

May 2014 subject reports

## Italian ab initio

### Overall grade boundaries

#### Standard level

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 12	13 - 26	27 - 41	42 - 57	58 - 68	69 - 82	83 - 100

### Standard level internal assessment

#### Component grade boundaries

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

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

For moderation purposes centres submitted where possible a suitable range of candidates' work. The sample material was uploaded for moderators and this was very helpful, the whole process being much more efficient. The quality of the recordings was generally very good and the occasions when a Symphony Orchestra could be heard in the background or a passer-by inadvertently burst into the exam room were mercifully few and far between.

For some reason a number of centres submitted their material after the deadline and this can put unnecessary work and pressure on administrative staff and moderators who have their own deadlines to meet.

### Candidate performance against each criterion

The process of assessment is not easy when one has to conduct the exam at the same time. At least the two sets of criteria are expressed in straightforward terms and make assessment less burdensome than in the past. Most teachers have got used to asking the two questions on the written assignment before the general conversation. This is intended to give candidates the opportunity to talk briefly about something they have researched and written.

As always there were some excellent performances, fluent, spontaneous, and with a good range of basic and more complex structures. These candidates have the ability to take the initiative and expand on their answers. The teacher-examiner should take a back seat. These candidates will be in the top band, attaining full marks despite some language errors. The weaker candidates will not have the same level of consistency. They will get some basic structures right and others wrong. The formation of plurals and adjectival endings becomes more of a problem. They are less confident and knowledgeable about the use of past tenses. Candidates who attain the higher bands under Criterion A should be able to use some past tenses, especially *il passato prossimo*. Regrettably some candidates never use the past tense because they are not asked questions to elicit its use. The very weak candidates struggle from the outset and tend to give the briefest description of the visual, brief answers to the follow-up questions and depend too much on the teacher-examiner to prompt them, rephrase and/or repeat the most basic of questions. They are certainly unable to take the initiative as they lack the vocabulary and basic linguistic structures to do so.

Many teachers do a very good job of examining and assessing their candidates and their comments on the candidates' performance are very helpful and accurate. The marks awarded are a true reflection of the comments. There are occasions however where the comments are rather flattering and the moderator has been left wondering if he/she has been listening to the same candidate. In an ideal world there should be a close correlation between the comments made and the marks awarded.

It is not necessary for teacher-examiners to include in the comments the verbs, link words and useful phrases a candidate has produced. It is the moderator's role to listen carefully to the complete performance and assess accordingly. To simply highlight the correct bits of language might be misleading. Does that mean the candidate has not made any mistakes? It is only required therefore to make general points about the level of the performance based on the assessment criteria.

As regards Criterion B, a teacher-examiner should realise when a number of questions have to be repeated or rephrased because a candidate is struggling to comprehend and/or slow to respond. Such a candidate is unlikely to be in the top bands and more likely to fall into the 4-6 or 7-9 category. The weaker candidates are usually asked more basic, straightforward questions and may even struggle to cope with these. In the same way it would be unlikely for a candidate who only uses the present tense to be placed in the 7-8 or 9-10 bands under Criterion A.

## Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- Both candidates and teachers need to prepare themselves for the oral. Teachers need to think of what kinds of questions they can ask, focusing especially on more open-ended questions. The role of the teacher-examiner is to get the best out of each candidate and most examiners do this. Below are suggestions that are intended to help with the conduct of the exam.
- Please do not correct the candidates or spoon feed them with words or ideas. Perhaps this might lead teachers into thinking that the candidate has produced them when in fact they have mimicked the teacher.

