

May 2013 subject reports

Mandarin *ab Initio*

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 13	14 - 28	29 - 45	46 - 58	59 - 72	73 - 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 - 14	15 - 18	19 - 21	22 - 25

Individual oral

Please ensure that the visual stimuli presented to the candidates are directly linked to the target culture. Words should only appear on the visual stimulus if they are a natural part of the scene, for example, shop or street signs. Any such words should be in the target language.

Introductions, even if they do not form an official part of the oral, should take place in the target language. The candidate should introduce himself/ herself in the target language giving name and candidate number.

Teachers are reminded to 'guide' students through the oral by informing them of when one Part is over and when another is about to begin.

In order that candidates can access the upper markbands for both criteria, teachers are encouraged to intervene if necessary and move the candidate on in order that the three parts are completed in timely fashion.

Teachers are reminded to ask the two compulsory questions on the Written Assignment after the description and follow-up questions on the visual stimulus. It is important to ask these questions because the student will possess the necessary vocabulary to handle both open ended and more direct questions on the Written Assignment and thus stands a better chance to access the higher markbands in Criterion B, interactive and receptive skills.

The style of questions chosen by the teacher is important and must be one which allows stronger candidates to access the upper markbands while allowing weaker candidates to feel comfortable throughout.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The majority of the chosen topics were linked to the syllabus themes and showed a clear context. Most of the stimuli selected were relevant and appropriate. Very few selected stimuli seemed to cause some difficulties for candidates to elicit their opinions. The teachers should try to choose topics that are easy for candidates to elaborate upon.

Candidate performance against each criterion

The majority of candidates showed the ability to convey information, and to justify ideas and opinions. Most of the candidates were able to respond readily. The pronunciation and tones of candidates were generally very good. Many teachers managed to exploit the candidates' knowledge and language skills by asking opened-ended questions to elicit opinions. Teachers who failed to do so limited their candidates' performances.

Criterion A: Productive skills

The majority of the candidates were able to present relevant information to the visual stimuli and were able to respond to the teachers' questions. For some less fluent candidates, some teachers were able to rephrase the questions in order to help elicit the candidates' opinions. As such, the candidates were able to achieve the highest possible mark that they were capable of. Although there were errors in the pronunciation and the intonation, most candidates were able to speak clearly using basic vocabulary and basic sentence structures.

Criterion B: Interactive and receptive skills

Most teachers spoke at a suitable pace with their candidates, and provided appropriate support to help candidates understand the questions and comments. Hence, many candidates were able to interact with their teacher and maintain the conversation. On the whole, general open conversation was well conducted. Many teachers managed to carry out genuine conversations with candidates, asking appropriate questions to elicit their knowledge of the topics and various language skills. For Part 3, the performance of candidates varied. The higher achieving candidates continued to perform well; but some of the lower achieving candidates appeared to struggle in the conversations, lacking the knowledge and language skills to respond appropriately. The last part of the examination differentiated the language abilities of the candidates.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- During the oral assessment, teachers must try to be more patient and wait for the candidates to answer or complete what they are trying to say. Simpler questions should be asked initially in order to ease the candidates' anxieties. If a candidate does not understand a question, rather than repeating the same thing again, teachers should find a different way to ask the question, or use yes/no questions to support the candidates.
- Teachers are encouraged to choose visual stimuli that have sufficient information for the candidates to describe/comment upon in their presentations. Teachers should encourage the candidates to present their comments as much as possible from the

visual stimulus. Teachers should also ensure that the oral assessment lasts as close to the timings given in the subject guide as possible. The follow-up questions asked by teachers should be related to the visual stimulus.

- During class time, teachers are encouraged to use the target language, Mandarin, as much as possible. Some teachers get candidates used to listening and answering different types of questions, which can assist candidates' oral performances. Nevertheless, teachers should try not to put candidates under pressure to use the target language.

Further comments

Since teachers know their candidates strengths, they should try to use this knowledge during the discussion and avoid using words which might be too difficult for them when asking questions. This will reduce unnecessary anxiety and enable the candidates to demonstrate the best of their language abilities.

There are always occasions that teachers have to come up with spontaneous questions based on the replies from the candidates during the assessment. Nevertheless, a good pool of questions should also be prepared by teachers in advance of the oral examination, in order to avoid unnecessary gaps or inappropriate questions during the conversation. Teachers should avoid asking more than one question at any one time. It might be hard for the candidates to remember all questions when they try to answer. Moreover, this kind of conversation somehow loses its authenticity.

