



# **JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS**

**1999**

***FRENCH***

**HIGHER LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT  
ORDINARY LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT**

## HIGHER LEVEL

### 1. Introduction

This examination consists of three sections:

Section I	Listening Comprehension	(140 marks)
Section II	Reading Comprehension	(100 marks)
Section III	Written Expression	(80 marks)

Schools may enter candidates for an optional school-based Oral Examination (80 marks).

This option is taken up by less than 10% of schools. Candidates who do not present for the oral examination are graded out of 320 marks.

### 2. **Performance of Candidates**

29,925 candidates sat this examination. Below is the percentage breakdown of candidates by grade awarded.

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>NG</b>
7.2	24.6	36.8	26.8	4.2	0.4	0.0

Comparative tables of results for 1999, 1998 and 1997 are provided. These show that this year's outcome was broadly in line with that of previous years.

#### **Percentage breakdown of candidates by grade awarded.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>NG</b>
<b>1997</b>	32,991	8.30	25.50	35.40	24.70	5.30	0.70	0.10
<b>1998</b>	32,014	8.90	27.00	35.50	23.90	4.30	0.40	0.00
<b>1999</b>	29,925	7.20	24.60	36.80	26.80	4.20	0.40	0.00

### **3. Analysis of Paper**

#### **3.1 Section I – Listening Comprehension (140 marks)**

There are five parts in this section, A, D, C, D and E.

##### **3.1.1 Part A**

That vast majority of candidates scored full marks here, getting off to a good start in their first certificate examination in French.

##### **3.1.2 3.1.2 Part B**

###### **3.1.2.1 3.1.2.1 First Speaker**

Most candidates gave correct answers for the first two segments – age and number of brothers. However when asked to give “one point about Rennes”, some candidates were in difficulty. Examiners were disappointed at the not inconsiderable number of candidates who thought “Rennes” was a person! Others made it a seaside town. A modicum of cultural awareness would have led to more informed answering. Otherwise candidates acquitted themselves well here.

###### **3.1.2.2 3.1.2.2 Second Speaker**

Few candidates had major problems here. The last segment however was rarely answered correctly. Candidates were asked to name one pastime from comics/comic strips or rugby. “Bandes dessinées” was admittedly testing but examiners expressed surprise that so few candidates recognised “le rugby”!

##### **3.1.3 3.1.3 Part C**

This was the part of the listening test which caused most problems. Many candidates were unable to cope with questions that required some sifting of material to achieve global comprehension rather than mere recognition of single words. For example, questions 1(a) and (b) and 3(a) and (b) gave candidates a wide choice but many did not understand expressions such as “*près de chez moi*” “*je me fais payer*”, “*j’ai horreur de faire le ménage*”, “*à l’extérieur de la maison*”, “*j’aime mieux être dehors*”.

##### **3.1.4 3.1.4 Part D**

In general, the standard of answering was much higher here than in Part C. Very few candidates understood that the man in Q.2(a) went to the doctor because he was not sleeping well (*“Je dors très mal”*). Examiners were puzzled at the tiny proportion of correct answers to questions 4(a) and (b): the French words targeted were *“le melon”* and *“de l’eau”*. This response was against the trend towards better performance in recognition of single words or *groupes nominaux*. Pupils appear not to be accustomed to aural perception of the partitive article. Words such as *“le rugby”* and *“le melon”* would cause fewer problems if pupils received some training in elementary phonics.

In the remaining 7 segments of Part D, the vast majority of candidates scored high marks.

### **3.1.5 3.1.5 Part E**

The majority of candidates coped well with Questions 1, 3, 4 and 5. Some did not understand *“montagne”* (Q.2). In Question 4, a sizeable minority got the numbers right (3 and 2) but gave the incorrect score and attributed victory to France. Another instance this of ability to recognise words in isolation but inability to comprehend clues such as *“L’Espagne a battu la France”* and ... *“... la fin quand les Espagnols ont pris la tête”*.

