

Mandarin ab initio

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 12	13 - 24	25 - 39	40 - 55	56 - 68	69 - 82	83 - 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

- Most samples were well conducted and were appropriate for this level. The majority of the visual stimuli were culturally related and the range of the work was mostly suitable for this level.
- Many candidates showed a very high level of fluency and accuracy.
- Many teachers managed to exploit the candidates' knowledge and language skills by asking opened-ended questions to elicit opinions.
- The correct procedure was followed by the majority of centres. However, some recordings were under 6 minutes, which would disadvantage affected candidates.

Candidate performance against each criterion

The majority of candidates were able to convey information, and justify ideas and opinions. Most of the candidates responded with ease. The pronunciation and tones were generally very good. Teachers who did not ask open-ended questions to elicit responses limited candidates' performance.

Criterion A: Productive skills

The majority of candidates presented relevant information about the visual stimuli and responded to the questions. For some candidates, the teachers rephrased the questions to help them elicit his/her opinions. As a result, these candidates were able to achieve the

highest mark possible. 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 and provided appropriate support, to help candidates understand the questions and comments. Most of the candidates were able to understand straightforward exchanges, answer appropriately, and maintain a conversation. Some candidates gave simple and short answers according to the teacher's questions, and a few candidates barely participated in the conversation. In part three, most candidates could express what their written assignments were about and the reasons why they chose the topics. Nevertheless, there were a few who could not understand the teachers' questions, or express what their written assignments were about.

On the whole, general open conversation was conducted well. 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 three, the performance of the candidates varied. This last part of the exam differentiated the language abilities of candidates.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- During the oral assessment, teachers should be patient and wait for the candidate to answer or complete what they are trying to say. Always ask simpler questions first to ease the candidate's anxiety. Instead of repeating the same questions, teachers could also use different ways to ask the same questions, or, use yes/no questions to support the candidates.
- Visual stimuli should be chosen which have sufficient information for candidates to describe/comment in his/her presentation. Teachers should encourage the candidate to frame his/her comments on the visual stimulus and to keep within the timing. 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. It could be useful practice for students to get used to listening and answering different types of questions.
- Written assignment questions – it appeared that some candidates struggled to participate in this part of the assessment, some even sounded surprised/unprepared when they heard the questions. Candidates should be made aware of the requirements of part three of the oral.
- Teachers are encouraged to be familiar with the assessment procedure and requirements: "Language ab initio teacher support material" and "Language ab initio guide". Both of these publications are available on the Online Curriculum Centre (OCC).
- Teachers should try to make their questions as concise as possible. Some moderators found that some teachers gave too much information when they asked some simple questions. This could cause unnecessary confusion for candidates. Some recordings showed teachers speaking more than the candidates.

- Teachers should try to avoid asking too many yes/no questions. Follow-up questions should involve a wider range of topics so that the candidate can provide a conversation in more depth.

Further comments

- There are always occasions that teachers have to come up with spontaneous questions based on the replies from the candidate during the assessment. Nevertheless, a good pool of questions should also be prepared in advance by teachers, in order to allow the assessment to go more smoothly. Teachers should avoid asking two to three questions in one go. Candidates may find it difficult to remember all the questions when they try to answer. Moreover, this kind of conversation risks losing its authenticity.
- Teachers should avoid repeating the same questions many times. In addition, it is unhelpful to repeat the questions with a loud voice.
- Be aware of the time allocation for each part of the exam. It is suggested that teachers could use a timer for each part of the oral assessment.
- It is advised that teachers do not interrupt the candidate's answer. Moreover, teachers should avoid correcting the candidate during the assessment.
- Teachers are advised to check the quality of the recordings at the end of each assessment.
- As the exam procedure is fairly new, teachers should take time to read through the Language ab initio guide. It is suggested that the teachers keep themselves up to date with any changes, or the latest developments in the course via the OCC.

Standard level written assignment

Component grade boundaries

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

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The majority of candidates chose topics that were suitable to demonstrate the aspects of intercultural understanding that they had developed during the course. In general, all twenty topics under the three given themes of the ab initio course were chosen. The following topics were most popular: special meals, food linked to celebrations, cultural festivals, an aspect of education, marriage ceremonies, leisure, sports, transportation, weather and clothing, an aspect of beauty, parent-children or teacher-student relationship, *etc.* A minority of candidates did not choose appropriate tasks. This includes:

- the focus of the assignment was not on the target culture but on the candidate's own

culture.

- the topic was too broad for a 200-300 word (240-360 Chinese character) assignment.

Some candidates did not follow the required format, but wrote instead an essay or an article. Some candidates used the correct headings or layout for the assignment, but did not fulfil the requirements of the criteria.

Some candidates demonstrated exceptionally good language skills in their work for the ab initio course. It could be questioned if the ab initio course provides sufficient academic challenges during the two years.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Description

Many candidates wrote a general introduction to the topic, or introduced a comparison, but the assignment contained no factual details of Chinese culture. In order to receive one mark, “some relevant factual information” (Subject Guide) must be used (at least two pieces of information). To receive two marks, “relevant factual information is used” (Subject Guide) (three or more pieces of information). Some candidates received no marks for this criterion.

