

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/01
Reading

Key messages

- **Question 1:** Candidates must read the questions carefully and make sure they answer them correctly and clearly by picking the relevant information from the text and not just quoting the text. The number of marks allocated by the side of each question serves as a clear indicator of the number of ideas or points that need to be included in order to gain full marks. When an explanation or a justification is required keeping to the words of the text is seldom enough to provide a full response. When the question requires to support the answer with an example from the text, the example should be written in full and not give the line number where the example can be found.
- **Question 2:** Some candidates did not read the rubric and compared the two texts instead of writing a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of the compulsory civic service. Others failed to notice that the question was about the compulsory civic service and not the voluntary civil service. Candidates should produce a structured response, making each point briefly, rather than expanding on each point. There should not be comments on the style of the texts and there is no need to write a lengthy introduction and conclusion.
- **Language:** Candidates need to allow time at the end of the exam to proofread their work so as to avoid careless grammatical and spelling errors.

General comments

Most candidates responded positively to the theme of civil service for young people.

In **Question 1** some candidates did not attempt the most difficult questions. In **Question 2** some candidates took the time to write a plan in order to ensure they stayed within the prescribed 250 words limit and used a varied vocabulary and a good range of linking words, which indicated that they had been well prepared in the techniques and requirements of the examination. However, many candidates still need further guidance and training on how to write a good summary as this required an ability to identify valid points and to group them into concise and well written paragraphs. Candidates who write their plan on the exam paper before the summary must remember to cross it off; otherwise it will be part of the word count.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Candidates generally understood the text but occasionally struggled to answer the questions purposefully.

The range of questions provided opportunities for all candidates to perform according to their ability. The easiest questions were **(a)**, **(b)**, **(c)**, **(d)** and the most challenging ones were **(e)**, **(g)**, **(h)**, **(i)**. The rest of the questions fitted in the middle band, where, as long as the text was well understood, the questions presented no major difficulty. Marks are awarded for each specific relevant point made by the candidate. When a question is worth more than one mark, it means that more than one relevant point needs to be identified and when a justification or explanation is required it is important that it is provided.

- (a)** The question was very successful and most candidates gave the correct answer. There were very few incorrect answers (e.g.: *ils reçoivent une pension de 570€/Des missions d'intérêt général ou de collectivité de volontaires*).

- (b) This was the most accessible question and the majority of candidates answered it correctly but they did not all spell *environnement* correctly. A few listed all the domains or answered *action humanitaire*.
- (c) In this question candidates had to convey the idea that there were more candidates than places. Those who just said that it was because it had attracted 100 000 volunteers did not get a mark as the answer was incomplete. Other answers which didn't receive a mark included: *Il offre une expérience au niveau personnel et professionnel/Car il veut rendre le service civique obligatoire/Ils ne peuvent accepter que 4 candidats*
- (d) Most candidates provided the correct answer. A few wrote: *Le service militaire/le service obligatoire*.
- (e) Some candidates found this question quite challenging. They had to convey the idea that civic education should be a compulsory subject. Instead, some answered *Il veut dire qu'on est obligé à être civilisé/Veut dire qu'être civil est un trait qu'il faut avoir/Etre civique/civil est obligatoire/être citoyen est quelque chose d'obligatoire/Tout civil d'un pays devrait essayer d'aider son pays*. Those who wrote *Le civisme est obligatoire* did not score a mark because using the present tense changed the meaning, as in the text does not say that it is compulsory but that it should be.
- (f) Candidates found this question a little more difficult. They had to convey the idea that you become a good citizen by learning to live together or by doing civic service. *Il faut reconstruire un espace de fraternité et de mixité sociale* was acceptable as supplementary information but not on its own.
- (g) This was another challenging question where candidates had to understand the inferred meaning. Max Armnet is reproaching the French education system because 60 000 illiterate candidates are leaving school each year. Many thought that he was reproaching them for not teaching them civic education or how to be a good citizen or how to live with other people or for having stopped military service. Other incorrect answers included : *L'éducation nationale est obligatoire jusqu'à 16 ans/Le fait de pêcher les jeunes du système éducatif pour le service militaire*.
- (h) Here, candidates had to show their understanding of how writers achieve effects (Assessment Objective R4). Like last year, it proved challenging and very few candidates gained full marks. Most candidates explained at great length what the writer wanted to achieve but failed to mention what persuasive methods he used. Many candidates identified the rhetorical questions but failed to identify other methods relevant to the text. Some incorrect answers included *métaphores/personnification/punctuation interrogative/point d'exclamation...* Some identified the correct technique but fail to give an example or picked the wrong example to support their answer.
- (i) This was another challenging question where candidates had to explain a phrase from the text and within that sentence candidates needed to show that they had understood the meaning in the text of the two contrasting words *contrainte* and *libère*. Those who explained one and not the other could only get one mark and those who tried to explain it using the same words as in the question did not score anything. Example of full answer: *Armanet veut dire que même si le service civique est obligatoire et empêche les jeunes de faire ce qu'ils veulent, c'est une expérience positive et utile pour leur futur qui les rend des citoyens meilleurs*.
- (j) (i) Many candidates answered this question correctly. However, answers like *un ton calme/autoritaire/impératif/imposant/objectif/léger/familier...* were not accepted as well as a list of different adjectives which sometimes contradicted each other.
- (ii) This question was also usually well answered. But there were a few incorrect answers: e.g. *car elle est jeune et elle est étudiante et qu'elle parlerait ainsi par habitude/Pour montrer sa compassion aux autres/parce qu'elle voit un changement dans le comportement des jeunes*.
- (k) Most candidates scored at least 2 in this question; one mark for saying that it should be compulsory and one mark for saying that it allows young people to make themselves useful.