## **3.2 Section II Reading Comprehension**

**(100 marks)**

### **3.2.1 3.2.1 Part A**

Answering here was of a high standard. The vast majority of candidates scored very high marks in Question 4, with many scripts being awarded full marks. *“Fier”* in 2(b) caused problems, as did *“péages”* in Question 3B2. Incidentally, candidates’ performance in Q.3A1 gave the lie to statements carried that there was an *“error”* in the wording of the question: this was among the best answered questions on the entire paper.

### **3.2.2 3.2.2 Part B**

Candidates showed good comprehension of the first two passages set. Many got full marks for the first exercise and most gained high marks for the passage on Pierce Brosnan. One problem here however was the phrase *“il y a onze ans”*, understood by many to mean *“when he was eleven”*. The words *“mari”* and *“planche à voile”* caused problems in the third

passage. Many examiners expressed surprise at the small number of candidates who answered correctly. Question 3(c): “From what part of France does Véronika come?” (“ses origines bretonnes”). Candidates may have not been sufficiently aware of the convention in French of switching to lower case for adjectives derived from proper nouns. This is a good example of language awareness and cultural awareness converging to facilitate comprehension. The questions on the fourth passage were well answered: the sole exception being (d)(ii), where candidates did not understand “les personnes âgées”.

### **3.2.3 3.2.3 Part C**

As in previous years, the longer continuous passage set in Part C met with a patchy response. Even able candidates were stretched. The following caused problems: “drôle”, “authentique”, “tout le monde me fait de grands sourires”, “notre ... CD marche ... bien”. Candidates found questions (a), (b) and (c) quite easy.

## **3.3 Section III Written Expression**

**(80 marks)**

### **3.3.1 3.3.1 Letter**

Many candidates were awarded high marks for format (4 or 5 out of 5). Examiners were surprised that a sizeable minority threw marks away by failing to respect the basic conventions, for example giving a full address for an informal letter, using a capital letter for the month, misspelling amitiés, using “Salut” or “Bonjour” instead of the required “Cher/Chère”. Five communicative tasks were set in this question. The vast majority of candidates treated all five points and most attempted to develop them in paragraphs of at least two or three sentences. At the top end of the scale candidates wrote letters that were a credit to them and their teachers: here mastery of basic vocabulary and grammar made for effective communication. In most scripts, however, the shortcomings in linguistic competence tended to offset meritorious achievement in communication. Examiners noted that the usual error-types made their annual reappearance: basic tenses of the common verbs, use of object pronouns (J'invite toi and Je invite tu were very common) agreements (mon vacances). Examiners expressed surprise at the huge number of candidates who wrote “le week-end dernier” instead of “le week-end prochain”. It may be useful to note that these and many other of the most common errors would be less prevalent if French were used as the language of communication in the classroom.

### 3.3.2 3.3.2 Postcard

As the communicative tasks set here were both more predictable and more circumscribed than in the letter, performance was better. Candidates possessed the required vocabulary and some basic structures. Examiners did however comment on the high incidence of errors in the use of the possessive objectives (mon amis, ma copain).

#### 1. 1. Summary

Candidates acquitted themselves best in reading comprehension. The vocabulary contained in the communicative-type materials had provided a suitable foundation for this skill. There is evidence however that some lacunae persist e.g. “sourire”, “drôle”, “mari” “peronnes âgées”, “il y a” (meaning “ago”), “breton”. Performance in listening comprehension was equally satisfactory. Candidates’ skills in global comprehension did not match their ability to recognise words in isolation. Performance in written production was patchy. Examiners expressed admiration for the extremely high levels of competence shown by a sizeable minority of candidates. The second exercise set - a postcard – helped many candidates achieve a reasonable mark for this section.

Many candidates were unable to use correctly object pronouns, direct or indirect. The use of French as the language of the classroom is the most effective way of fostering this skill.

#### 2. 2. Recommendations for Teachers and Students

It is recommended that

- • the excellent work being done in the communicative teaching of French be continued;
- • that students be given increased opportunities to hear spoken French;
- • that the use of English by teachers be phased out as quickly as possible;
- • that students receive some training in cultural awareness. A good start here would be familiarity with some basic notions of geography of France.

# ORDINARY LEVEL

## 1. Introduction

French is examined at Junior Certificate Ordinary Level in one examination of two and a half hours. The examination has three sections:

Section I	Listening Comprehension test	(140 marks)
Section II	Reading Comprehension	(120 marks)
Section III	Written Expression	(60 marks)

Because section I involves the playing of an audiotape, candidates usually sit this examination in class-size groupings rather than in large centres.

