

November 2017 subject reports

English ab initio

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 14	15 – 29	30 – 50	51 – 63	64 – 73	74 – 85	86 - 100

Standard level Internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 7	8 – 11	12 – 15	16 – 18	19 – 21	22 - 25

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range of work submitted was generally of a higher standard than the last session with fewer candidates receiving very low marks in either criterion with a marked difference in a higher number of candidates doing better in Criterion B. There were very few cases of candidates who were not able to sustain the oral.

There were problems with the teachers who did not follow the oral structure as defined by the formal guidelines. For example:

- There were many recordings that were under 10 minutes, some as short as 4 minutes.
- In some schools, the description sections were more than 4 minutes long to then be followed by another two minutes of questions that often forced the candidates to repeat information they had already given. As a result of this misuse of time, there was then not enough time left for substantial information to be given by the candidates about their WAs, etc.
- Sometimes, there was NO interaction with the candidates at all, throughout all of the oral; this severely disadvantaged the candidates. Teachers know that they have to give

the candidates the opportunity to demonstrate a range of tenses and structures and to show their comprehension through their ability to correctly respond with valid information.

- There were also lots of descriptions and WA sections that were obviously scripted and this therefore affected the mark the candidates received for sustaining participation.

Candidate performance against each criterion

A: Most candidates were understandable (pronunciation and intonation) although, generally speaking, grammar was weak and in most cases only a limited range of more complex grammatical structures were ever used accurately by any of the candidates.

In a few schools, there is a marked tendency of teachers marking Criterion A far too generously; and generally speaking, erroneously high marks were given to Criterion A in cases where the candidates have replicated their teachers' language skills ONLY, for want of exposure to alternative, first language sources, on a more regular basis. There also seems to be some confusion about what constitutes "basic and more complex grammatical structures".

B: Most candidates were able to at least, generally sustain their participation through the provision of appropriate information although this was not always reflected in the teacher's marks. There was a lot of inconsistency in the marking of Criterion B. Some educators believed that their candidates spoke more fluently than they did and were far too generous whilst on other occasions (and often within the same school) the opposite happened. It is also important to note that the teacher's performance really influences the outcome of the candidate's score. On some occasions, teachers interrupted candidates quite often and disrupted the flow of the conversation.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

In order for their candidates to perform well in the IA, teachers must ensure that the English they use is clear, comprehensible and grammatically correct. Teachers could complement their classes by providing more exposure to audio sources that use native English speakers, to help strengthen pronunciation and intonation. They should also revise, together with their candidates, the level descriptors of both the criteria, in order to get a better idea of what is expected from the different bands and how to best fulfill them. Likewise, teachers and candidates would do well to revise the formal IA requirements and the guidelines for oral structure.

As a means of addressing the issue of the confusion concerning grammar expectations, teachers need to decide and communicate clearly to their candidates, what comprises *basic* and *more complex* grammatical structures and then emphasize teaching and practising these to the candidates, in order to prepare them for the examination.

Questions during the oral should be clear and coherent for the candidates.

Teachers should not encourage the use of scripted sections of any part of the oral.

Standard level Written Assignment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 14	15 – 17	18 – 20

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The strengths and weaknesses of the written assignment echo those of candidates in the May session. Strong candidates gave information that is well developed, relevant to the topic and expressed with a reasonable degree of linguistic accuracy. The majority of the written assignments were based on a comparison between comparable cultural elements in an English-speaking country and a culture that the candidate knows well. Suitable topics included daily routine, festivities, meals and food, leisure activities, school systems and holidays.

On the other hand, some candidates chose two non-English-speaking cultures for the cultural comparison and others wrote general essays with no cultural focus. A significant number of candidates seemed to have little idea of the formal requirements of the task. Few candidates uploaded the required documents: the written assignment, the bibliography and at least two resources in English. Many candidates consequently lost marks in criterion G.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A (2 marks) – Description

To achieve 2 marks, the candidate must provide 3 factual pieces of information on the chosen topic. These must be based on the target culture.

Candidates who did not receive full marks were those who did not choose an English language country, who did not provide a sufficient number of facts on the topic but expressed opinions and vague generalities, who compared the chosen topic in 2 countries (the content of criterion B), or those who wrote a general introduction to an essay.