Question 2

In this session was different from last session as candidates were not asked to compare the similarities and differences between the two texts, but instead they had to sum up the advantages and disadvantages of the compulsory civic service. Those who failed to comply with the rubric lost some marks in this question.

As this question is a guided summary, it is important that candidates remember that their response should not exceed the word limit as only the first 250 words are taken into consideration in the assessment. For the best results, candidates should read carefully both texts and plan their answer, as planning improves organisation, helps making valid comparisons and encourages the use of a more fluent and varied style.

There is no need to make a lengthy introduction and conclusion and to develop each point. There was also no need to mention from which text each point came from or to mention the points which related solely to voluntary service as no mark was given for those points. Some candidates compared the voluntary civic service to the compulsory civic service and then gave their opinion, which again was not what the question asked. Consequently, not many candidates scored above 10 in the summary. Those who scored more than 10 were those who focused on the compulsory civic service, grouped their points together and used a variety of linking words which enhanced the natural flow of language. Because of the nature of the task, quoting from the text or giving line references is not needed.

The best candidates began their writing with a short introduction, which already contained some ideas, e.g. *Bien que le service civique obligatoire permette aux jeunes français de se rendre utile (1) et d'avoir une expérience enrichissante sur le plan professionnel (1) et personnel (1), il est considéré par certains comme une forme d'exploitation (1) et de précarisation (1). En effet...* and then wrote two paragraphs, (one for the advantages and one for the disadvantages) with sentences which included several points, and lastly finished with a clear but short conclusion which contained a final idea, e.g. *Il est vrai que le service civique permet de se forger une identité citoyenne et de combattre l'incivisme, mais le gouvernement aura-t-il les moyens de créer des places pour tous les jeunes?* Candidates who did that tended to score higher marks than the candidates who just narrated the content of each text. It is also very important to make each point quite briefly and avoid repeating the same ideas as no credit is given for repeated points.

To improve, candidates should:

- Read the question carefully.
- Identify as many advantages/disadvantages as possible.
- Organise and plan their response so that it is purposeful and fully relevant.
- Include several points in a sentence.
- Use a variety of linking words (e.g. *tandis que, par contre, cependant, alors que, de plus, pourtant, aussi, en effet, par conséquent, de ce fait, d'un côté, d'un autre côté, enfin, aussi, également, toutefois...*)
- Remain focused and avoid mentioning things which are not in the text or giving your own opinion or extensively developing each point or quoting what the people in the text are saying.
- Avoid excessive switching into narrative or descriptive mode.

Style and Organisation

Organisation is closely linked with content and some of the points mentioned above have a direct impact on it. The better candidates grouped and linked ideas, typically introducing several ideas into one sentence. The majority of candidates dealt with ideas in a series of short sentences, often following the same pattern, so that the overall effect was somewhat repetitive and at times laboured. A few picked points at random, losing focus now and again, thus making their answer hard to follow.

Style relates to the range and complexity of structures and to the breadth of lexis used. Few candidates were at the extremes of the scale: stylish or purposeful responses were rare, so were very poor responses with excessive lifting written in a basic and barely adequate language.

Accuracy (Questions 1 and Question 2)

Generally, candidates tended to perform better in **Question 1** than in **Question 2** as their answers were shorter and they had the support of the text whereas in **Question 2** they had to produce their own language. But similar errors appeared in both questions e.g. use of the infinitive instead of the past participle or vice versa (e.g. *il est possible d'étudié et de travaillé/elle a utiliser ce ton*), incorrect verb ending (*on apprend/ont voient que/il en reviendrons content...*), failure to agree adjectives and past participles (e.g. *une expérience social/une expérience éducatif/les jeunes sont obligé/les autre...*), wrong gender (e.g. *la service civique*), omission of *ne* when using the negative form, failure to use the subjunctive after *bien que*, incorrect use of pronouns; some candidates had problems with using the correct prepositions with verbs like *dire, permettre, donner, apprendre...*. In their answer to **Question 1c** some candidates used *par* + infinitive instead of *en* + present participle (*par apprendre à vivre ensemble*)

Many candidates favour the phonetical rendering to the detriment of grammatical accuracy (e.g. *c'est* sometimes spelt *cet/cette/ses/sait*; *est* often spelt *et* or *ai* and vice versa; *ce* spelt *se*; *ceux* spelt *ce*; *ça* spelt *sa*; *on* used instead of *ont*; *a* instead of *à*; *eu* instead of *eux*; *un court* instead of *un cours*; *les genes* instead of *les jeunes*...