All questions must be answered in sections I and II. The only choice on the paper is in section III, where, in question two, candidates may attempt to write either a postcard or a note.

## 2. Performance of Candidates

13,874 candidates took the examination at this level in 1999. The breakdown of grades was as follows:

Grade	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
Number	274	2558	4539	4059	2081	344	19
%	1.97	18.44	32.72	29.25	15.00	2.48	0.14

The combined A+B+C result for 1999 was 53.13% and the combined E+F+NG result was 17.62%. Comparative tables of results for 1999, 1998 and 1997 are provided.

### Percentage breakdown of candidates by grade awarded.

Year	Total	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
1997	14,552	0.8	14.7	36.1	33.6	12.2	2.4	0.0
1998	13,797	0.80	11.8	34.4	37.5	12.7	2.7	0.10
1999	13,874	2.0	18.9	32.7	29.3	15.0	2.5	0.14

The combined E+F+NG result, consistent with the 1998 outcome, was caused mainly by candidates not attempting many questions and especially not attempting section III, Written Expression. At the upper end of the scale, many candidates answered well, giving an increased A+B result of 20.41% compared to a combined A+B result of 12.60% in 1998. Examiners commented that the trends in 1999 showed concentrated pockets of extremes with A+B grades at 50% plus, while other pockets scored consistently well.

### 3. **Analysis of Paper**

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#### 3.1 ***Section I – Listening Comprehension*** (140 marks)

Candidates' aural competence in the language was tested by the playing of five pieces of French incorporating conversation, dialogue, news items and personal descriptions. Questions were asked and answered in English or Irish. Many were multiple choice questions, which helped those who were unable to cope with global comprehension.

The first part eased candidates into the examination with the identification of three vocabulary items. Almost all identified at least two of the three elements. The second taped passage, in which two young people introduced themselves, showed a reasonably good knowledge of vocabulary, a mastery of simple numbers in the context of age and number of brothers. There was little grasp of the negative, colours were confused and occasionally wild guesswork replaced attentive listening. This was found especially in "main ingredient of Sunday dinners", where, despite the mention of one item on the tape, candidates, ignoring cultural differences, listed meat, potatoes, two vegetables, etc.

In the third passage - the single longest piece of taped material – multiple choice questions were generally correctly answered. However, the two non-multiple choice answers showed the inability of candidates at this level to sift material accurately. The marking scheme was amended to take this into consideration.

While the questions on the fourth passage (four separate conversations) were very well answered by some, this piece highlighted flaws in basic vocabulary in the areas of days of the week, numbers (with francs), simple directions.

Performance in this passage was a good reflection of the ultimate grade achieved by most candidates.

The final taped passage – five items taken from radio – was more successfully answered this year than in previous years. Identification of countries was the main problem.

### **3.2. Section II – Reading Comprehension**

**(120 marks)**

The reading comprehension involved written answers in English or Irish to questions based on thirteen different visual stimuli and short written passages of French. The material was wide-ranging. It tested basic vocabulary and all questions were attempted by the candidates. While answering was, on the whole, very satisfactory, some candidates appeared to rush through the pages, reading the questions superficially and attempting an answer from a glance at the graphics, without reference to the logic of the questions asked. As in the listening test, answers arising from guesswork tended to reflect the candidates' own lives, experience and value systems with little feel for different cultural practices.

Despite the apprehension of some teachers, authentic documents were handled admirably by most candidates. It was impressive to see how well they coped with the train ticket, identifying abbreviations such as 'dép' and 'non fum'. They scored equally well on the weather chart, the advertisements for Gites de France and leisure/holiday activities. The five extracts from letters to a magazine presented no problems. However, many relied on personal perception/prejudice to misinterpret 'pommes de terre farcies' [q.6], the falcon's problem [q.7 (iii)], despite the words 'l'oeil', 'la vue', and 'verres de contact'. Errors in q.12 sprang from over – reliance on 'Amy', 'ami' of the picture and a possible non-reading of the accompanying text. What seemed incomprehensible was the inability of many candidates to identify the total amount indicated on a supermarket receipt.