As there are changes in the examination procedure, teachers should take time to read through the *ab initio* subject guide. One moderator found that 12 out of 26 centres from her allocation did not comply fully with the guidelines of the new oral examination format. These centres either left out the written assignment questions, or the general topics conversation. It is suggested that the teachers keep themselves abreast with the changes of the latest developments in their course. Perhaps the IB coordinators could also ensure that their teachers are aware of the new guidelines.

Standard level written assignment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10	11 - 12	13 - 15	16 - 17	18 - 20

Written assignment

Choice of topic

The topic selected for the written assignment **must** come from the prescribed topics as detailed in the guide:

Individual and society	Leisure and work	Urban and rural environment
Daily routines	Employment	Environmental concerns
Education	Entertainment	Global issues
Food and drink	Holidays	Neighbourhood
Personal details, appearance and character	Media	Physical geography
Physical Health	Sport	Town and services
Relationships	Technology	Weather
Shopping	Transport	

Teachers should guide students to choose topics which are sharply focused and manageable in the number of words available (200 -300).

The topic should be clearly stated in the title of the written assignment. It is recommended that the target culture (country /countries) is mentioned in the title.

Students must select a target culture where the target language is spoken.

Teachers are reminded that the topics selected by students for the written assignment can overlap but each title **must** be different.

Presentation

The written assignment consists of:

- Title
- Description
- Comparison
- Reflection
- Bibliography

The headings (Description, Comparison and Reflection) should be used to structure the text. The three questions which form the basis for the section Reflection should also be written out fully.

All written assignments must be hand-written in ink.

When quoting from a source, almost all *ab initio* languages use the same convention of either speech marks or footnote notes:

1. ...and confirmed according to J Fotheringham: "cycling is as popular in Great Britain as it is in France".
2. ...and confirmed because cycling is as popular in Great Britain as it is in France.¹

Word count

The word limit **must** be respected. There is a 2 mark penalty in Criterion E, Language if less than the minimum number of words or more than the maximum number of words has been written.

For the purposes of the written assignment, a word is defined as having a space either side of it:

It's a shame that = 4 words

It is most unfortunate that = 5 words

Quotes, the headings of each part, the three questions (Reflection) are **not** included in the word-count.

Criterion specific comments

Description

It is important that factual information on the **target culture** be included in this section. Information given on the student's own culture will not be awarded marks in this section.

The factual information should emanate from the research conducted by the student. Justifying why this topic has been chosen is **not** considered factual information.

Comparison

A comparison may be made in a single paragraph using comparative language (*but, on the other hand, while, whereas, more than...*) or in two parallel paragraphs which treat the same elements in both cultures.

For the purposes of assessment, similarities and differences between the cultures chosen for the written assignment will be treated equally.

Reflection

All three questions must be answered.

Students should not include any information that has already appeared in the two preceding parts (Description and Comparison).

¹ J. Fotheringham

In the third question: *What might a person from the target culture(s) find different about your chosen topic in your culture(s)?* the student is being asked to consider the chosen topic not in the context of the target culture but in his / her own culture from an “outsider’s” point of view.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The topics and work that candidates chose were relevant and appropriate for the course. However, it seemed that the chosen topics were mainly limited to food, school, festivals and entertainment. It is strongly recommended that teachers guide candidates to explore various topics of “everyday life and cultures” (subject guide, page 26). Those 20 prescribed topics under the three given themes of the *ab initio* syllabus, such as shopping, relationships or employment, are suitable for candidates to demonstrate the aspects of intercultural understanding that they have developed during the course.

There were quite a few candidates who demonstrated exceptionally good language skills in their work. It should be questioned whether the *ab initio* course will provide sufficient academic challenges for them during the two years.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Description

This criterion appeared to be the easiest part for all candidates. Most candidates were successful in stating the factual information about the chosen cultural topics. There were, however, still some candidates who were not able to use any relevant factual information in their description.

Criterion B: Comparison

The majority of candidates were able to identify cultural differences and/or similarities between their own culture and Chinese culture. In addition, most candidates, to varying degrees, presented these differences and/or similarities in a clear and coherent manner. However, some candidates failed to make any comparison between the cultures but only described some factual information about one culture, either the Chinese culture or their own.

