian; handled syntax and lexis very well; used appropriate, consistent, complex sentences, which were varied and sophisticated, with ambitious vocabulary. They should pay attention to using correct punctuation, including commas, capital letters and speech marks, with correct spelling. Some candidates should spend more time on re-reading their work to reduce the errors from writing words phonetically or simply in a hurry.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Discussion and Argument

Question 1

- (a) Может ли один человек повлиять на экологическую ситуацию всей планеты? Порассуждайте на эту тему.

This question “Could one person influence the ecology of the whole planet?” asked candidates to discuss this topic.

The best responses that showed consistent analysis, a clear and sometimes sophisticated style, logical, relevant, complex arguments, linkage between the paragraphs and sequenced sentences within paragraphs. The answers firstly noted, that even one person is very powerful, especially if he/she is a politician who provides an ecological policy, the whole system of measures directed at protecting nature. They must check the activities of industrial plants, which produce harmful waste, put efficient technology to work in production, develop and exploit alternative sources of energy, impose fines for damage inflicted on the environment, site nuclear reactors deep underground, restrict felling of the forests, etc. Candidates then continue, that nature is being defended by one person, who collects rubbish, plants trees or works voluntarily in local residents’ and environmental protection group. The green movement, a movement of people concerned about nature conservation, has sprung up in many countries. They educate others, using mass media, and employ all methods of protest such as demonstration, nationwide plebiscite, referendum, etc.

As evidence of the influence that one person has on the ecology of the whole planet, candidates give some interesting examples. One of them is an accident at nuclear power station at Three Mile Island which was caused, as the investigation showed, by the operator’s error. One person pushed the button and dropped bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; one person gave the permit to conduct an unauthorized experiment in Chernobyl, the effect of which on the environment could last for thousands of years. Finally, Genghis Khan, Alexander The Great, Hitler, Stalin not only changed the history of humanity but influenced the ecology of a continent.

Candidates should carefully plan their essays to avoid repetition, long, irrelevant explanations and examples from their own experience and the experience of their relatives and friends. Discussion should include facts, reasons, explanations and some examples.

- (b) «Вегетарианство вредно для человека.» Согласны ли вы с этим утверждением?

The question asked candidates: do they agree with the assertion, that vegetarianism is dangerous for health?

Many excellent essays were well developed, logical, gave strong complex arguments, demonstrated clear sequence and good linkage, used fluent and accurate language with a wide, consistently effective, range of vocabulary. These answers start from pro-vegetarian statements: it is cruel to kill animals for food; a vegetarian diet delivers complete nutrition and can provide health benefits; can help alleviate world hunger; helps build healthy bones which absorb more calcium; a vegetarian diet lowers the risk of heart disease; promotes a healthy weight; decreases the risk of diabetes; is better for the environment; vegetarians live longer.

The contrary view states, eating meat is not cruel, it is a natural part of the cycle of life; meat is the most convenient protein source available; it provides healthy fats, which enhance the function of the immune and nervous system; vitamin B12 is necessary to nervous and digestive system health; better source of iron; diet can help with weight loss; vegetarian protein options such as tofu can cause more greenhouse gas pollution. Then followed the conclusion: whether vegetarianism is healthy or dangerous depends on who practises it. This diet may be healthy for some people and may be dangerous for some children and ill people.

Candidates should avoid very long descriptions of these occupations and general conversation about their own experience.

- (c) «Журналисты могут использовать любые средства для получения нужной информации.»
Насколько вы согласны с этим утверждением?

“Journalists may use any resources for receiving necessary information.” The question asked candidates, how far do you agree with this allegation?

The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organized, and produced unique and sophisticated analysis. The best responses set out the principles underlying journalism: journalists should be truthful in assembling and verifying facts, be as transparent as possible about sources and methods. The last point is very important. At present, in new technology it is very difficult to understand, where permissible barriers lie. Journalists should use approved methods to gather news; they should not quote out of context or hack into e-mails or telephone conversations. For their own survival journalists have to give stunning, but not trivial and false information, even if citizens demand ‘Bread and Circuses’. They always have to follow an ethical code: not harm their sources, or cause potential disaster and damage them.

