

May 2013 subject reports

English *ab initio*

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 14	15 - 29	30 - 44	45 - 60	61 - 72	73 - 83	84 - 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

Individual oral

Please ensure that the visual stimuli presented to the candidates are directly linked to the target culture. Words should only appear on the visual stimulus if they are a natural part of the scene, for example, shop or street signs. Any such words should be in the target language.

Introductions, even if they do not form an official part of the oral, should take place in the target language. The candidate should introduce himself/ herself in the target language giving name and candidate number.

Teachers are reminded to 'guide' students through the oral by informing them of when one Part is over and when another is about to begin.

In order that candidates can access the upper markbands for both criteria, teachers are encouraged to intervene if necessary and move the candidate on in order that the three parts are completed in timely fashion.

Teachers are reminded to ask the two compulsory questions on the Written Assignment after the description and follow-up questions on the visual stimulus. It is important to ask these questions because the student will possess the necessary vocabulary to handle both open ended and more direct questions on the Written Assignment and thus stands a better chance to access the higher markbands in Criterion B, interactive and receptive skills.

The style of questions chosen by the teacher is important and must be one which allows stronger candidates to access the upper markbands while allowing weaker candidates to feel comfortable throughout.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

In the first session of a new programme, there is always a certain number of new challenges to be met. In this case, the challenge was to respect the timing of the three parts of the individual oral.

Overview of the Individual oral

Part 1: 1-2 minutes

Presentation of the visual stimulus.

Part 2: 2-3 minutes

Questions on the visual stimulus.

Part 3: 4-5 minutes

Questions on the written assignment.

Questions on a variety of topics on the ab initio syllabus.

The majority of teachers guided their students through the 10 minute individual oral making the appropriate comments to alert the candidate and the examiner when they were about to move onto the next part of the exam (Let us now talk about something different. We are going to talk about the written assignment...).

Part 1: presentation of the visual stimulus

The choice of visual stimulus is for the most part appropriate. The majority of teachers understand the requirement of a picture in colour in which there are three key elements: people, place and action. Photos seem to produce better results than drawings or cartoons which are frequently too “busy” i.e. there are too many elements to describe. Cartoons are not always appropriate for the age of the candidates.

Note that there is not a caption or sentence under the visual stimulus (this is a requirement in Language B not in Language ab initio). Indeed there should be no words or text on the visual stimulus other than shop or street names which are part of the scene.

The use of collages (several photos linked by topic) should be avoided as this is generally too difficult for ab initio level candidates.

Part 2: questions on the visual stimulus

The questions should be based on the visual stimulus, either on what can be seen in it or on the topic of the picture. Teachers should avoid asking candidate to repeat what has been said previously in the presentation. If the candidate, for example, has already described the physical appearance of a person on the photo, rather than asking him / her to describe someone else, the teacher should ask questions to test other aspects of the picture.

Part 3: questions on the written assignment and the general conversation

The questions on the written assignment should open the third part of the oral; they should not be asked after the general conversation. The teacher must ask at least 2 questions on the written assignment. It is preferable not to ask the students to “Tell me about your written assignment” which can lead to a presentation which seems mechanical or learnt by heart. It is preferable to ask a question about the content of the assignment and / or a question to solicit the opinion of the candidate on the topic.

In the general conversation, in order for the candidates to reach the higher mark bands, they must show that they are capable of talking about several topics on the programme. It is essential, therefore, that the teacher reserves enough time to do this within the 10 minutes allotted time. Please refer to the guide for more guidance.

In order to reach the highest mark bands candidates have also to show that they are capable of using more complex grammatical structures. Teachers should prepare questions using different tenses and structures which will give the strongest candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: productive skills

Pronunciation and intonation generally facilitate understanding. Vocabulary is frequently excellent, both varied and effective. Not all students however, are given the opportunity by the teacher to use more complex grammatical structures. Expressions of comparison are essential to talk effectively about the written assignment.

Criterion B: interactive and receptive skills

The majority of candidates are able to sustain a conversation, to respond appropriately and to demonstrate comprehension. Many spoke with great enthusiasm about the topic of the written assignment

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

There will be samples of the Individual oral available to ab initio teachers after this examination session. Be sure to check the Online Curriculum Centre.