All these mistakes could be avoided if candidates took time to proofread their work.

Most produced “appropriate but unsophisticated and generally simple syntax”. In **Question 2** the language was often quite repetitive as candidates were more concerned with making valid points than with improving the quality of their language.

To improve the quality of language, candidates should pay particular attention to the following

- Agreement of adjectives and participles.
- Correct verb endings.
- Correct use of pronouns and prepositions.
- Knowing the difference between *a* and *à* ; between *et*, *est*, *ai* and *aie*; between *c'est*, *s'est*, *ses*, *ces*, *sait*; between *ce* and *se*; between *sa* and *ça*; between *été* and *était*; between *on* and *ont*.
- Widening their knowledge of linking words and vocabulary.

Concentrating on these areas should stand all candidates in good stead.

FIRST LANGUAGE FRENCH

Paper 0501/02
Writing

Key messages

To do well on this paper, candidates need to select two titles (one from each section) and write a response that is clearly relevant and well structured. Essays should be generally accurate with a use of idiom and appropriate vocabulary, be coherent with well-developed ideas.

General comments

As in previous years, candidates were given a choice of 4 titles for the discussion and argumentative essay and 4 titles for the narrative/descriptive essay. Each essay was marked out of 25, comprising a maximum mark of 12 for style and accuracy and a maximum of 13 for task achievement. Most candidates observed the rubric regarding the number of words used (350–500 words per essay). There were some first-rate essays from able candidates who handled the questions not only with commendable fluency and accuracy, but also demonstrating good understanding of the issues requested in **section 1**. The very best closely focused essays are those which support the arguments with apt illustration and exemplification. For **section 2** essays which were awarded good or very good marks for content featured an exceptional description or narration which engaged the reader throughout. At the other end of the range, only a small number of candidates presented seriously deficient pieces of work where ideas and opinions were limited and included too much padding. Some essays had no proper structure and link words between paragraphs were non-existent.

With regard to quality of language, the best essays combined high levels of accuracy, fluency and a wide range of vocabulary and idiom; mistakes were few and far between. At the other end of the spectrum there were essays where poor language meant that ideas were not well communicated.

A few candidates wrote in “spoken language” where colloquial expressions and repetitions of the same words were used inappropriately. However, much of the work was characterised by a fair level of accuracy and a positive attempt to vary expressions despite some clumsiness and lapses in clarity of meaning. Some of the most common linguistic errors and infelicities are listed below:

- Misspelling of common words e.g. les **resources**, le **future**, l'**environnement**, le **government**, la **plus** part, la **medicine**, **example**, **campagne**.
- Omission of accents.
- Wrong preposition in verb + infinitive constructions e.g. “intéresser par”, “aider de”, “préférer de”, “permettre à”.
- La/les raisons “pourquoi” for la/les raisons pour laquelle/lesquelles.
- “l’expectance/expectation de vie” for l’espérance de vie.
- “les célèbres” for les personnes célèbres.
- Subject-verb agreement.
- “le plus...le plus” instead of plus...plus.
- Weak link words at the beginning of paragraphs e.g. “aussi”, “ensuite”.
- “Balancer” for équilibrer.
- Confusion between homonyms e.g. ceux/ce, ses/ces.
- Omission of *ne* in negative forms.
- Use of tu form instead of the vous ou on form.
- Use of à cause de instead of grâce à
- Conjugation first person singular past historic e.g. “j’alla”, “je marcha”.
- Confusion between past tenses (past historic, imperfect and perfect).

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question (a)

« De nos jours, les jeunes semblent de moins en moins attirés par la lecture. » Discutez.