Then candidates gave reasons for using any methods of receiving information: it is possible only if it concerns the life and safety of citizens, because the first loyalty of journalism is to citizens, and the larger public interest above any others.

Some excellent essays used a lot of Russian proverbs and idiomatic expressions, such as: Клин клином вышибает (“To fight fire with fire”, about using unauthorized method against criminal); Хлеба и зрелищ (“Bread and Circuses”, for the connection between journalists and readers); Назойливые мухи (“Importunate flies”) or (“To go to the end of the earth to get something”, about the journalist, who uses all resources to get an information); журналиги (“Zhurnalyugi”, modern word for “Journalist”), etc.

Candidates need to understand, that in this type of question they should focus more on how far they agree with the allegation that the journalists may use any resources for receiving necessary information. Candidates should avoid general conversation about journalism and positive and negative points about journalists’ occupation, as this was not relevant to the question.

- (d) Кто может быть лидером? Порассуждайте на эту тему.

The question asked candidates to discuss who may be a leader.

This was the most popular essay title and produced a wide range of performance from candidates. The best answers demonstrated good summary style with orderly grouping of ideas, good linkage, well-focused, excellent expression and clear, appropriate, accurate language using varied, precise vocabulary.

These answers start from the statement that a leader is not a manipulator, a leader is a motivator; his activities are aimed at the welfare of others; he has ample free energy and due to a strong and stable energy he is able to lead people; a leader does not try to be a leader, a leader becomes a true leader through the choice of others; leaders have deep confidence. The leader is extremely unhappy with the situation and ready to do everything to change it; he defeats fear; his fearlessness and confidence attract followers. Leaders know who they really are; a leader is hardy and competent, has diverse life experiences; he is a master of communication, can inspire others with his ideas. Leaders raise other leaders; he rises on the shoulders of people, who pushed him to move up (Russian expression “Поднимается не по головам”). One candidate wrote that a boring man cannot be a leader.

On the subject of whether a leader is born or becomes a leader, candidates gave different answers: some believe that leaders are born, while others provide evidence of how people made themselves, for example, Suvorov, who was a sickly weak boy, and became the leader of the Russian Army. Some candidates rightly point out that a successful leader is not necessarily guided by the common ideas of peace and kindness to all mankind, such as dictators and aggressive leaders.

Candidates should avoid long description of their personal issues.

Section 2: Description and Narrative

Question 2

- (a) Вы впервые посетили город, в котором давно мечтали побывать. Опишите самый веселый и самый грустный моменты.

You have for the first time visited a town, which you have long dreamed of visiting. Describe the most cheerful and most sad moments.

Candidates visited a lot of cities all over the world: New-York, Los Angeles, Prague, London, Paris, etc. There were many excellent responses that showed well-developed ideas and images, described feelings and thoughts, included appropriate, sophisticated, complex sentences, used to achieve particular effect; written with accurate language and an effective range of vocabulary. One excellent essay described a journey from a small village in Kostroma to the capital, Moscow. The essay started with the description of how important it was for the villager to go to Moscow. Then followed the saddest moment: the weather was so hot, that the car was like баня (Russian bath) and they missed Russian historical places because there was no time. Then the essay described Moscow with its wonderful churches and cathedrals, ringing bells, Moscow-river, Tretyakovskaya Gallery, Kremlin, etc. The essay included a range of details, and the creation of atmosphere of gaiety, gladness and joy.

Candidates should be aware that the state question asks them to describe the most cheerful and most sad moments, not the sights; the descriptive task can focus on description, not storytelling; candidates should avoid repetition.

- (b) Опишите ваше любимое занятие или любимый вид спорта и какую роль они играют в вашей жизни.

Describe your favourite hobby or favourite sport and what part in your life it takes.

This was a popular title and gave rise to some imaginative responses. There were many well-structured essays with a good selection of interesting ideas and images, a range of details, lively writing, forming a clear picture, with wide, effective range of vocabulary, and accurate grammar.

Predictably the most popular sports were football and tennis. They are emotional, active, joyful whether you play or just watch them. There were excellent essays about reading books and what it gives to a reader: they opened the door to the fantastic world of Ray Bradbury; the second-hand book with yellowed pages and smell of library and the modern with glossy beauty, books help in real life, because you are surrounded by cunning helpful Chichikov, melancholic Tatyana Larina, passionate Anna Karenina, and God-seeker Karamazov.

