

Russian ab initio

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 14	15 - 29	30 - 42	43 - 58	59 - 71	72 - 84	85 - 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

Performance in this component reflected the fact that candidates had had a good deal of classroom practice in this activity and they demonstrated a wide range of oral skills. Practically all the visual stimuli were appropriate. The majority were connected to the target culture and offered good opportunities for candidates to make detailed presentations.

Some visual stimuli did not always offer candidates suitable opportunities for comment but the quality of the majority was mostly appropriate.

The topics discussed in the general conversation covered the syllabus and touched upon candidates' personal experience. In many cases the interaction between the teacher and candidate turned into an interesting and informative conversation with a lot of initiative and personal input displayed on the part of candidates.

Candidates generally gained higher marks for criterion B than criterion A. The only hindrance for candidates who failed to earn high marks was limited vocabulary, lack of confidence because of poor language skills and problems with comprehension of spoken Russian. Weaker candidates lost marks both for criterion A and criterion B. They did not attempt to improvise, needed teacher's assistance in the form of repetition, prompting or closed questions.

There were some cases of inadequate organization of the oral exam. In one centre the oral exam did not contain the general conversation and ended with the discussion of the written assignment (WA). Other orals did not contain the discussion of the WA. There were quite a number of centres that did not properly control the timing.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Productive skills

Most candidates were able to demonstrate adequate productive skills. Ten per cent of candidates earned maximum marks as they used accurate grammar and varied vocabulary. Throughout the exam they showed full comprehension, sustained interaction and independent contributions. A large number of candidates experienced difficulties with accuracy in grammar and vocabulary. Pronunciation seemed to be a challenge for weaker candidates. On the whole however, candidates coped with all the exam tasks even with their limited vocabulary and grammar skills.

Criterion B: Interactive and receptive skills

Most candidates earned higher scores in this criterion compared with criterion A. Candidates rarely failed to understand straightforward exchanges. All of them were able to answer their teacher's questions and provide appropriate information. With the best candidates the conversation was maintained throughout the exam with independent contributions and even a sense of humour. The descriptions of the visual stimuli in most cases contained relevant information, showed logical argument and awareness of cultural elements.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

All the skills required for this oral task can and should be practised in class throughout the course of study. Communicating in the target language in class is the best way for candidates to get used to this kind of activity.

Candidates should be encouraged to improvise even with their limited language skills.

Further comments

The overall level of oral responses was higher than in previous years thanks to the fact that the number of candidates possessing almost fluent oral skills has grown. Many such candidates have an advantage of studying Russian in a Russian-speaking environment, for example in centres situated in Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, etc. Another explanation is that a number of candidates doing the *ab initio* course are the so called "false beginners" who could have been placed in the B course but opted for *ab initio* for various reasons.

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

Recommendations for IB procedures, instructions and forms

The situation with cover sheets has improved this year. Only one centre used an out of date cover sheet but all were signed by both candidates and teachers. The cover sheet contains four boxes to be checked *by candidates* to make sure their written assignments conform to the requirements and guidelines. Centres must ensure that candidates do this. On several occasions the assignments were not organized under the three headings although the appropriate boxes had been checked.

Most of the assignments were accompanied by the required bibliography, and although not a requirement, it is most helpful to the examiner to receive copies of the sources used by candidates.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

More than half of this year's WAs earned high marks (18-20), which means that they were written according to the guidelines. The choice of topics ranged from habitual ones like Christmas or New Year traditions, education, cuisine, and lifestyles, to topics which required sources of information other than from text books, such as folk dances, wedding traditions, national musical instruments and others, showing candidates' interest in cross-cultural issues. The majority of candidates displayed cultural awareness when they did research into similarities and differences between the target culture with the culture of their country of origin.

The lowest marks for the WA were earned by candidates from new centres that have had little experience teaching and organizing exams in this subject. It is mostly in such centres that the WAs were not adequately organized, lacked logic, contained repetitions and in many cases the range of vocabulary used by the candidates did not correspond to the chosen topic.

