

Chinese

2017 Senior External Examination: Assessment report

Statistics

| Year | Number of candidates | Level of achievement | | | | |
|------|----------------------|----------------------|-----|----|----|-----|
| | | VHA | HA | SA | LA | VLA |
| 2017 | 236 | 44 | 163 | 25 | 4 | 0 |
| 2016 | 223 | 87 | 116 | 14 | 6 | 0 |
| 2015 | 233 | 90 | 121 | 21 | 1 | 0 |
| 2014 | 201 | 68 | 99 | 32 | 2 | 0 |
| 2013 | 314 | 55 | 155 | 84 | 19 | 1 |

The *Chinese Senior External Examination* comprised two components: an oral examination and a written examination.

Oral examination

In 2017, the majority of candidates were individually assessed in person, with remaining candidates assessed during individual telephone conversations. Candidates were sent topic information several weeks before the assessment date and were required to research and prepare a 2–3 minute speech. They were able to take notes on one double-sided palm card into the examination room and to refer to the notes as they presented their speech.

There were two tasks in this section.

Task 1

Each candidate presented a speech of two to three minutes in Chinese to a marker. A demonstration of relevance, logic and organisation at a high level was expected. The majority of candidates performed very well in this task, with appropriate and clear divisions of introduction, development and conclusion evident.

Task 2

Candidates were required to respond spontaneously to questions from the marker. This task gave candidates the opportunity to express themselves on a variety of themes and topics from the syllabus. The majority of candidates performed very well in this task.

Written examination

The written examination consisted of three sections: Listening, Reading and Writing. It assessed knowledge and skills demonstrated by candidates in spoken and written texts.

Listening section

Suggested responses

Task 1

Question 1

What have you learned about the female speaker's life?

She was born in Shanghai, China, and grew up in Brisbane, Australia. She is visiting her birthplace (Shanghai) at the moment and had her birthday celebration in Shanghai the previous day for the first time. What she wants to do most in life is to travel all over China.

Question 2

What is the relationship between the two speakers? Use information from the text to support your response.

Although they don't seem to know each other very well, they seem to be very good friends, e.g. walking in the rain along the Huangpu River, talking about their interests in life. However, the male speaker seems to have some special interest in the female speaker. When they were caught in the rain, he went to hire an umbrella so that they could continue walking in the rain (perhaps to spend more time with the female speaker). He remembered that it was the female speaker's birthday the day before while the female speaker didn't seem to be aware he had known her birthday. When asked how he knew about it, he replied that he had always remembered her birthday, which showed that he really cared about her. When he got to know that the female speaker wanted to travel all over China, he offered to travel with her. All of these indicate that the male speaker has a special interest in the female speaker.

Task 2

Question 1

How did Paul feel about his new living environment? Explain your response using information from the text.

He felt very grateful because his new neighbours were very kind and helpful. They helped him renovate his newly purchased house and taught him many practical skills to live in the new environment, such as collecting firewood, drying firewood and hunting. However, he also felt confused about his new environment at times.

Question 2

What is the purpose of Paul's phone call? Use information from the text to explain your response.

Paul phoned Mike to pay him for clearing away the snow on the path to the front of his house. One night, it snowed heavily. The next morning, Paul found that all roads around his house were covered with snow except for the path to the front of his house. When he found out that it was Mike who had cleared it away for him, he phoned Mike to offer his payment.

Question 3

Explain the reason for Mike's action at the end of the story. Justify your response using information from the text.

At the end of the story, Mike became so angry that he hung up on Paul. When Paul phoned up to pay him, Mike thought that it was a rather insignificant matter and suggested that Paul could help him in the future. But Paul insisted on paying and even suggested doubling the amount of payment. This is, I think, because there is a difference between Mike and Paul in how they value help from others. For Paul, who came from a big city like New York City, paying money to those who had helped was probably a normal practice. For Mike, on the other hand, who came from a small town, the value in the community was on helping those in need. This is probably why Mike suggested that Paul help him clear the snow away in the future. It could also explain why Paul's new neighbours offered their help to renovate his house and teach him practical skills to live there. On the other hand, this could be where Paul felt confused about his new environment.

Comments

Most candidates responded well to the questions in both tasks. They demonstrated an effective grasp of the main ideas and the ability to generally distinguish gist from detail. They were able to identify the speakers' general intentions and attitudes when explicitly expressed.

However, to achieve an A standard, candidates need to be able to infer the speakers' intentions and attitudes and draw appropriate conclusions which are substantially supported by evidence from the text, e.g. the response to Task 1 Question 2 and Task 2 Question 3.