- Please try and select visuals where there are various things/activities to describe. Some visuals are totally inappropriate and unless candidates have a great deal of imagination they produce very little. The teacher-examiner often struggles to ask follow-up questions on these dull, lifeless visuals and the following is an example of the kind of thing that happens. The candidate says a few brief things about the visual itself before saying what this person will do next, what the person did before, the name, nationality and profession of this person, the colour of his hair even though he is bald etc. All this is going on while the moderator is frantically searching for a magnifying glass to try and find whether this description has in fact anything to do with the visual that the school has submitted. If candidates are allowed to do this then one wonders what purpose the visual actually serves? Why is it that some candidates from some centres describe the visual that they have in front of them while others mainly ignore the visual and do their own thing? The visual is unseen and the candidates are given time to prepare their description. The candidates who are allowed or even encouraged to go off at tangents can prepare what they are going to say before the exam. A candidate should spend most of the allocated time on the description of the visual and limit the 'inventions' to a minimum.
- After the completion of the candidate's task the teacher-examiner should ask some follow-up questions to elicit further details about the visual. Some of the follow-up questions are frankly pointless e.g. come si chiama questa persona? Please try and avoid asking too many closed questions as weak candidates especially will usually end up producing very little of their own. Some closed questions are inevitable at times but too many ...! There is no set rule about the number of questions but some teachers ask two or three when there is time to ask far more. Remember that about five minutes is allocated to this part of the exam.
- Now that teachers are supposed to ask their candidates a few questions on their prepared topic it should be much more obvious when Part A ends. Please bear in mind not to go on too long with the discussion of the written assignment as this will deny the candidate enough time on the general conversation. The complete oral should last 10 minutes, not 13 or 14. In Part B the ideal oral would include three different topics and development towards a discussion/conversation, rather than asking candidates just one question on several different topics. The latter scenario did happen on some occasions and it seemed fairly obvious that candidates were allowed to trot out some prepared speech uninterrupted and there was no spontaneity whatsoever. Candidates naturally prepare for certain questions but do not allow them to trot out pre-learnt speeches especially when much of it is irrelevant.
- Some teachers continue to ask far too many closed questions in both parts of the exam. Everyone does it occasionally but it is not difficult to ask even the weakest candidates some basic open-ended questions. To score marks they have to produce something of their own.
- The majority of teachers do respect the time allocated to each part of the exam. Now and again an oral goes on far too long.

## Further comments

Moderators make every attempt to be sympathetic to the candidates but they cannot make allowances for an infringement of the guidelines and/or poor examining technique. They can only assess what they hear.

## Standard level written assignment

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 4	5 - 7	8 - 10	11 - 13	14 - 15	16 - 17	18 - 20

## Recommendations for IB procedures, instructions and forms

The Written Assignment is a complex task, for it implies research skills that not all candidates have developed completely, as well as an ability to use the target language to describe, compare, contrast, and to some extent argument and justify. This may be a challenge for ab-initio candidates who definitely need the teacher's guidance to complete the task successfully.

Teachers should help candidates to choose the right topic. The right topic is one that is complex enough to allow candidates to get an insight into relevant similarities or differences between their own and the target cultures, using a language which is at a level that they can deal with. The right topic is also as original as possible, it should spring out of a personal interest of the candidate, bearing in mind that certain topics (Christmas in Italy vs the UK; the Italian school system) have been extensively dealt with. Therefore, teachers should encourage candidates to research on topics they are interested in, but also give them advice: the topic should not be too difficult or broad in scope, otherwise candidates are likely not to perform well. Teachers should also provide help with the selection of the articles on which candidates should base their assignments. At times, material downloaded from the internet is obsolete. One cannot base a discussion on the differences on the educational system in one's country and in Italy on the basis of information of what the Italian school was like 40 years ago.

The coversheet of the assignment includes a box where the topical area of the assignment is stated (individual and society, leisure and work, urban and rural environment). If such information is given in Italian, the translation should be accurate. It is fairly easy to give a good translation for each heading and for the macro-topics that each heading includes during classes.

<b>Individual and society</b> <b>L'individuo e la società</b>	<b>Leisure and work</b> <b>Lavoro e tempo libero</b>	<b>Urban and rural environment</b> <b>Ambiente urbano e rurale</b>
Daily routines/Routines quotidiane	Employment/Impiego	Environmental concerns/Questioni ambientali
Education/Istruzione	Entertainment/Divertimento e svago	Global issues/Questioni globali
Food and drink/Cibo e bevande	Holidays/Vacanze	Neighbourhood/Territorio locale
Personal details, appearance and character/Informazioni personali, aspetto e carattere	Media/Media	Physical geography/Geografia fisica
Physical Health/Salute fisica	Sport/Sport	Town and services/La città e i servizi
Relationships/Relazioni	Technology/Tecnologia	Weather/Il tempo atmosferico
Shopping/Gli acquisti	Transport/Trasporti	

As far as the text presentation is concerned, it is important that the title chosen for the assignment clearly illustrates what the assignment will discuss. The title should be in Italian and, ideally, it should make immediately clear what aspect(s) of the target culture or lifestyle it will deal with (e.g. "Il sistema scolastico italiano e cinese"; "I trasporti pubblici a Roma"; etc.).

Writing headings in the body of the assignment (Description, Comparison and Reflection) is useful to help candidates structure the text. For the same reason, and to avoid forgetting to deal with one of them, it is advisable to write out fully the three questions which form the basis for the section Reflection. As these are going to be parts of the layout common to all assignments, the class should agree on translations for the headings and the questions (e.g. Descrizione, confronto, riflessione (not riflesso) etc.), so that the occurrence of mistakes and language inaccuracies can be reduced.