Inadequate choice of topics for the WA by a number of candidates resulted in poor overall performance and subsequent low marks. The titles of several WAs did not suggest any comparison of different cultures such as *The Skier* or *Riots in Ukraine*. It is most regrettable that such a situation happened for the second time in some instances.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Description

While most candidates used this part of the WA to give relevant information on the topic, some candidates from centres that debuted this year erroneously included irrelevant information which could not earn any marks.

Criterion B: Comparison

Quite often this part was the longest one and it contained both description and comparison. Another irregularity that occurred in a number of WAs was that instead of comparing different aspects of two cultures candidates described first the realities of one culture then those of the other. Such an approach failed to earn candidates good marks.

Criterion C: Reflection

Very few candidates managed to avoid any repetitions when answering the three mandatory questions. Unfortunately, many candidates lost marks because they mentioned in their answers facts already described in previous parts of their written assignments. This was a very common mistake.

Criterion D: Register

Few candidates lost marks in this criterion.

Criterion E: Language

There were only two cases of inappropriate length. More often candidates lost marks in this criterion because of serious language inaccuracies that obscured the meaning.

Criterion F: Formal requirements

Very few candidates did not include a bibliography or used only one source in the target language.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

The general impression from the WAs which failed to earn high marks is that their authors had only a vague idea of the purpose, format, requirements and assessment criteria for this task. So the primary recommendation is to inform future candidates of *all* the aspects of this assignment. It would be a good idea to analyze in class an example of a WA emphasizing its strengths and weaknesses.

The teacher's role in giving guidance on the choice of topic is an important one. Teachers should be able to guide less confident candidates to focus on suitable topics, examples of which are in the *Teacher Support Material* on the OCC, and encourage more able candidates to choose from a wider range of topics. But in all cases the choice of the topic should provide enough points of comparison based on two cultures.

Further comments

The written assignment is still a new and evolving assessment task but it provides a good opportunity for candidates to define the areas of their personal interests and show their language competence and creativity.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 6	7 - 11	12 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 34	35 - 40

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

The most difficult exercises turned out to be connected with vocabulary, gap-filling, chart-filling and True/False with Justification. These tasks are traditionally considered to be the most challenging ones. Less able candidates gave incorrect answers in other kinds of exercises but made attempts to respond to questions in all the four texts. There were several candidates who left a number of exercises with no response.

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

The majority of candidates demonstrated understanding of the texts and tasks to be performed. Unlike last year when many candidates tended to give more incorrect responses to the two final texts because they lacked time to properly read them, this year the scores did not leave a similar impression because errors were mostly in more difficult tasks regardless of the text.

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

Q1: Understanding the gist of Text A did not present problems for many candidates.

Q2: This task perhaps appeared easy at first sight, but not all candidates gained the required three marks, although most of them gained at least two marks. The task was to give three categories of visitors for whom the tours were offered. Most candidates identified the first group as "For centre candidates", and then instead of writing "For parents and children" they

separated them into two different categories, which was incorrect. Only one or two candidates correctly identified the third category as “For everyone”.

Q3: There were many correct responses, which showed a good level of understanding of the task.

Q4: An easy task even for less able candidates.

Q5-7: Matching titles with paragraphs was quite challenging. This task distinguished between candidates demonstrating extended vocabulary and those who mostly relied on guesswork.

Q8-10: Synonyms – a traditionally challenging task. Only the best candidates managed to gain maximum marks for this exercise.

Q11-12: The wording of the task turned out to be difficult for some candidates who confused the word “article” with the word “statistics”. A few candidates gave quotations from the articles instead of giving their numbers as the task required. However, these responses were not penalized and were accepted as correct.

Q14-16: Few candidates found it difficult to match the people with what they said.

Q17-19: This was a gap-filling exercise. The best candidates coped with the task and earned three marks. Quite a number of candidates earned one or two marks but there were some who failed to give correct responses or even left this exercise without responses.