Criterion C: Reflection

Many candidates did not perform so well in this criterion. These candidates lacked the understanding of the requirements, stating that, “The reflection must include answers to all of the following questions” (subject guide, page 32). At the same time, there were some candidates who appeared to lack the skills to respond to the three questions provided, especially the third question asking, “What might a person from the target culture(s) find different about your chosen topic in your culture(s)?”.

Criterion D: Register

Most candidates showed an awareness of the appropriate register for the task. They were able to use the appropriate register for the different communicative purposes required in the

task: to describe, to compare and to reflect.

Criterion E: Language

Candidates demonstrated quite a wide spectrum of skills and used the Chinese language effectively and accurately. Some candidates received a 2-mark penalty either due to a failure to write the minimum number of words or due to exceeding the maximum number of words. It is notable that the word count for Mandarin should be multiplied by 1.2 of the English word count and as such, the word limit for the written assignment should be 240–360 words.

Criterion F: Formal requirements

Most candidates performed well against this criterion, but there were quite a few candidates who did not acquire high marks in this section. It appeared that these candidates did have the knowledge and skills for fulfilling the formal requirements. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that a copy of the "formal requirements" is provided to candidates. Candidates should also be taught, with sufficient practice, how to cite and refer to source material. It is important to note that 2–4 sources should be used and "a bibliography in standard format is included with references to all sources" (subject guide, page 27).

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- It is strongly recommend that teachers guide candidates to explore various topics of "everyday life and cultures".
- It is essential to remember that the word count for Mandarin should be multiplied by 1.2 of the English word count and the word limit for the written assignment should be 240–360 words.
- It is important to ensure that candidates include the three headings (Description, Comparison, and Reflection) in the written assignment. More importantly, teachers must ensure that candidates understand the requirements for each section, while emphasizing that there are three questions to answer for the "reflection" session. It will be very helpful to instruct candidates so that they fully understand the assessment criteria for the written assignment.
- It is essential to use the updated 2/ABWA form. The form will be provided to centres in the IB coordinator handbook every year.
- It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that a copy of the "formal requirements" is provided to candidates. Candidates should also be taught how to cite and refer to source material.
- Candidates should not be placed on the *ab initio* course if it may not provide sufficient academic challenges for them during the two years.
- There will be some changes to the language *ab initio* written assignment. First teaching of the revised component will be from September 2013; first examinations in May 2015. Note that in the November 2013, May 2014 and November 2014 examination sessions, the written assignment will be administered and assessed as per the current guide. Teachers should refer to the updated guide on the Online Curriculum Centre (OCC) for May 2015 examinations onwards.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 5	6 - 11	12 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 30	31 - 35	36 - 40

General comments

It is important to ensure all candidates are helped to develop their abilities to read and understand a range of authentic texts and a variety of text types. At the same time, it is essential that candidates are helped to establish a sense of self-efficacy whenever reading Chinese texts. Candidates should be given sufficient time to practice their reading skills to a level of proficiency, and more importantly to allow them to have sufficient “successful” reading experiences to build up their confidence in reading Chinese texts.

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

In general, candidates found Text C to be the most difficult. Many candidates seemed to have difficulty interpreting some of the questions, such as Q21 and Q22. Many of found the “True/False questions with justifications” (Q23-26) to be particularly challenging, as well as the gap-filling exercises related to grammar structure (Q27-29). Q29 in particular seemed to be most challenging.

In terms of question types, the “True/False questions with justifications” appeared to be the most challenging for candidates. These include Q23-26 in Text C as well as Q7-10 in Text A. Some candidates were able to give the correct justification but were confused between “True” and “False” while some gave the correct True/False answer but struggled with giving a proper justification. In addition to the True/False questions with justifications, the matching exercises (Q3-5), and Multiple choice questions (Q12, Q31, Q32, Q35) also appeared to be difficult for a significant number of candidates.

Many candidates had trouble understanding certain questions and the related text due to some difficult vocabulary that was used: 第一次 (first time – Q21), 满意 (satisfied – Q22), 接送服务 / 只能 (pickup service/can only – Text C and Q23), 免费 (free – Text C for Q24). Some candidates seemed to lack the proficiency in using conjunction words including 除了, 所以 (except, therefore – Q27-29).