The topics of the written assignments should not be limited to written production but should be introduced into the class in the forms of debate, presentations and discussions. Prepare questions on the visual stimulus and on the general conversation in advance. This allows the teacher to ask questions on a variety of topics and of different levels of difficulty.

Continue to emphasize pronunciation and the use of a variety of tenses in the classroom.

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

Written assignment

Choice of topic

The topic selected for the written assignment **must** come from the prescribed topics as detailed in the guide:

Individual and society	Leisure and work	Urban and rural environment
Daily routines	Employment	Environmental concerns
Education	Entertainment	Global issues
Food and drink	Holidays	Neighbourhood
Personal details, appearance and character	Media	Physical geography
Physical Health	Sport	Town and services
Relationships	Technology	Weather
Shopping	Transport	

Teachers should guide students to choose topics which are sharply focused and manageable in the number of words available (200 -300).

The topic should be clearly stated in the title of the written assignment. It is recommended that the target culture (country /countries) is mentioned in the title.

Students must select a target culture where the target language is spoken.

Teachers are reminded that the topics selected by students for the written assignment can overlap but each title **must** be different.

Presentation

The written assignment consists of:

- Title
- Description
- Comparison
- Reflection
- Bibliography

The headings (Description, Comparison and Reflection) should be used to structure the text. The three questions which form the basis for the section Reflection should also be written out fully.

All written assignments must be hand-written in ink.

When quoting from a source, almost all ab initio languages use the same convention of either speech marks or footnote notes:

1. ...and confirmed according to J Fotheringham: “cycling is as popular in Great Britain as it is in France”.
2. ...and confirmed because cycling is as popular in Great Britain as it is in France.¹

Word count

The word limit **must** be respected. There is a 2 mark penalty in Criterion E, Language if less than the minimum number of words or more than the maximum number of words has been written.

For the purposes of the written assignment, a word is defined as having a space either side of it:

It's a shame that = 4 words

It is most unfortunate that = 5 words

Quotes, the headings of each part, the three questions (Reflection) are **not** included in the word-count.

Criterion specific comments

Description

It is important that factual information on the **target culture** be included in this section. Information given on the student's own culture will not be awarded marks in this section.

The factual information should emanate from the research conducted by the student. Justifying why this topic has been chosen is **not** considered factual information.

Comparison

¹ J. Fotheringham

A comparison may be made in a single paragraph using comparative language (*but, on the other hand, while, whereas, more than...*) or in two parallel paragraphs which treat the same elements in both cultures.

For the purposes of assessment, similarities and differences between the cultures chosen for the written assignment will be treated equally.

Reflection

All three questions must be answered.

Students should not include any information that has already appeared in the two preceding parts (Description and Comparison).

In the third question: *What might a person from the target culture(s) find different about your chosen topic in your culture(s)?* the student is being asked to consider the chosen topic not in the context of the target culture but in his / her own culture from an “outsider’s” point of view.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

This session, the majority of candidates chose topics which were suitable (for example, an aspect of education, marriage ceremonies, food (specific meals or linked to celebrations, leisure, sports). There was an excellent range of Anglophone countries (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA, Great Britain, India, South Africa...). Some candidates chose topics which did not lend themselves to the task (natural disasters, happiness, war, obesity...) and a minority did not choose a culture which was not Anglophone (Korea, for example). The most common problems include:

- The focus of the assignment is not on the target culture but on the candidate’s own culture.
- The topic is not linked to the target culture.
- The topic is not linked to the programme themes and topics.
- The topic is too broad for a 200 -300 word assignment.

Some candidates did not follow the required format but wrote instead an essay or an article on a topic. Understanding the criteria proved difficult for many and even candidates who used the correct headings or lay-out for the assignment did not all fulfil the requirements of the criteria.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A, Description

Many candidates did not understand “relevant factual information” and wrote instead a general introduction to the topic or introduced a comparison. This section was frequently very short and many assignments contained no factual details. In order to receive one mark,

“some factual information” must be used (at least two pieces of information). To receive three marks, “relevant factual information is used” (three or more pieces of information). Many candidates received no marks in this section.