Criterion B: Comparison

The majority of candidates were able to identify cultural differences and/or similarities between their own culture and Chinese culture. Most candidates provided many objective and pertinent points of comparison in varying degrees of clarity and coherence. However, some candidates failed to make any comparison, but only described some factual information about one culture, either the Chinese culture or their own.

Criterion C: Reflection

Most candidates demonstrated good knowledge and skills to fulfill the requirements for this criterion. However, some did not perform well due to lack of understanding of the requirements. At the same time, there were some candidates who appeared to lack the skills to respond to the three given questions, especially the third question asking, “What might a person from the target culture(s) find different about your chosen topic in your culture(s)?” (Subject Guide). Some candidates repeated details given in the preceding sections, some wrote their personal opinion without responding to the third question.

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 to use the Chinese language effectively and accurately. Some candidates received a 2-mark penalty due to either failure to write the minimum number of words or exceeding the maximum. It should be noted that the word count for Mandarin should be multiplied by 1.2 of the English word count. The word limit for the written assignment should be between 240-360 characters.

Criterion F: Formal requirements

Most performed well against this criterion, but there were quite a few candidates who did not gain good marks. It appeared that these candidates did not have the knowledge and skills for fulfilling the formal requirements. It is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that a copy of the formal requirements is provided to candidates. Candidates should also be taught with enough practice on how to cite and refer to source material. Page 27 of the Subject Guide details the formal requirements for this criterion.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- It is a requirement to include the three headings (Description, Comparison and Reflection) in the written assignment. More importantly, teachers should ensure candidates understand the requirements for each section, while emphasizing that there are three questions for the "reflection" section to answer. It will be very helpful to instruct students to fully understand the assessment criteria for the written assignment.
- Complete the 2/ABWA form. The form is available via the Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme via the OCC.
- A copy of the "formal requirements" should be 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 challenge.
- 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. A revised Subject Guide (first exams 2015) is available on the OCC.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 11	12 - 18	19 - 24	25 - 31	32 - 40

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

Text C appeared to be most challenging for the majority of candidates. Text C, is an interview with a gold medal winner of table tennis and candidates need to understand the main idea of each paragraph, details of the text and cohesive devices in order to answer the corresponding questions.

In terms of question types, candidates found questions 25–28 most challenging. These questions required candidates to choose the correct words to fill the gaps from the text. Questions 17–20 also appeared to be difficult. Candidates were required to choose the correct interview questions to match the given responses. This indicates that summarizing the main idea of a paragraph should be further emphasized and practiced. Questions 10–14, some candidates were able to give the correct justification but chose true or false incorrectly, while some others gave the correct true or false answer but found difficulty in giving a correct justification.

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

Question types are similar to those in past examinations. Candidates are familiar with these question types and with examination techniques. This indicates that past examinations have been utilized for effective classroom practice. The areas in which candidates appeared well prepared varied from centre to centre. Some candidates did very well using conjunction words or true/false with justification. The majority of candidates responded to multiple choice questions and short answer questions with ease.

In terms of themes and topics, candidates appeared well prepared for Text A (a hotel introduction), Text B (a personal letter about a part-time job) and Text D (a list of four students' opinions on protecting the environment). The majority of candidates appeared to be familiar with these topics and showed good understanding when answering the related questions. This demonstrates that candidates are able to perform much better with familiar topics. The majority of candidates appeared to be well prepared for 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.

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

Text A:

Question 1: Most candidates did well to choose the three true statements about Text A.

Questions 2–4: Most candidates did well for question 2, but appeared challenged by questions 3 and 4. There appeared to be a lack of understanding of the question.

Questions 5–6: Most candidates performed well with short answers, but some candidates excessively quoted irrelevant information.

Text B:

Question 7: Almost all candidates answered this multiple-choice question correctly to identify the relationship of two people.

Questions 8–9: Most candidates did well with short answers. Although it was surprising to see some did not understand the question word “who”.

Questions 10–14: Many candidates had difficulty with true / false questions with justification. Some of them gave the correct justification but checked the wrong box for true / false. In addition, some candidates did not understand the meaning of the key vocabulary of the questions: “空闲” (Q10), “工资” (Q11), “无聊” (Q12).

Questions 15–16: Most candidates did well with short answer questions. However, some were unsuccessful because they quoted long extracts from the text. In such cases the candidates were not awarded a mark even if the correct answer was contained in the quotation. It appeared that they did not read question 16 carefully. They tried to compensate for this lack of knowledge by quoting long extracts from the text. Answers must be short and focused to show understanding of the question.

Text C:

Questions 17–20: These four questions appeared to be challenging for the majority of candidates. Candidates must choose the correct interview question to match with the given responses. This indicates that summarizing the main idea of a paragraph should be further emphasized and practiced.

Questions 21–24: These four questions appeared to be of average difficulty. They required candidates to understand the details of the text in order to match the given sentence endings.