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

The well-prepared areas varied from centre to centre. Candidates from certain centres performed very well using conjunction words while candidates from certain other centres

found them much more difficult. Multiple choice questions in general appeared to be easier for most candidates, while only a small percentage of the candidates found them difficult.

In terms of themes and topics, candidates seemed to be well prepared for Text A and Text B. The majority of candidates appeared to be familiar with these topics and showed good understanding when answering the questions. This shows that candidates are able to perform to a much higher standard when they are faced with familiar topics.

The majority of candidates appeared to be well prepared for identifying text types and also demonstrated very good reading skills, identifying main ideas and looking for details. They were able to achieve this regardless of the question type, whether they were short answer, multiple choice or matching questions. It is notable that the majority of the candidates performed well in matching pictures with related descriptions from Text B (Q17-19).

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

Text A: Yinzuo Shopping Mall

Q1: Most candidates did well to choose the correct answer from four choices.

Q2: Most candidates performed well on this question.

Q3-5: These questions appeared to be challenging for some candidates.

Q6: Many candidates appeared to find two words difficult to understand: 支付方式 and 现金 (the synonyms of 钱) in the text booklet. As a result, many candidates were not awarded the marks for this question.

Q7-10: Although many candidates answered well, this type of question appeared to be challenging for candidates. For those candidates who were not awarded the marks, they either ticked the wrong box for True/False or could not provide appropriate justifications. Some candidates were able to provide justifications but made the wrong judgment on whether the sentence was True/False. Candidates seemed to find Q7 particularly difficult, as many did not relate “日常用品” (Daily necessities) to “超级市场” (supermarket) and Q10 as some did not seem to understand the structure “离……很近” (close to) or the meaning of “旁边” (side).

Q11: Most candidates performed well on this question.

Text B: Internet friends

Q12: Most candidates performed well on this question.

Q13: Candidates performed quite well on this question.

Q14-16: Most candidates performed well on this question.

Q17-19: Most candidates performed well on this question.

Text C: Which Youth Hostel?

Q20: This question appeared to be easy for the majority of candidates.

Q21-22: These two questions seemed to challenge many candidates. They may not have understood the meaning of some of the vocabulary used in Q21. For Q22, judging from the answers from many candidates, it is apparent that many did not understand the word “满意” (satisfied).

Q23-26: Candidates appeared to find these questions the most challenging. For those candidates who were not awarded the marks, they usually either ticked the wrong box for True/False or could not provide appropriate justifications. Some candidates were able to provide justification but made the wrong judgment on whether the sentence was True/False. In Q23 most of the candidates did not understand “接送服务” (pickup service). Candidates also appeared to find the vocabulary used in Q24 too difficult: “免费” (free) has the same meaning as “不用花钱” (No need to pay).

Q27-29: There were mixed results in dealing with this type of question.

Text D: Hong Kong Environmental Protection: what can we do?

Q30: Candidates who did not pay enough attention to the foreword of the text were not able to get the marks. However, most candidates performed well on this question.

Q31-32: There were mixed results to this question.

Q33-34: Most candidates performed well but some were not awarded marks due to not understanding the questions or not understanding the cohesive devices “不但...而且” (not only...but also), or words like “坏处” (disadvantage) and “减少” (decrease).

Q35: There were mixed results to this question but most of the candidates were able to get at least 1 or 2 correct answers.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

In general, most candidates performed well in the text-handling component. This indicates that most teachers have prepared their candidates well to complete the Paper 1 examination. Below are some suggestions for teachers to consider when teaching the Mandarin *ab initio* course:

- It is important to teach candidates to read for the meaning instead of looking for the meaning of new vocabulary. Candidates will need to learn how to use a range of reading techniques such as skimming, scanning, or reading for detail.