Examiners expressed disappointment at the loss of marks caused by basic vocabulary not known/not identified. Striking examples included items of weather, e.g., le vent, (q.7), times of the day, e.g., le matin, le soir (q. 10) and especially items of food, e.g., pommes de terre, beurre, jambon, lait (q.6). It may be that candidates at this level could identify some of these elements from a list of items but find it impossible to isolate them within the context of a menu or a recipe. A little classroom practice with authentic documents could be helpful.

### 3.3. *Section III – Written Expression*

In this section, candidates were required to write a letter and either a postcard or a note in French. Examiners found it a pity that so many candidates tended not to attempt this section. Those who did were very adequately rewarded. Even when accuracy was a problem, marks were scored once the message was comprehensible. Apart from not attempting the section, the other major loss of marks was caused by candidates slotting in irrelevant material learned by heart without being understood, or inappropriate lifting of material from another section of the paper, i.e., transcription. Those who scored best in this section isolated the points for which they had some phrases and treated them with brevity. It was noted that candidates who attempted the Written Expression section of the paper very rarely failed the examination.

#### **Letter**

The most popular points and those best dealt with were about:

- - family;
- - school;
- - going out with friends;
- - going to town.

The least popular and successful points were;

- - holidays;
- - a recent happening in your house;
- - asking what (s)he likes to eat.

It was generally observed that there was a great lack of ability to manipulate tenses or in any way convey a sense of time to a meaningful degree.

There was also a surprising inability to ask questions, even by stating some fact and then adding, ‘et toi?’ Several points could have been adequately dealt with in this way, such as ‘Ask what (s)he likes to eat’ - ‘J’aime les pommes de terre. Et toi?’

Many candidates were inhibited by a lack of the same sort of basic vocabulary as was observed to be in short supply in Sections I and II. Even words like école, vacances, sortir

(in some form), famille were often incorrect. Few successfully attempted to convey information about 'work that you did at home'. Many English words were used for lack of knowledge of simple French words. It is interesting too that those candidates who tried to translate word for word performed less well than those who got away from the idea of specific words and found another way of conveying the meaning.

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**Postcard:**

The postcard was extremely successfully handled this year. Marks were gained easily by those who took the trouble to try this very predictable holiday postcard.

**Note:**

This was far less popular and certainly more difficult. It was disappointing to see how many candidates did not know the word 'book' in French. Indeed the first two points in the note required only basic classroom language.

It is sometimes argued that candidates of this level should not have to do such a daunting writing test. Certainly, there is strong evidence that a large number baulk at the task. However, it continues to be most heartening to see how many acquit themselves quite competently and produce passages of meaningful writing which could be most useful in a real life situation. These candidates – and not just those who get As and Bs – would be capable of exchanging information by letter with a Francophone and making themselves understood. They would also be capable of sending a simple postcard in French while on holiday. This is something very worthwhile.

**4. Overall general comment**

- (i) This examination paper was considered by examiners to be well balanced and without pitfalls. It was a good test of those candidates whose basic vocabulary was adequate to respond to the taped material and authentic documents and who also were capable of some attempt at productive written French.
- (ii) It was therefore surprising that the initial marking scheme, while producing a high rate of As and Bs also revealed an unacceptable almost 20% combined E, F and NG

grades. The range of candidates presenting themselves for examination at this level seems to broaden. One suspects that some would be capable of sitting the Higher level paper. On the other hand, an increasing number of candidates with little preparation and poor knowledge of the subject continue to attempt it.

**5. Recommendations for Teachers and Students**

- (i) That French is used as the normal language of the classroom so that basic vocabulary is in current use. In this way, candidates will more easily identify vocabulary elements on tape and use them in written expression.
- (ii) That the same willingness with which each candidate attempts the listening and reading comprehension tests be shown in attempting the written expression.
- (iii) That candidates read the questions carefully, study the accompanying French reading passages before attempting a wild guess at answers.

**6. Conclusion**

The competence, perseverance, ingenuity and dedication of teachers are obvious in preparing pupils for examination at this level. The work of those candidates is equally admirable in a subject which many find difficult.