Questions 25–28: These four questions appeared to be the most challenging in the examination. A majority of candidates performed poorly in choosing the correct word(s) to fill in the blanks in the text.

Text D:

Questions 29–30: Most candidates performed well with these multiple choice questions.

Questions 31–33: Most did well in these three true / false with justification questions.

Questions 34–36: Most candidates gained at least 1 or 2 marks in matching the people and their ideas. Perhaps some candidates did not achieve marks as they did not understand some of the characters.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

In general, most candidates performed well in this text handling component. This demonstrates that most teachers have prepared their students well for Paper 1. 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.
- It is important to teach candidates that answers must be short and focused to show understanding of the question. Candidates must learn that quoting long, irrelevant extracts from the text suggests that they have not clearly understood the question.
- Give candidates opportunities to read widely and extensively on a regular basis. It is encouraged to include extensive reading practice on a frequent basis in the classroom and to use a wide range of authentic texts.
- Candidates should learn and practice how to read intensively in order to address the reading exercises on the Paper 1. They are also expected to identify main meaning, deduce the meaning of words from their context, understand grammatical structures and functions in context, be aware of the cohesive devices that give coherence to a text (Subject Guide, pages 23–24).
- Teachers are encouraged to broaden candidates' vocabulary by guiding students to learn words from contexts. It is helpful if students have sufficient opportunities to read broadly and regularly. It is also important that students keep a personal vocabulary list to learn 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

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

Quite a good number of candidates found it difficult to demonstrate appropriate tone for question 4. In addition, a few candidates wrote a letter to the school magazine instead of an article for the magazine in question 5. Furthermore, some candidates appeared unfamiliar with the format of a blog for question 3. The following wording in the questions may have also caused some difficulty for some candidates:

Section A: 一项活动, 网吧, 建议。

Section B: 庆祝会, 博客文章, 午休时间, 不准, 让, 说服/请, 演讲稿。

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

Section A:

Overall, most candidates performed well in writing an email to a friend (question 1). The appropriate format was presented in most responses. The note in question 2 was also well conveyed. Both messages based on the question requirements were delivered clearly and efficiently by many candidates. Candidates may have found the detailed questions helpful for assisting their writing.

Section B:

Many candidates were also familiar with the formats of the speech for question 4 and the article for question 5. Question 5 appeared to be the most popular choice; nevertheless, both questions 3 and 4 were also chosen.

From the aspect of topics, candidates were familiar with “weather”, “clothing”, “activities” and “location”. Some candidates expressed themselves well on the benefits of going to the supermarket in question 4 and the reasons why the film was worth watching in question 5. Most of the writing may not be the most sophisticated, but it was effective.

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

Section A:

In general, sufficient message and appropriate formats were given by the majority of the candidates and the results were satisfactory. The majority demonstrated an ability to use the correct vocabulary to communicate. Question 1 was the most popular choice.

Question 1: most answers to the required information needed in the e-mail were presented sufficiently, although the information “你为什么写这封电子邮件” was omitted by some candidates. The majority of candidates used the appropriate format for this task. Many found the topics of “weather” and “activities” easy to convey.

Question 2: many candidates answered this question well. However, some candidates did not include the names of the recipient and/or writer in the note. In addition, the information of “这个网吧在哪里” was not provided in a clear way by some candidates. Some candidates failed to clarify the reason for “why you want to go to the internet bar together”.

Section B:

As candidates chose to answer a question which they understood, the required information was conveyed fairly well in general and the results were mostly satisfactory. The strongest responses developed other interesting points or thoughts. Some candidates were able to provide not only the required information with logical details but were also able to develop their own thoughts and suggestions.

Question 3: many candidates provided detailed activities of the Chinese New Year party and some candidates were able to mention the cultural differences between the Chinese and their own. A few candidates were not familiar with the format of a blog.

Question 4: many candidates justified well the reasons why they should be allowed to go to the supermarket. Even though the delivery of the message was sufficient, many used inappropriate tone in their speech. In addition, some did not have the concluding words, such as “thank you” or “I have finished my speech now.” *etc.*

Question 5: Many candidates were able to provide the detailed story of the film and reasons why readers should see the film in their answers. Moreover, some were able to conclude the task in the end by encouraging readers to see the film. Some candidates made-up movie titles (which is allowed), so that they could apply their own knowledge on those particular subjects to answer the question.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Candidates can often use and extract information from the questions. It is a useful technique for candidates to have, especially in section A. For example, in both questions 1 and 2, candidates can easily use half of the information from the question to

incorporate them into their own writing.

- When setting writing tasks for class, teachers could use meaningful, purposeful and realistic materials to support their students. A writing task can be an extension of reading, listening or a speaking piece; it does not need to be carried out in isolation.
- It is helpful if candidates practice 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 early on in the two-year course. It can start with one sentence or two, then gradually extend the length of writing.
- During the course, provide different choices/levels of writing for the class.
- Teachers could provide updated genres to candidates, such as *Wechat*, blog *etc.* They provide an authentic environment and the purpose to write.
- Review of past exam papers could offer the opportunity on what to expect in the examination.