- Candidates need to be given the opportunity to read widely and extensively on a regular basis. It is encouraged to include extensive reading practice in every single class, and to use a wide range of authentic texts.
- Candidates need to learn and practice how to read intensively in order to handle the reading exercises in the Paper 1 examination. They are also expected to identify the overall meaning, deduce the meaning of words from their context, understand grammatical structures and functions in context and be aware of the cohesive devices that give coherence to a text (subject guide, pages 23-25).
- Past examination papers can be used as very useful resources. Special attention should be taken to practice the “True/False questions with justifications”. Some candidates were able to provide accurate justifications but picked the wrong answer from True/False. This shows that candidates might not understand the logic of the text. Teachers could try letting candidates practice more of this type of question to familiarise them with the different types of questions.
- Teachers are encouraged to broaden candidates’ vocabulary by guiding them to learn words from contexts. It is helpful if candidates have sufficient opportunities to read broadly and regularly. It is also important that candidates keep their personal vocabulary list to master the essential vocabularies for them to communicate in various contexts that are required in the course.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 10	11 - 14	15 - 17	18 - 21	22 - 25

General comments

Candidates are encouraged to tick the box “candidate section and option answer” on the cover page of the examination scripts.

During the examination, candidates are encouraged to attempt to answer all questions. However, simply copying down the tasks may not be awarded any marks.

A review of past papers could also offer the opportunity to look into what is expected in the examination.

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

Some candidates were not able to illustrate the correct format of a speech (question 3), an article (question 4) and a report (question 5).

In addition, some candidates struggled to understand the required tasks and responded to them inappropriately. For instance, some candidates misunderstood question 1, and thought that they should write to 小王 and invite him/her for the author's birthday's celebration. Some did not deliver the appropriate speech; instead it became a speech/letter to a teacher for question 3. Many candidates wrote a letter to their school magazine in a letter format rather than as an article in question 4. For question 5, the report format was often not sufficiently provided.

The following wording perhaps also caused some difficulty for some candidates in part A: 邀请, 内容必须包括, 参加, 联络, 当地华人社区、费用; and in Part B: 演讲稿, 选择, 文章, 看法, 事情发生的经过, 报告.

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

Overall most candidates performed well in question 1. The poster in question 2 was also well conveyed. Both messages based on the task requirements were delivered clearly and efficiently for many candidates. Many candidates were also familiar with the formats of the speech and an article. also In addition, it is notable that most candidates seemed to have a good sense of the content of "food(my favourite restaurant)" in question 3 and the topic of "learning (whether IB course is good)" in question 4.

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

Short essay

Both essays were chosen quite evenly, perhaps with just slightly more for question 1.

The majority of candidates provided most of the information necessary to carry out question 1. Moreover, most of them used the appropriate format and demonstrated an understanding of the requirements for question 1. Nevertheless, some candidates did not mention one of the key messages – “不让小王知道”.

For question 2, most candidates conveyed appropriate format but missed some details in the content. Candidates quite often did not include the “费用、食物” part as they might have either overlooked it or not understood it.

Long essay

Questions 3 and 4 appeared to be equally popular choices and there was no difference in task choices relating to the ability of the candidates. Question 5 was the least chosen topic for this examination session. A good number of candidates used the appropriate format and most messages were conveyed well.

Question 3: The majority of candidates used the appropriate format and showed clear awareness of the appropriate register for the task. Some went further in demonstrating an

awareness of cultural elements. The majority of candidates also clearly showed the ability to use simple and appropriate language for the purpose of this task.

Question 4: Some candidates used the appropriate format and showed clear awareness of the appropriate register for the task. Some went further in demonstrating an awareness of cultural elements. However, as mentioned earlier, some candidates thought the task was a letter to their school magazine so in these cases it did not fulfil the requirements of the format of an article.

Question 5: This was chosen by very few candidates as most candidates may not feel confident in writing this type of question. Some may feel that they could express themselves better in questions 3 or 4. Nevertheless, this task was chosen by both less able and able candidates. Some candidates did not realise that the task required a report format, but most candidates managed to fulfil the task.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates can often use and extract much information from the questions. It is a useful technique for candidates to have, especially in the short essay section. For example, in both questions 1 and 2, candidates can easily use half of the information from the question and put it into their own writing.

When setting writing tasks for classes, teachers could use meaningful, purposeful and realistic materials to support the candidates. A writing task can be an extension of reading, listening or a speaking piece; it does not need to be an isolated writing task.

It is helpful if the candidates can carry out different formats of writing tasks, such as a postcard, an email, a letter, a note, a speech, a diary entry or a school journal article, *etc.* Candidates are encouraged to start writing very early on in their two-year IB programme. It can start with one sentence or two, then they can gradually extend the length of their writing.

To differentiate the more and less able candidates during the course, different choices should be provided to the class.