Criterion B (3 marks) – Comparison

Many candidates wrote a balanced description (two paragraphs, one on each culture) and used comparative terms. However, some candidates repeated the information given in the section, Description. Others lost points due to incomprehensible language or uneven treatment of the countries.

Criteria C, D, E (3 marks each) - Reflection

This section remains the most challenging for candidates both in terms of content and linguistic expression. Answers were frequently brief and undeveloped. Many candidates continue to recycle material from the description and comparison sections. Others omitted question E. Occasionally this part of the assignment was treated as a conclusion to an essay, and, therefore, did not contain answers to any of the three compulsory questions.

Criterion F (4 marks) Language

The majority of candidates were able to express the information clearly if not always linguistically accurately. In criteria A and B most candidates were able to communicate clearly, but in criteria C, D and E, (expression of reasons and opinions), there was a marked decrease in linguistic abilities and consequently in clarity of message. Syntax and punctuation are areas for improvement. Vocabulary was mostly appropriate for the task.

Criterion G (2 marks) Formal requirements and register

The bibliography was very frequently incorrect, lacking consultation dates for Internet sites, not following any system or not having two sources in English. Sources were seldom uploaded. Some sources had little link with the chosen topic, others were too long or too linguistically difficult. The register was mainly appropriate.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should structure their work by using subtitles that correspond to the criteria. They should also write out the three questions in the section, Reflection (criteria C, D and E) and place the corresponding answer under each question.

Teachers should ensure that:

- candidates have read the criteria and relevant extract about the written assignment in the ab initio guide and that they have understood the requirements for each part of the task;
- candidates compare two countries, one of which represents an English-speaking culture;
- the topic of the task is focused;
- the topic is linked to the course program;
- the resources are relevant to the topic and up-to-date;
- the resources are within the linguistic abilities of the candidate;
- candidates are provided with models of bibliographical references that include consultation dates;
- candidates are reminded that the content of their answers should not be recycled from previous sections.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 21	22 – 25	26 – 30	31 – 34	35 - 40

General comments

Whilst some candidates taking the English ab initio SL Paper 1 exam in the N17 session did well, in general, the work presented revealed some obvious gaps in their reading comprehension skills. According to the examiner reports, there were gaps in reading comprehension skills for both simple and more complex information. Weaker candidates lacked the language and text-handling skills necessary to engage in the tasks successfully or at all, with a notable number scripts which were nearly entirely made up of unanswered questions.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Many candidates had problems when answering questions that needed them to read for specific information. On the whole, there were problems with vocabulary and syntax, specific grammar and in the interpretation of questions. This last part was most noticeable in Q 1- 6, Q17, Q22, match parts of the sentences given in Q 29 – 31 or match the information given in Q 33 – 36, where many candidates failed to answer complex questions and in the true or false questions (Q13, Q23, Q24 and Q25) where answers need to be justified with relevant evidence. Many cases occurred in which even though candidates succeeded in finding the right place, line or fragment in the text, they were not awarded marks as a result of either excessively long answers that become ambiguous in nature or they gave insufficient information or a wrong justification as a result of not referring to the correct section of the text for the answer (following instructions).

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Overall, the candidates this session seem to have been much better prepared for the exam in terms of both their use of the English language and in their application of reading comprehension skills and reading strategies. Candidates who performed better showed greater familiarity with the text types and the kinds of tasks they faced and obviously used effective

reading strategies. On the whole, the candidates were well prepared for tasks that required general understanding, especially in cases where they could use their own cultural knowledge. Reading for the gist seemed to be quite easy for them even though the texts might have appeared to be challenging for this level of English.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Text A

Qs 1 – 6: Most of the candidates answered correctly here, often giving full correct sentences (which were awarded marks) even though the instructions did not ask for them. At the same time, in Q1, candidates were not generally able to determine that the *children* or *children in emergencies*, was the target answer, demonstrating a lack of basic comprehension.

Q4 - While some candidates had problems identifying the target answer which was *bake sale*, many candidates did give answers that were related to cooking or selling food, demonstrating that they did know, but did not have the necessary language skills to extract it from the text. Q5 – Likewise, while some candidates had problems identifying the target answer which was *fundraising leaflet*, several candidates did give answers that were related to fundraising information and where to find it, demonstrating comprehension even though marks may not have been awarded.

Q6 - was a particularly difficult for most of the candidates. The MS required that the word *online*, be repeated.

