

November 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 - 44	45 - 61	62 - 74	75 - 87	88 - 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

In general, centres did well and submitted work that was suitable. In Part 2, some teachers did not ask questions that were related closely to the visual stimulus. Also in some cases, the visual stimulus was not culturally based. In Part 3, the general conversation was well conducted on the whole, with teachers choosing topics that were relevant to the candidates such as hobbies and future studies. Most teachers asked questions that were of a suitable level for the candidates. In some cases, the teachers asked candidates about another topic such as “introduce yourself” or “introduce your family members” which led to another presentation being made instead of having a general conversation.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Many candidates responded well to the visual stimuli and were able to interact with the teacher naturally during the general conversation. Most candidates succeeded in giving a presentation based on the visual stimuli. Some candidates performed very well in the general conversations, while others required prompting from teachers to sustain the conversation.

Criterion A: The majority of candidates demonstrated an ability to use basic vocabulary very well. Some candidates’ performances were beyond the standard of this level and used a wide range of vocabulary successfully. Many candidates were able to use the basic as well as complex grammatical structures in general. Some candidate delivered the messages without much struggle. Only a small number of candidates were unsuccessful in making the audience understand due to the poor intonation or/and pronunciation. Many of these candidates were

not able to use basic vocabulary or/and grammar structures, and their responses and communication were of limited effectiveness.

Criterion B: Many of the conversations were spontaneous. The interactions between the teacher and candidate were natural and generally flowed smoothly. Some candidates required some repetition of the questions, and most teachers supported the candidates well by rewording the questions. Only a small number of candidates struggled to maintain the conversation.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

- Teachers are advised to vary their question types. Yes/no questions are suitable to start a new topic. Follow up open questions can be used to give candidates an opportunity to show their abilities.
- Teachers should try to keep the conversation natural and spontaneous. Candidates should be discouraged from memorizing lengthy speeches for their answers.
- Visual stimuli should be chosen that contain sufficient information for candidates to describe / comment on in their presentations.
- To better equip candidates for an exam situation, speaking with or without exam format should be a regular part of lessons.
- To avoid time wastage and candidate confusion, questions should be clear and not require prior explanation. Teachers are advised to avoid answering or completing the answers for candidates. Instead candidates should be given the opportunity to answer or complete what they are trying to say before the questions are repeated or reworded.

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 topics and work that candidates chose were relevant and appropriate for the course. It is strongly recommended that teachers guide candidates to explore various topics of “everyday life and culture(s)” (subject guide 2013, 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 an *ab initio* level course will provide sufficient academic challenges for them during the two years.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Description

This criterion was well addressed by 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 only described some factual information about one culture, either the Chinese culture or their own, hence failing to make any comparison between the cultures.

Criterion C: Reflection

Some candidates did not perform well in this criterion. These candidates did not demonstrate understanding of the requirements: "The reflection must include answers to all of the following questions" (subject guide 2013, page 32). 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)?".

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 Chinese language effectively and accurately. Some candidates received a 2 mark penalty either as a result of not writing the minimum number of words or for exceeding the maximum number of words. It should be noted that the word count for Mandarin should be 1.2 times the English word count giving a word limit for the written assignment of 240-360 words.

Criterion F: Formal requirements

Most candidates performed well against this criterion, but there were quite a few candidates who did not achieve high marks. It appeared that these candidates did 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 practice, how to cite and refer to the 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 culture(s)".
- It is essential to remember that the word count for Mandarin *ab initio* written assignment is 240-360 words.
- It is important to ensure that candidates include the three headings (Description, Comparison and Reflection) in their written assignment. More importantly, teachers should ensure that candidates understand the requirements for each section, while emphasizing that there are three questions to answer for the "reflection" section. It will be very helpful to instruct candidates so that they fully understand the assessment criteria for this component.
- It is essential to use the updated 2/ABWA form. The form is available in the "Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme".
- It is the teachers' 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. It should be noted that the 2013 version of the subject guide should be followed for the May 2014 and November 2014 examination sessions. Teachers should refer to the updated version of the subject 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 - 4	5 - 10	11 - 17	18 - 25	26 - 32	33 - 37	38 - 40

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

Text B and Text C appeared to be most difficult for candidates. Many candidates seemed to have difficulty answering questions related to Text B, in particular questions 13 –18. With Text C, many candidates had difficulty with true / false questions with justifications (questions 19 – 22), as well as matching words from the text with description (questions 23 – 25). Candidates found questions 6, 13, 18 and 30 the most challenging in the paper.

In terms of question types, candidates found most difficulty with vocabulary exercises that require the interpretation of words / phrases from context and true / false questions with justifications. Some candidates were able to give the correct justification for the true / false questions but were confused between “true” or “false”, while some gave the correct true / false answer but found difficulty in giving a correct justification.

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 did very well using conjunction words. 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 and Text D. Text A is an advertisement for recruiting new staff for an Internet cafe and Text D is a personal letter for a friend talking about personal life. 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 text types and also demonstrated very good reading skills in 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: New Internet Café recruiting waiters

Question 1: Most candidates did well to choose the correct answer from four choices in order to identify the text type.

Question 2: Most candidates were able to choose three correct descriptions about Text A.

