

The expert



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Exam focus

Written section: this deals with the letter, postcard or note. Many marks are lost in this section. It can be the most difficult because it's the only section of the exam where you have to write in French.

A student who does very well in the listening and reading comprehensions can still make a mess of this section. It requires care and a good deal of learning.

The listening comprehension also requires a lot of practice. CDs of previous exams are available; the tapescripts can be downloaded, so you can practise with these.

All questions are answered in English, with zero marks for answering in French, unless, of course, there is no English equivalent.

Study tips

◆ A good way of learning grammar is through examples, rather than through a whole lot of dull rules.

For instance:

“**Je viens d'Irlande, mais il vient de France**” = I come from Ireland, but he comes from France.

This sentence tells you about verb endings (never 't' with “je”; never 's' with “il”).

“**Je suis allé en Italie, ma sœur est allée au Portugal**” = I went to Italy, my sister went to Portugal.

This shows that “aller” takes “être” and that “allé” agrees with the feminine.

“**Nous allons sortir quand tu rentreras**” = we are going to go out when you return.

This example highlights the very useful “aller” + infinitive to express what you ‘are going to do’. You also have an example of the future tense in “rentreras”. You’re reminded of the verb endings too.

You can find plenty of examples in your own notes.

◆ Review your mock answer papers. Look at the mistakes that you made. Were they typical? Do you know why you went wrong? Can you ensure that you won't repeat the errors?

◆ Read again and again the sample letters and notes that your teacher has given you. The repetition should leave imprints of the content in your mind. You'll be able to remember the material more easily on the day of the exam.

◆ If you look over the letter/note questions in past papers, you'll notice some similarity of content.

For example, you may be required to write about your plans for the weekend/summer; how you spent your birthday; to describe a journey; thank your pen-friend for a holiday or present; describe Irish food or schools; or say what you most liked about your stay in France.

Learn some useful paragraphs that you can draw on when you need to.

◆ For the aural, revise the vocabulary that tends to crop up in the different sections. Section A: making arrangements, cancelling appointments and so on; Section B: personal details like dates, hobbies and school subjects; and in Section E: weather, sports, disasters, crime and so on.

Putting some French polish on your letters

Knowing your format, being careful with your grammar and being clear about what points you're going to make will get you a long way towards good marks in the letter-writing question

LA LETTRE

The letter carries 50 marks out of a possible 320, with 5 marks for the format, 20 for the content and 25 for grammar and language.

You are given five points that you must develop. Each point carries 4 marks for content.

FORMAT

The format of the letter is simply the city, date, “cher” and sign-off.

If you stick to the format you can't go wrong.

Learn it by heart and be sure you have it, 100 per cent, before you go into the exam. It's easy to gain marks here, and it's just as easy to lose out on them.

Always be aware that careless grammar can make a letter look awful.

THEMES

Typical themes include talking about an exchange visit that you had; describing a holiday in France; planning a visit to your pen-friend in France; responding to a gift or card that you received; and talking about your new school or area.

THE FUTURE TENSE

In the written section it is very common to talk about the future.

For example, you might talk about what you are going to do next summer, when you are coming home from your holidays, what you and your pen-friend are going to do during his/her vis-



Cyclists taking in the scenery during the fifth stage of the Tour de France between Bonneval and Amiens in northern France