Q20: This question earned marks for the majority of candidates.

Q21: This exercise unexpectedly became a challenge even for some good candidates. The task required finding three disadvantages of working in a traditional office as opposed to working from home. In most cases candidates found the correct information in the text to prove the point but then were not able to choose a positive or negative verb form to formulate their argument as a disadvantage.

Q22: This exercise worked well for most candidates.

Q23-25: Chart-filling exercise. The task required referring pronouns to the words in the text. Many candidates gave responses that went beyond the ones in the mark scheme but the examiner considered some of them acceptable and granted marks.

Q26-29: True/False with Justification: exercises of this type appear to be challenging because candidates have two tasks actually – to tick the appropriate box and to find the proper justification in the text. Not many candidates managed to do both properly. There were many cases when the justification was appropriate but the wrong box was ticked. In several cases only the boxes were ticked with no justification given. An explanation could be that candidates who are slow readers found themselves pressed for time.

Q30: Most candidates coped with the task of finding three reasons why doctors were interested in the robot.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates cope better with the tasks when they understand what is expected of them regardless of the text content. Therefore candidates should be well informed about the types of exercises they might have to do in the exam. It is recommended that teachers should either work through previous years' papers with their candidates or introduce similar exercises in their everyday language classes. Reading skills should be constantly perfected and improved as well.

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

Written production is a challenging task requiring a certain level of linguistic competence. Many candidates encountered difficulties with vocabulary range, spelling, verb forms and case endings. For a number of candidates even the tasks' wording seemed to be a problem. As a result there were examples of wrong format or content. Some candidates failed to respond to any of the tasks and there were candidates who responded to one task instead of two. Their pieces of writing were hardly up to an appropriate standard and gained minimum marks.

Out of two tasks in Part A and three tasks in Part B the least popular and therefore the most difficult appeared to be task 2 about plans to go to a ski resort. The situation described in the task apparently contained vocabulary not familiar to the candidates. As a result responses did not reflect the situation properly, contained confusion in important details and rarely earned high marks.

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

A high percentage of this year's candidates coped with the written production well or even very well. Many candidates demonstrated understanding of the situations in the tasks and gave detailed responses using a good range of vocabulary, proper grammatical structures, relevant information and a lot of personal input. Language inaccuracies are unavoidable for *ab initio* candidates and may be pardonable to some extent, but there were candidates who managed to offer very grammatical and competent pieces of writing deserving the highest marks.

In contrast to this high standard there were other less well prepared candidates, many of whom appeared to come from new centres with no previous experience of the subject.

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

Part A 1:

The question was by far the most popular as the situation (birthday party preparation) was familiar to candidates. Quite a lot of candidates earned maximum marks as they mentioned all the relevant information and the format was correct. Some candidates lost marks for serious language inaccuracies.

Part A 2:

Not many candidates chose this task. Those who did failed to give quality responses.

Part B 3:

This was quite a popular task about interest in sport, competitions and athletes. It appealed to many candidates who wrote interesting messages containing relevant information.

Part B 4:

Another very popular task concerning school uniform. There were examples of creative writing with a proper range of vocabulary, interesting ideas, intercultural understanding.

Part B 5:

The least popular task in Part B although the number of candidates choosing the topic of environment protection was rather high compared to previous years. Again, many serious and detailed pieces of writing demonstrated a high level of language skills in a number of centres.

On the whole all the tasks offered were chosen by candidates, with one (2 in part A) being the least popular.

Generally speaking the shorter tasks (Part A) earned higher marks than the longer ones (Part B). More marks were earned in criterion B compared with criterion A. A few weaker candidates who failed to understand the situations in the tasks attempted to write something about themselves or their centre. Such pieces of writing could not earn them high marks.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Regular writing tasks would help to improve spelling, grammatical structures, case endings, etc. Candidates should be aware of the text types used for the paper 2 examination, such as a diary, a note, the text of a speech, etc. and practising past papers in class will help.