When quoting from a source the source itself must be clearly stated. So, after the quotation the name of the author followed by a comma and the year of the publication should be given [e.g. (Marini, 2012)]. Alternatively the full reference, including the title, place of publication etc. can be given, either in brackets or in a footnote. If the same source is quoted more than once in a row, then the use of the word 'ibid.' in brackets after the quotation is possible. Sources in the bibliography should be quoted according to conventions. Teachers should teach this to candidates.

As for the list of references, when an internet source is listed, it is essential that the date on which it was accessed is stated. Sites on the net may change over time, therefore this information is needed.

## The range and suitability of the work submitted

This session, the majority of candidates chose topics which were suitable (for example, an aspect of education, marriage ceremonies, food (specific meals or linked to celebrations), leisure, sports). However, a small number of candidates did not follow the required format, but wrote, instead, an essay or an article on a topic. Moreover, understanding the criteria proved difficult for a few candidates: some the correct headings or lay-out for the assignment, but did not fulfil all the requirements of the criteria.

Candidates must compare either their culture of origin or the one of the place where they live / with which they are most familiar with the equivalent aspect of Italian culture, rather than exploring other cultures through the medium of Italian.

Another frequent weakness regards the sources. Quite a number of candidates presented the minimum number of sources in the target language. These were mostly articles downloaded from the Internet, which in some cases gave information that was inaccurate or out of date; in other cases candidates generalized wrongly correct information, because using too few sources did not give them enough context. Teachers should teach candidates what doing research means and tell candidates that the time they take in the process of selecting articles and sources will be "saved" later in the writing-up phase.

Finally, a recurrent problem were mistakes in the way candidates mentioned the articles they had consulted in the bibliography, as mentioned above.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A: Description

Quite a few candidates did not understand "relevant factual information" and wrote instead a general introduction to the topic or introduced a comparison. This section was frequently very short and many assignments contained no factual details. In order to receive one mark, "some factual information" must be used (at least two pieces of information). To receive three marks, "relevant factual information is used" (three or more pieces of information).

### Criterion B: Comparison

This section was generally well done with candidates providing many objective and relevant points of comparison. Several candidates, however, repeated some of the elements from the section, Description. This may be acceptable if the candidate had just mentioned the point in the Description section and discussed it more in detail in the Comparison section. A more thorough planning of the essay would certainly help avoid this problem.

A few candidates were weak in supporting their statements with substantial factual information. For example, one candidate discussing the differences of Indian vs Italian bread, was surprised that two cultures which are so different both had bread, but did not point out that the ways bread is made and tastes in the two countries are actually very different.

### Criterion C: Reflection

In order to achieve high marks, the candidates had to reply to all three questions. This did not happen in a minority of cases. Many candidates gave thoughtful answers, identifying religious practices, historical events or climate, for example, as the contributing factors for differences. Other candidates did not in actual fact justify their statements ("There are differences because Italy has a different culture compared to Australia"), or were not specific enough ("These differences are due to historical reasons").

### Criterion D: Register

Register was appropriate for the large majority of candidates: even those who had poor language levels, usually managed to fulfill this criterion, at least partially.

### Criterion E: Language

The word count was generally adhered to. Language inaccuracies did not usually obscure meaning. The most common mistakes were in the use of the correct gender and number when agreeing nouns, adjectives and articles. The vocabulary regarding the topic was generally adequate.

However, there were some candidates whose language performance did not allow the reader to get the meaning of the text, in part or in full. One frequent problem regarded text coherence and cohesion. This is very important when candidates have to compare and contrast. Learning linkers and comparative expressions and how to use them effectively is essential to draw up a clear, coherent text. Only the strongest candidates were able to use linkers effectively.

### Criterion F: Formal requirements

In some cases, a bibliography was missing or incomplete (fewer than two sources in the target language, lack of the access date for websites).

Although most candidates provided a bibliography with the minimum sources in Italian required, these had often not been appropriately selected. The impression is that in quite a number of cases the first article that came up when the topic was googled were stuck into the reference list, sometimes without even reading them properly. It is reminded that the cover sheet has to be signed by both teacher and student as part of the formal requirements.

## Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

The skills necessary to carry out the task of the written assignment should be taught throughout the two years. Candidates should be encouraged in the first year to carry out

some research on a topic chosen by the teacher. Candidates should be taught to consult a number of sources so that they can check the factual information they find in them. This can be learnt also using sources in their mother tongue. Candidates should learn how to compare similar information from different sources, in order to gain an understanding of the topic and insights in an intercultural perspective. Later in the year linking expressions should be taught and candidates encouraged to again carry out independent research to describe and compare a topic in two cultures. Candidates lucky enough to have experienced the topic in question personally by visiting Italy should draw on this valuable experience.