Q 7 - 11 A notable number of candidates found this section challenging and often answered with too many words, creating phrases that failed to make grammatical sense, or just choosing a random word or group of words that did not make sense once inserted into the gaps.

Text B

Qs 14 – 17 This matching task was a generally challenging for most candidates. A few candidates chose the right titles but had problems matching them to the right paragraphs.

Qs 18 - 19 Few candidates had problems here.

Text C

Q 20 -23 Some candidates provided answers that were far too long and/or not related to the question.

Q 22 Many of the candidates had problems in this question because they referred to the whole text when searching for the answer instead of the line or paragraph numbers given in the instructions.

Q 23 - 25 Although many candidates answered the true/false part correctly, they often failed to justify their answers with the clear and correct information often as a result of ignoring the clear instructions asking them to use words from the text. Quite often, whole sentences were copied from the text, making the answer ambiguous and therefore making it impossible to award marks. Stronger candidates demonstrated that they had the necessary reading comprehension skills to pass this section.

Q 26- 27 Although many candidates did well here, a notable number of candidates still found this section challenging which reveals a general weakness in grammar skills.

Q 28 Weaker candidates had difficulties identifying the correct answers, indicating both limited vocabulary and weak text-comprehension skills. Stronger candidates were able to pick up marks here.

Text D

Q 29-36 In general, candidates had difficulty identifying the most relevant piece of information to answer the question.

Q 29 – 31 Few candidates managed to succeed in this task which was based on grammar and a solid understanding of both the text and the task. Candidates failed to match the sentences correctly even though this type of task is generally candidate-friendly.

Q 33 - 36 Quite a few candidates gave the right answers. However, for a large number of candidates, this task was just as challenging as Q 29 – 31.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should be given reading comprehension tasks that based on a variety of text types (course books, newspapers, magazines, Internet texts, reports, essays, short stories, diary entries etc.), on a regular basis. They should also practise various reading comprehension related tasks such as gap filling, T/F questions, answer justification, paraphrasing, multiple choice, etc. They should also be familiar with reading strategies such as scanning or reading for the gist and contextualization in order to identify unfamiliar vocabulary. There is a clear need to work on how to identify and select relevant evidence from the text to support an answer (especially in the justification of T/F questions). There is also a clear need to strengthen grammar skills, especially those used for identifying and matching synonyms and pronoun references.

One area of weakness that has been identified is not following exam instructions (for example: what lines to refer to when looking for a piece of relevant information or using ONE word instead of various words when the instructions ask for words in the plural.). All candidates should be made well aware that it is essential to read the instructions for each task very carefully and more than once. The N17 P1 exam results could have been very different if instructions had been followed more often.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 14	15 – 17	18 – 19	20 – 22	23 - 25

General comments

Candidates continue to improve their performance in Paper 2. A majority showed good knowledge of the formal requirements of the written production and many candidates were able to express their ideas with reasonable clarity if not always with linguistic accuracy.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

As in past examination sessions, weaker candidates had limited language skills. The weakest candidates used a limited range of vocabulary and produced few accurate basic structures. They were unable to express their ideas with clarity. When the message is not communicated because of incorrect grammar, lack of vocabulary and inaccurate spelling, the candidate is inevitably penalized under both criterion A, Language and criterion B, Message.

A surprising number of candidates did not know how to form regular and irregular verbs in the simple past (required in questions 3 and 5). Many omitted the subject pronouns before verbs. The use of phrasal verbs challenged many: the adverb or preposition was either missing or incorrect (*think about, look at, look after, talk about, depend on...*) Some candidates placed agreements on adjectives - adding 's' to the adjective when the noun was plural, for example. Candidates also confused subject, object and possessive pronouns and adjectives (*I, me, my; we, us, ours...*).

There was considerable first language interference (*ubicate, realise, actual, funny, colosseum*). Idiomatic expressions are difficult to use appropriately and should always be used sparingly. (*Once in a blue moon, with the drop of a hat, cost an arm and a leg...*) Care must also be taken to use the appropriate register: "a hot potato" is a familiar expression and inappropriate in a report, for example.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Most candidates fulfilled the formal requirements. A large majority answered one question in each section, provided all or most of the required information for the chosen tasks and developed the answer in section B by providing several details and examples. The majority of candidates also showed awareness of the appropriate format for the text type. The texts were

of an appropriate length and were logically structured. Many candidates used cohesive devices appropriately. Strong candidates were able to form both simple and complex structures accurately. They used a range of vocabulary and were consequently able to develop their ideas by giving detailed information.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Section A

Candidates chose Question 1 more frequently than question 2.