This proved to be by far the most popular title, which generated a significant amount of thoughtful, well-constructed and cogently discursive essays. To score well, it was essential that essays focused on young people and reading (as a generic term) and not only reading books. A few candidates chose to elaborate on the benefit of reading and/or the solutions to engage children in reading more which was not relevant to the question. Other candidates developed their own experience throughout the essay which limited the range of ideas on offer. In fact, this question required a discussion about both sides of the issue; most candidates explained that the much-bemoaned decline of reading is of course because of young people being distracted by computer games and social networking. Some essays also developed the idea that teenagers do have far more choice of activities outside school which seemed more exciting than sitting still and reading. Furthermore, the development of technology such as the internet has drastically reduced the attention span of teenagers. In addition, forcing children to read literary books at school could also be considered reading as a duty rather than a pleasure, a real put off. Perhaps money could also be a factor in this decline; books are expensive in a world where information on the web is largely free. However, good essays also disagreed with the premise of the question. Indeed, young people read more but in different ways because of new technology (e-books, internet, social media) and schools play an important role in encouraging young people to read. It was perfectly acceptable to express one's opinion in the conclusion and speculate about anticipated reading behaviour in the future.

Question (b)

A votre avis, quels sont les avantages et les désavantages des avancées de la médecine?

A small minority of candidates interpreted the question as modern medicine versus traditional medicine and were off topic. In this question, it was essential to utilise some examples to support the advantages and the disadvantages of medical advances. Most candidates agreed that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages as people who are diagnosed with a serious illness can be treated much more easily than before. Thanks to new treatments quality of life has improved drastically and people are now fitter and are living longer. New techniques such as CT and MRI scans can detect health problems sooner and tackle them effectively. However, candidates raised the problem of over population as more and more people have a life expectancy exceeding 100 years old and this issue will continue to grow as medical advances keep finding new remedies for diseases. Furthermore, as antibiotics are overused in modern society, superbugs have appeared and are resistant to any antibiotics exposing people to greater risk. Another disadvantage which was well developed was the cost element in some countries which meant that not everyone could access treatment and there are still people in the world who are dying of diseases such as malaria due to wealth inequality. The scripts were generally a pleasure to read as candidates did not run short of ideas.

Question (c)

« Les personnes célèbres, telles que les sportifs, chanteurs et acteurs, sont beaucoup trop payées. » Êtes-vous d'accord?

This title generated some disappointing responses. Although there was no ambiguity in understanding the question, a lot of essays lacked pertinent examples and candidates tended to utilise a basic range of expressions in presenting their ideas. As this was an argumentative essay, they were able to develop one side of the argument and good candidates successfully managed to explain the reasons why celebrities were either paid too much or deserved to be well-rewarded. Although candidates acknowledged the fact that celebrities were naturally talented, had to spend years to reach fame and can be an inspiration to millions of people, most candidates felt that celebrities' salaries were disproportionate in comparison to other professionals such as surgeons or firefighters who save lives daily. Discussion on some celebrities' bad behaviour was also relevant to support the argument.

Question (d)

Les jeunes de moins de 18 ans devraient aussi avoir le droit de voter. Partagez-vous cette opinion?

Relatively few candidates opted for this title. However, it generated some high scoring answers with good balanced arguments. Most candidates felt that there were good reasons for making the voting age 18, the most common ones being a lack of maturity and responsibility, influenced too much by peers and family and a general lack of interest in politics. However, some candidates raised the issue that important decisions are being made about young people's futures and therefore they should have a say particularly on the questions of education and employment. It was also suggested that if the voting age was to be lowered it would be essential to include some civic education in schools.

Section 2

Question (a)

C'est l'été, vous êtes assis(e) sur une plage ensoleillée.

This title produced some excellent descriptive answers using well-developed images accompanied by appropriate detail. Some candidates found it difficult to link each detail to the whole picture and the writing became more a series of points rather than one coherent piece. Using the past tense was more effective and those who were most successful included all five senses and gave vivid details of what was happening on the beach.

Question (b)

Imaginez que vous êtes sans domicile fixe.

This question elicited mixed responses. Unfortunately, some candidates chose to convert the descriptive task into a narrative task relating to the reasons why they became homeless. As per **Question (a)**, it was essential to provide a description using all senses and not just tell a story. Those who were most successful gave details of their feelings and a well-developed description of their surroundings. Common chosen settings were mainly on a bench in a park or on the pavement in the town centre during winter. There were some exceptional essays written in response to this title.

Question (c)

« Je me rendis compte que je m'étais bel et bien perdu(e). »

Candidates' main themes revolved around a trek to the forest or the mountains, a car drive at night or visiting a new place. Narrating the story in the past tense was necessary as the sentence to be incorporated was in the past historic; this proved to be somewhat challenging for some candidates. It is important not to start the essay with the given sentence, nor to modify it. The story also needed to be written in the first-person singular. Some candidates produced excellent and well-developed storylines and the desired impact was successfully achieved.

Question (d)

Vous avez inventé une machine à voyager dans le temps.

Some candidates who selected this question made it clear of the setting before embarking on a time travel adventure which was necessary to avoid any confusion. The most engaging essays were able to use flashbacks effectively and describe a particular mission to travel to the past in order to change the course of events and to prevent a disaster or a conflict from happening. As per **Question (c)** it was essential to write the narrative in the first-person singular.