In the second year the vocabulary necessary to express an opinion should be introduced and the task extended to include this third section. As candidates become more independent in reading in the target language, they should be encouraged to choose material that is appropriate for their achieved reading levels and to use a method of selection similar to the one that they have experienced working with L1 sources, checking more sources on the same aspect and fact. For example, if two texts on the Italian school system report different versions of a fact, more research must be conducted so that what the student chooses to state in his/her essay is certainly true.

As stated above, candidates should be instructed on how to draw up an appropriate bibliography or on how to quote a source correctly. The headings and sub-headings (Descrizione, Confronto, Riflessione...) in the assignment are going to be always the same for everybody. Teachers should teach them to candidates. Finally, candidates should learn to be coherent, which means to justify their statements in a convincing way, to compare thoroughly the cultural aspects of their choice in the two different societies and to answer questions in a punctual and complete way.

## Standard level paper one

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 4	5 – 9	10 - 15	16 - 21	22 - 26	27 - 32	33 - 40

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

As in previous years, the 'vero/falso' section (Q8-Q13) was the real watershed between stronger and weaker candidates. Candidates who scored low marks in this section usually did not do well overall. However, some of the stronger candidates lost points too: this was mainly because even if they offered the right explanation, they picked the wrong box for the true or false option.



Many candidates showed great difficulty in answering Q14-Q17; it was therefore very surprising to see that the vast majority of candidates did provide the right answer to Q18, even though Q14-Q17 were of very similar difficulty.

The final part of Test C (Q27 – Q30) also provided mixed success. Generally, strong candidates did well and weak candidates scored lowly in most questions. The exception was Q30, which seemed to receive the most correct answers.

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

Testo A (Q1-Q6) proved to be by far the most successful part for candidates. (Q1 received by far the most correct answers, probably followed by Q3 and, surprisingly, Q18). This was a multiple choice section, which traditionally yields a good average of correct answers. However, Q33 – Q 35 in Testo D (also a multiple choice section), yielded mixed results. In Q33, the difference between the correct and the most common wrong answer (C was correct, a good number of candidates offered A as the answer) was rather subtle. It did require candidates to understand that not the whole Emilia-Romagna region had been affected by the earthquake, and that therefore the coastal region was open for business. It is possible that many candidates may have simply scanned the suggested answers, without paying much attention to the details.

Some candidates misunderstood the meaning of 'cortesi' in Q15, interpreting the last two letters (-si) as the pronominal particle in verbs (e.g. lamentarsi); those candidates offered a reflexive verb as an answer.

A few candidates did earn a mark for Q31, as they stated that Piero Gnudi was the 'Ministro del Turismo dell'Emilia Romagna' (he is the Minister of Tourism for the whole of Italy). This was rather unfortunate, as those candidates most likely understood the question correctly, but by adding 'dell'Emilia Romagna' they invalidated their answer.

Similarly, for Q37 some candidates offered 'turisti stranieri' as an answer, which cannot be accepted because the definition refers to all tourists, whether Italian or foreign.

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

In many cases, candidates seemed to lack basic exam technique. Testo C (Q19 – Q21) clearly asks candidates to indicate the noun(s) referred to by the highlighted pronoun. It was surprising to see how many candidates answered the question by copying sentences taken from the question, or by simply paraphrasing the question. Similarly, Q14-Q18 asked candidates to report a synonym from the text; in a few cases, candidates also copied or paraphrased sentences from the question.

Q31 and Q37 also seem to suggest that candidates lacked some basic exam technique (e.g. identify the core part of the question, consider all possible answers and proceed by exclusion).

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

For the multiple choice questions, teachers may want to show candidates how to analyse questions and to extrapolate the essential parts. Candidates should then consider all answers as being possibly correct, and to proceed by elimination.

Such an analysis would also be very useful for true or false questions; the importance here is to identify the essential parts that need to be unequivocally confirmed or dismissed. It would also be very useful to candidates to understand that a correct justification cannot consist of a sequence of suspension points and some words (e.g. ... le moto ....perdere l'equilibrio....). Such answers are simply not precise enough, and the Examiner cannot be expected to assume the candidate understood the question correctly.

For questions similar to Q19-Q21, a basic grammatical understanding of pronouns should indicate to candidates that there can only be one answer, typically consisting of one word or group of words, but definitely not of whole sentences.