Question 1

The information to be given:

- the time lunch at school is served
- the type of food served
- the cost of school lunch
- two reasons why students should have lunch at school.

A majority of candidates provided all or most of the message details and these were generally clearly expressed. Some candidates did not understand the meal that “*lunch*” referred to. Others thought that *the time lunch is served* referred to duration (i.e. *30 minutes*). Many candidates repeated information from earlier in the response to answer the last message point (*two reasons why students should have lunch at school*). Repeated information is not awarded marks. Several candidates used Spanish language dishes for *the type of food served*, not all of which were internationally known enough to be understood by English speakers.

Most candidates scored one mark for using the format appropriate to a message. To receive the mark the candidate had to use a title or greeting.

Question 2

The information to be given:

- the date of the competition
- where they must meet to leave for the competition
- how they are going to travel to the competition
- what they should bring to wear and to eat.

The majority of candidates provided all or most of the message points and these were clearly expressed. Some candidates copied extensively from the question itself. Others omitted to say

where the team should meet. Others misunderstood the verb *to wear* or did not give an example.

Most candidates received one mark for using the format appropriate to an email. To receive this mark the candidate had to use a greeting, a signature or a title.

Section B

Question 3

This question was by far the most popular choice in section B.

Information to be given:

- description of the reunion
- topics of conversation
- what your friends are doing now.

Most candidates understood the information to be given and had the necessary vocabulary to express their ideas. The message was structured: a majority of candidates used linking words and paragraphing appropriately.

The information provided was not always easy to assess. Some candidates embedded message points within other points (for example, *the topic of conversation was what your friends are doing now*). Some did not describe the reunion. Others made no mention of the topics discussed. The main weakness was language competency: many candidates did not know how to form the past tense, especially of irregular verbs.

Most candidates received two marks for using the format appropriate to a diary. To receive two marks, two of the following characteristics had to be included: first person text, opening greeting, date.

Question 4

Information to be given:

- the subjects of the books
- the characters of the books
- the latest book

Most candidates included at least two parts out of three for the Message (*book subjects* and *characters*). The third part of the Message (*the latest book*) was either not mentioned or not clearly referred to. Perhaps candidates were unsure of what '*latest*' meant.

Most candidates who chose this question used a format appropriate for an interview. To obtain 2 marks the candidate had to use two of the following characteristics: title, question and answer format, brief introduction, writer's name.

Question 5

This was the least popular choice of question.

Information to be given:

- What you did to look after the animals
- What you did to look after the environment
- Why this experience was important for you

All candidates who answered this question explained or attempted to explain why the experience was important to them. However, the theme of looking after animals and looking after the environment confused candidates, as they could not seem to separate them, or see them as distinct activities. Many candidates wrote a general text on endangered species without giving an example of what they themselves had done in the nature reserve to look after the animals. It is possible that candidates misunderstood the meaning of the phrasal verb *look after* in the question, confusing it with *look at*.

The format was frequently appropriate for a report despite a limited message. Most candidates included two of the following characteristics: reference / title, name of project manager, name of student, brief introduction and conclusion, date.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should practise writing texts set in the past or future not only in the present.

Candidates should practise analyzing the content of questions and highlight or number the information they are asked to provide. There are always 5 details to be given in section A and usually three in section B.

Candidates should consider the following when completing the task in section B:

- Have I answered all the parts of the question?
- Are my ideas well-developed? Note: a well-developed answer is one where the candidate has given a relevant statement and at least 2 supporting / additional pieces of information (an example, a detail which develops the idea).
- Is my text logically structured (paragraphing and sequencing)? Have I used cohesive devices?

- Candidates should be advised not to choose a question if they do not understand all the words in the question.
- Candidates should not simply copy sentences from the question itself in their answer. Recycled text is not awarded marks. Candidates should be encouraged to expand on the information in the question or to paraphrase.
- Candidates should be reminded that their text is going to be read by an examiner and that they risk losing marks if the work is illegible because of, for example, the use of soft tipped pens, scored out words and indecipherable handwriting.