A favourite hobby may be drawing; playing the piano; аниме (do not confuse with the animation for children, анимэ is for teens and adults); writing verses, when you fall in love or hate somebody, when happy or not, for friends and for relatives' anniversaries, till late night or next morning. There was an essay about computers as a hobby and as a job with a range of details, and feelings, such as "forced perfection", because you have to improve your knowledge in math, languages, have good health, get pleasure, express yourself, create your own world and rule it and to have a good job in future. There was an excellent essay about photography as a hobby with well developed ideas and images and a range of details, such as a grandfather's album in silky soft cover, with old black and white creased photos with bent corners.

Candidates should be aware that this essay focuses on description, not storytelling or just writing how much you love football or tennis. The most common mistakes were repetition, lack of clarity, length of writing (too long or too short), poor grammar and spelling, punctuation.

- (c) «Я шел, погруженный в свои мысли, как вдруг услышал за собой легкие торопливые шаги...» Вставьте эту фразу в короткий рассказ.

“I was deep in thought, and suddenly heard behind me light hurried steps.” Use this phrase in a short story.

This topic proved to be the most popular. The responses varied from simple tales to balanced, tense stories, with a carefully managed climax, well developed characters and appropriate details.

The excellent responses started from the description of an atmosphere before the sentence: “I was deep in thought, and suddenly heard behind me light hurried steps.” For example: “Only ten minutes ago on the street was 1915, but for the short time everything changed so sweepingly, transformed, and the people are awaiting the alterations in their own life with joy and hope.” The place may be forest, blackish in the distance; another planet; Siberian taiga; Moscow in 2050; a little table in café; the main square in the provincial town in 1915.

Then followed the representation of the characters, for example: a little elf with a large beautiful egg; a noble wolf; a genetically modified person; an old man in a warm coat in the middle of a hot summer; a badger with little badgers; two kind young ladies in elaborate fancy dress. Candidates gave a lot of details to build up characters: in a blue dress and with transparent wings, his scales glowed silver; the most beautiful things in him were his eyes, green as just grown foliage, and they were deep, so deep, that when I looked in them, it seems I am drowning; his thin legs leave accurate traces on the soft, fresh snow, when he very quietly plods back; ugly, smelly, eternally shrieking animal. The sequencing of sentences provided clarity and engaged the reader in events and atmosphere. There were a lot of excellent, unexpected endings in these essays, for example: the little girl brought me an envelope with a pack of money and the notes: “You do not know yet that you will be a famous fable-writer”; now, when the dragon was full-grown, I am a Keeper of Borders. The climax of one successful story was: “I decided to take away the children from Moscow, far away from Arena, and hide the symbol of The Games; without it The Games will not be possible. This symbol, a jay-mockingbird, hangs out in my pocket now.”

These examples show how candidates were able to invent details and happenings that could arrest a reader’s attention.

- (d) «В жизни часто происходят удивительные совпадения. Например, недавно мой приятель рассказал мне историю...» Напишите историю или ее часть.

“In life amazing coincidences very often happen. For example, recently my friend told me a story...” Write the story or part of it.

Many candidates were able to bear in mind, that for narrative, it is important to think about content that has some originality, creates tension, produces effects to engage a reader’s attention, and provides necessary and appropriate details. The best responses were balanced. They needed to use language appropriate to a narrative.

There were very interesting responses: twins lost each other, then they met, they both were married to blond women, had a daughter and a son, worked as constructors. Very popular themes were: two children were friends, something happened and they lost each other, then suddenly met in New York, London, Moscow; he lost his lover and found her somewhere or even on a plane beside him. One essay was a very well-structured funny story which happened with a boy named Sulami Bonus Eventus Don Korleone Karlson On the Roof (his parents were very funny). Then followed a story of fishing, full of tension and with appropriate details, for example: far away from the city bustle, a few sausages for a fry-up on the forest fire, a dog named Dog (again funny parents) ate the fish he caught. Then he met boy. The climax was the coincidence, when the boy met another boy, whose parents also were very funny, and named him Boy!

This example shows how the candidate was able to invent details and build-up character and narrative. Candidates should use real coincidences, not merely describe some chance meeting.