## Standard level paper two

### Component grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 2	3 - 5	6 - 9	10 - 13	14 - 16	17 - 20	21 - 25

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

Paper 2 is a challenging task for ab initio candidates, for it forces candidates to show their skills in using the language for good, by writing an original text freely and this is not easy for candidates who have not studied a language for a long time. The overall results were not too different from last year's, ranging from very poor to excellent and actually the spread of marks followed a more regular pattern this year than last year, with half of the candidates getting a grade 5, 6 or 7.

The tasks were written to cater for all candidates and were designed to allow candidates to deal quite freely with either general topics (music, describing people, describing places) or everyday matters (school, exams, school subjects). Formats like the blog or the internet post, may sound daunting, because they have been included in the syllabus quite recently, however, candidates are familiar with them, and they allow quite a lot of freedom, for they have fewer strict rules compared to more traditional formats, such as letters, reports etc. Like last year, it was the tasks in the second section of the paper that engaged candidates more intensively because the evaluation criteria in this part are slightly stricter and more detailed than in section A.

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

In Section A the two different tasks were more or less equivalent in terms of difficulty and they both were more or less equally popular with the candidates.

Task 1 required the candidates to write a Facebook post telling friends about the results of their IB examination, making comments on what they had found more difficult, on what had given them the most satisfaction and inviting them to celebrate. Most candidates were able to include at least part of the information required. Possibly the most difficult point to understand was to mention what part of the exam gave them the most satisfaction.

Task 2 was an advertisement for extra lessons in two subjects chosen by the candidates. They had to give all relevant information for potential customers. Quite a few candidates did not understand that the task required that they should define the type of student they wanted to give their lessons to and so they omitted the information.

The first section of the paper was, for many candidates, less challenging than the second for a variety of reasons:

- The task of writing a minimum of 50 words is less daunting than that of writing 100.
- The rubrics of tasks 1 and 2 are arranged in points, so that, if the candidates can understand what they read, they are able to write their texts on the basis of instructions they can follow step by step.

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

Most teachers considered this year's paper more or less at the same level as last year's and also the clarity of wording and presentation received mostly positive comments. Although some reservations were expressed about the tasks requiring the candidates to write a blog and a Facebook post, these tasks were quite popular with candidates, both good and less able. The advantage of these formats, especially the blog, is that they pose fewer limitations than other more traditional ones to the freedom of expression of the candidates and they tend to be formats with which candidates come into contact more regularly in their day-to-day lives.

Good candidates were able to deal with the topics they chose, showing a good knowledge of basic structures and vocabulary and the capacity of constructing logical, coherent texts. Stronger candidates were also able to realize that task 4 was actually quite easy, as they had to describe a person, something that is usually dealt with at a very early stage of learning a language. They also were able to put to fruit what they had learnt in their courses talking about their musical tastes in task 3.

Poorer candidates found it difficult to build sentences which made sense and that were relevant with the topic. Many of them tried to exploit the rubric, so as to write as many words as possible without making the effort of thinking and producing something original. Some, even, used the rubrics of Section A, copying chunks of them into the text they were

composing for Section B. It is important that their teachers make them aware that such procedures, on their part, are going to be penalised by the examiners. Also, a number of weaker candidates chose task 5 in Section B. This asked them to write a brochure entry in Italian about a monument or attraction in their town. Unfortunately many of them decided to write texts about Italian cities or monuments without having the background knowledge to do so. This fact, coupled with a rather poor command of the language led them to unsatisfactory results.

A further tendency that has been noted, among weaker candidates, is that of learning by heart a few common sentences regarding basic topics (personal information about themselves, their school life, their family etc.) which these candidates include, often with many mistakes, irrespective of the task of their choice. Memorisation of vocabulary or even of full sentences is valuable in second language learning, but it should be a means, not a goal. Teachers should train learners to use what they have memorised in a creative way, adapting structures and words to the topics on which they are required to write, rather than reproducing them indiscriminately, without taking the context into account.

## Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Writing creatively, as an ab-initio student, is far from easy, however, it is frustrating for examiners when candidates prove unable to string a few correct – or at least understandable – sentences together. Examiners do recognize the difficulty of such a task for candidates who have been learning Italian for only about 18 months, but awareness of this difficulty should be a spur to teachers to insist more on making their candidates practise their writing skills.

Careful training should be given in order to allow candidates to deal with each step involved with writing tasks, from the comprehension of rubrics (as it always happens, there were a number of poor candidates who misunderstood them), to the choice of the most appropriate task, in order to pick one that suits the candidate's level and knowledge.