It was pleasing to see many candidates achieve this level.

Reading section

Suggested responses

Task 1

Question 1

Summarise the story in one to two sentences.

It is a story about how Zheng Banqiao, a talented and famous Chinese scholar, was treated and how he felt about his treatment during his visit to a temple one day.

Question 2

What did the visitor do during his visit to the temple?

He walked around the temple and then followed the crowd into the temple. Once he was inside, all he had interest in was the calligraphy and the paintings on the wall. On his departure, he was asked to write a couplet for the temple and he did.

Question 3

How did the visitor's choice of words convey his feelings? Justify your response with evidence from the text.

He wrote a couplet. The first line of the couplet says, 'Sit! Please sit! Please have a seat!' The second line of the couplet says, 'Tea! Please have some tea! Please enjoy some (quality) tea!'

These were the words used by the monk during Zheng's visit to the temple. The change in the quality of the language used revealed the monk's snobbish attitude towards Zheng — from the

simple and direct language when the monk hadn't realised who he was, to the most polite and honorific language when the monk recognised him. Zheng's choice of words for the couplet expressed his annoyance of the monk's snobbish attitude and it also might be his way of telling the monk that they should treat people nicely no matter who they are and what their appearance might be.

Task 2

Question 1

What was Mary's initial response to the situation she was in?

Mary had been very ill. She didn't seem to cope very well. She sounded very sad and depressed, comparing her life with the falling ivy leaves outside her windows. She told her roommate Susan that when the last of the five remaining ivy leaves fell, it would be the time she died.

Question 2

What is the significance of the ivy leaf to each character?

To Mary, the ivy leaf symbolised her life. Initially, she expected the leaf to fall and she would die. Later, it became the hope and inspiration for her to fight for her life.

To Susan, the ivy leaf represented her concerns and hope for her friend Mary to survive. She cried when the doctor told her that nothing could help Mary any more but her own will to live. When Mary told her that she would die when the last ivy leaf fell, she believed that so long as the leaf did not fall, Mary would survive. Therefore, she did her best to ensure the leaf would remain standing, which might have included a discussion about Mary with the old artist living downstairs.

To the old artist, the ivy leaf represented hope for Mary to survive and the sacrifice of his own life for Mary's. When the ivy leaf fell during the stormy night, he painted one on the brick wall. His painting skill was such that Mary believed it was the real leaf remaining. Unfortunately, he caught a cold while painting in the storm which led to his death from pneumonia.

Comments

Most candidates responded to the questions well in both tasks. They demonstrated an effective grasp of the main ideas and the ability to generally distinguish gist from detail. They could identify the general purpose of the text and the writer's attitudes when explicitly expressed.

However, to achieve an A standard, candidates need to be able to draw appropriate conclusions and substantially support their conclusions with evidence from the text, e.g. the response to Task 1 Question 3 and Task 2 Question 2. It was pleasing to see that a number of candidates achieved at this level.

Writing section

Task 1

Write an account of your best eating experiences for a community newspaper.

In your account, include

- *the place where you ate*
- *the food you had*
- *the people you might have been with*
- *the feelings you had.*

Write about 200 characters in the space provided.

Task 2

The pictures on this page raise a 21st century topic.

Write an argumentative article, in the affirmative or the negative, about this topic.

In your article, to be posted online,

- *provide a title that reflects your stand*
- *clearly state your argument(s)*
- *support your argument(s) with evidence from the pictures*
- *provide strategies that may be useful.*

Write about 300 characters in the space provided.

Comments

Most candidates responded well to both tasks. They generally followed the instructions of the tasks and responded accordingly. More attention is required when understanding the tasks, and demonstrating the correct characters, register, paragraphing and punctuation.

Recommendations

Prospective candidates should ensure that they have a good understanding of:

- the terminology used in the task suggestions in the syllabus
- the task instructions in each section of the examination paper
- how to identify key words/elements in the questions of each task and respond accordingly
- how to draw conclusions from given information in the Listening and Reading sections
- how to identify and use relevant information from a given text to support their opinions or conclusions in responses to the Listening and Reading sections
- how to distinguish information from a given text and from common sense or personal observation in response to the Listening and Reading sections.

Candidates also need to:

- understand English better (e.g. vocabulary and tenses) to identify or determine the information required in their responses in all written sections
- express themselves clearly in English (e.g. spelling and grammar) in responses to the Listening and Reading sections
- follow appropriate writing conventions where necessary, such as titles, paragraphs and punctuation, in all written sections.