

FIRST LANGUAGE CZECH

Paper 0514/01

Reading

General comments

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part concerns an analysis of Text 1; the second part involves a comparison of Text 1 and Text 2. In general the students performed well, especially in the first part, which they handled without any serious problems. In the second part the students mainly encountered problems with expressing the information from the texts in their own words, appropriately and with precision.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) & (b) Candidates had no difficulties with these questions and mostly answered well.
- (c) Here the candidates managed one reason why the men had to abandon the ship: because they had been attacked by the squid. Very few candidates grasped that the ship itself was a wreck.
- (d) The candidates were able to describe the tactic of dumping the pheromones into the water, but often missed that the reason for doing so was that the pheromones sank to the bottom, and the aim was to lure the squid to the depths of the sea. This omission caused the majority of candidates to lose one mark.
- (e) Here the candidates generally had good explanations in mind, but often lost a mark by being imprecise and unclear in their explanation.
- (f) Candidates had no difficulties with this question and mostly answered well.
- (g) The candidates were asked to find words that evoked the atmosphere onboard the boat. The majority of candidates selected exact quotations from the text, successfully for the most part.

Question 2

The two parts of this question required candidates to compare the two texts. Question 2(a) asked candidates to look for differences and similarities in the attitudes of the crews towards octopuses and the fights with the octopuses. Question 2(b) asked them to find differences and similarities in the descriptions of the octopuses.

The majority of candidates had no problem finding similarities and differences, though they did not necessarily identify all of them.

Some candidates had difficulty expressing these in their own words and incorporating them into a well-arranged text that would be neither a mere listing nor a stylistically complicated work. Candidates are advised to consider carefully the way they construct their answer to create a coherent piece of writing. This may mean re-ordering the points, not necessarily just listing them in the order in which they appear in the passages. The examiner needs to be able to see whether a difference or a similarity is being pointed out, and which text the point has been taken from; the language used and structure of the answer should take account of this.

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Paper 0514/02

Writing

General comments

The work submitted covered the full ability range. Each composition was marked for both style and accuracy (a maximum of 12 points) and content and structure (a maximum of 13 points).

Some candidates found it difficult to complete two pieces of writing in the time allowed. The rubric states that each piece should be between 350 and 500 words, but there were some texts that ran to three or four A4 sides, often containing irrelevant or rambling material.

Although candidates here are tested in the language which, for nearly all of them, is their native language, they should not underestimate the demands of the examination. Candidates should make use of previous examination papers to practise answering questions in a structured, coherent way, and ensure they check their work carefully for avoidable errors.

Examples of common language problems included: agreement of subject and predicate, the proper use of capital and lower-case letters, the correct spelling of diphthongs, punctuation, writing direct speech and voice assimilation. There was also frequent incorrect declension, especially of adjectives after nouns. Candidates also need to take care not to translate directly from English.

Candidates living in a foreign language environment, or being educated through the medium of English, need to ensure that they read books and newspapers in Czech in preparation for this examination in order to reinforce their grammatical knowledge and expand their knowledge of vocabulary and structures.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Argumentative and discursive task

Candidates should pay attention to the structure of their response; they should start with a short introduction which indicates the line their argument will take, before elaborating on their points in depth within the main body of the text, then reaching a conclusion.

Candidates frequently repeated the same idea over and over throughout the composition, padding out the piece with lots of detail and examples related to the same point. They often stated facts or bald arguments, forgetting to question cause and consequence.

The most popular topics were "the role of music in modern life," "young people are significantly influenced by fashion trends," and "men and women today enjoy the same standing." Candidates demonstrated that they have a good deal of direct experience in these areas. Nevertheless, to score highly, candidates needed to ensure they did not apply too narrow a focus to the topic. For example, some candidates chose one or two music styles and described these with minimal detail, often with only a passing reference as to why music was important in their lives. Or they described a number of examples of modern fashion trends with great detail but did not consider why young people may be so vulnerable to fashion crazes. In response to the question about equality between men and women, some candidates presented overly simplistic accounts of the past.

Some candidates veered away from the given subject, talking at length about matters which, whilst related to the topic, were not relevant enough to merit high marks. For example, there were numerous cases of texts on the subject of music that dealt for long stretches with hearing disorders that result from listening to loud music, to the exclusion of other points.

Texts were often missing a concluding paragraph.

Question 2

Descriptive and narrative task

This is designed to test the ability to write an effective narrative or description, as well as the ability to manage the basic stylistic tools of description and narrative.

Candidates are advised to focus on the construction of a short, but stylistically well written story. For the descriptive task, candidates should focus strictly on description and use narrative only as a minor backdrop. Those who did best in this exercise wrote about something they had personal experience of; if a candidate writes about the Brazilian Carnival or about getting lost in a specific city without ever having witnessed them at first hand, they are likely to make factual errors which render the work less convincing.

Another pitfall with "descriptive" writing is demonstrating the ability to use an appropriate and varied vocabulary. Candidates should avoid repeating words and the excessive use of the verbs "to be" and "to have." Unfortunately, in many cases, this was not achieved. Descriptive writing should create a realistic impression in the reader's mind; it should not confuse the reader. Unfortunately, in an attempt to provide a large amount of intricate detail, some candidates created unrealistic and puzzling descriptions which were difficult for the reader to follow.

In narration, candidates should show that they can develop a story from an interesting starting point. They need to show that they can use convincing narrative tools such as direct speech and tenses. They should also manipulate their syntax to either accelerate or slow down the story (shortening sentences, using interjects, exclamation points, etc.).