Questions 3 – 4: Some candidate found these true / false questions with justification challenging.

Questions 5 – 8: Most candidates did well with these short answer questions except for question 6, which required locating a word from the text to match with “用心”. Many candidates appear to find difficulty with two words: 用心 and 认真.

Text B: Six things that will make you happy

Questions 9 – 11: Candidates found these matching words of the text with description questions of average difficulty.

Question 12: Most candidates did well in this short answer question.

Question 13: Many candidates did not answer this question which required them to complete the second half of a given sentence.

Questions 14 – 16: These three questions are table-filling exercises. Most candidates did well for question 14 (一边) but some struggled with question 15 (比较) and question 16 (后).

Questions 17 – 18: These two questions required candidates to match the definition with words from the text. Most candidates did not answer question 18 well (放松 ; 不紧张).

Text C: Tibet travel information

Questions 19 – 22: These four true / false questions with justifications appeared to be of average difficulty.

Questions 23 – 25: These three questions appeared to be of average difficulty. They required candidates to match appropriate descriptions with given words of text.

Questions 26 – 27: Most candidates performed well in these two short answer questions.

Text D: A letter to a friend

Questions 28 – 31: There were mixed results to these questions that required candidates to match two halves of a sentence.

Questions 32: Most candidates performed well in this short answer question.

Questions 33 – 34: Most candidates performed well in these true / false with justification questions.

Questions 35: Most candidates performed well in this question to choose two correct statements.

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 candidates well. 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.
- Give candidate 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, and be aware of the cohesive devices that give coherence to a text (subject guide, pages 23 – 25).
- Teachers are encouraged to broaden candidates' vocabulary by guiding them to learn words from different contexts. It is helpful if candidates have sufficient opportunities to read broadly and regularly. It is also important that candidates 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 - 7	8 - 10	11 - 14	15 - 17	18 - 21	22 - 25

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

The majority of candidates were able to illustrate the correct format of all tasks. There is no particular difficulty in this aspect. However, many candidates did not use “您” to show the proper register to a teacher in task 1.

Some candidates appeared to find the following wording difficult in section A “昨天最愉快的时候” ; “考试期间” in section B.

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

Overall most candidates did well on Task 1, 2, 3 and 5. For the short writing task, most of the candidates chose task 1 and performed well. Nevertheless, task 2 was also chosen by many and it was presented well.

For the extended writing task, task 3 was the most popular choice. The majority of candidates had much to say about their home town and the activities they could do with their friends in the email. Many also chose task 5 to describe their favourite celebrity (their looks and personalities). Even though the topic of task 4 was perhaps the least familiar and least popular, the candidates who selected this task completed it generally well.

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

Section A

Task 1: The majority of candidates who selected this task were able to provide most of the necessary information. Moreover, the appropriate format was used by most candidates who demonstrated an understanding of the requirements for task 1. Nevertheless, a small number of candidates forgot to write their names at the end of the card. Some did not mention why they were writing this card; instead many words were written to thank the teacher for teaching them Chinese.

Task 2: Most candidates conveyed appropriate format and content. Many conveyed with rich and extra information for the point “可能在哪里不见的”. Almost every candidate provided contact information in the form of an alternative mobile number, home phone number or email address, thus demonstrating that they understood the nature of the task. However, some found it difficult to express “lost” (不见了/丢了) ; “didn’t see / couldn’t find” (没看到 / 找不到).

Section B

Even though there was a quite significant difference in the choice of tasks, there was no difference in task choices relating to the ability of the candidates. Task 3 was the most

popular choice for candidates, and task 4 appeared to be least popular. The standard of the writing in some responses was outstanding.

Task 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. And the majority of the candidates clearly showed the ability to use simple and appropriate language for the purpose of this task.

Task 4: Many 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, some candidates found it challenging to make links between the factors which helps to keep one healthy during the exam period.

Task 5: As mentioned earlier, this task was chosen by candidates with a range of abilities. Many 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. Some were able to express how the celebrities influenced them with a high standard of language.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- Candidates can often use and extract much information from the tasks set. It is a useful technique for candidates to have, especially for section A. For example, in both tasks 1 and 2, candidates can easily use half of the information from the question to frame their own response. In addition, it is essential to teach candidates to understand various types of questions, such as “why”. “where”, “when”, “who”, “how”...etc.
- While teaching the language itself, teachers should also make candidates aware of proper register and tone to readers.
- When setting writing tasks for use in the classroom, teachers could use meaningful, purposeful and realistic materials to support candidates. A writing task can be an extension of reading, listening or a speaking piece; it does not need to be done in isolation.
- It is helpful if candidates are able to address different formats of writing tasks, such as a postcard, an email, a letter, a note, a speech, a diary entry or a school article...etc.
- Candidates are encouraged to start developing their writing skills as soon as they start the Mandarin *ab initio* course. It can start with one sentence or two, then gradually extend the length of writing over the two years.
- Candidates should develop their examination techniques and be encouraged to write something on the task chosen; however marks are not awarded for only copying the task set.

- Practice past paper tasks in the classroom to give candidates an opportunity to experience what to expect in the examination.
- Candidates are encouraged to draft their writing plan before responding to the actual task set.