Criterion B, Comparison

This section was generally well done with candidates providing many objective and pertinent points of comparison. The weakest candidates repeated some of the elements from the section, Description. The strongest candidates used comparative terms to clearly present their topic.

Criterion C, Reflection

In order to achieve high marks, the candidates had to reply to all three questions. Some gave thoughtful answers, identifying religious practices, historical events or climate, for example, as the contributing factors for differences. Other candidates gave platitudes: There are differences because they speak English and we speak Spanish. The weakest candidates repeated the details given in the preceding sections. Indeed in some cases, the factual detail stated in the Description was the only point of comparison made in the second section and this same fact became the element that surprised them most and would surprise someone from another culture. Repetition on this scale does not earn high points!

Criterion D, Register

Register was appropriate for the majority of candidates: words such as guys, dudes, and kids should be avoided.

Criterion E, Language

The word count was generally adhered to. Language inaccuracies did not usually obscure meaning. Candidates should be taught to spell the names of countries and inhabitants and learn the prepositions of place for towns and countries. Comparative expressions and linking words add cohesion and clarity to a text. These were used by only the strongest candidates. The vocabulary related to the topic was generally appropriate.

Criterion F, Formal requirements

Many candidates did not provide a bibliography. Those who did frequently did not provide two sources in the target language.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

The skills necessary to carry out the task of the written assignment should be taught throughout the two years. Students should be encouraged in the first year to carry out some research on a topic chosen by the teacher. This factual information could be presented orally in class as well as in written form. Later in the year comparative expressions should be taught and students encouraged to again carry out independent research to describe and compare a topic in two cultures. In the second year the vocabulary necessary to express an opinion should be introduced and the task extended to include this third section.

While candidates may practise writing part or all of a written assignment, it is essential that the candidate chooses a topic for the final written assignment different from one used as practice in class.

Resources for this task may include texts from previous Paper 1 examinations. These texts are at the appropriate level of challenge and the appropriate length.

Visual stimuli are also a useful classroom source for developing the skills of description, comparison and reflection.

On the Online Curriculum Centre (OCC) in September, there will be examples of students' work with examiners' comments. This will give further guidance for future sessions.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 – 5	6 - 11	12 - 15	16 - 23	24 - 28	29 - 32	33 - 40

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

There has been little change to this component of the examination with the arrival of the current ab initio programme. Paper 1 continues to test receptive skills only and consists of a series of four texts each linked to one of the three themes of the ab initio programme (Individual and Society; Leisure and Work; Urban and Rural Environment) and to their associated topics. Each theme must be represented and all texts must be relevant to English speaking cultures.

As in previous programmes, this examination is intended for those who begin the course with little or no prior experience of the language. The level of difficulty is, therefore, similar to that of past examinations. Text A is the easiest text, Text B is of average difficulty, Text C presents the greatest challenge and Text D is a text of average difficulty.

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 and there is now a sufficient bank of past examinations to allow for effective classroom practice. The removal of the Written Response task based on Text D is to the advantage of many candidates who score higher marks in answering questions on Text D than in producing a text where poor written skills frequently obscured the message.

All candidates finished the examination within the allotted time (an hour and a half) and the results for this component are very satisfying.

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

This year, the examination reserved a few surprises since the comprehension activities which many candidates found most challenging were in Text A, (matching the student and his/her opinion about university) and in Text D, (true / false questions with justification). In the first case the difficulty was due to a limited knowledge of vocabulary. In the second case, the difficulty lies in the question type itself which requires close reading of the text to identify a focused, relevant justification.

In Text A some candidates did not have the necessary lexical knowledge to associate the students with their choice of university or with what they enjoyed at university. Some first language interference was also apparent: question 8 (answer: class discussions) and question 9 (answer: lectures) were misunderstood by many candidates.

Although Text B presented the majority of candidates with little difficulty, weaker candidates again showed that they did not understand basic vocabulary (for example, question 13: How will Transport Department officers be dressed?). They tried to compensate for this lack of knowledge by quoting long extracts from the text. In such cases the candidates are not awarded a mark even if the answer is contained in the quotation. Answers must be short and focused to show understanding of the question.

Only the strongest candidates answered correctly question 15 (How can residents arrange an interview at a convenient time?) and question 16 (Which word in paragraph 4 has a similar meaning to “questionnaire”?).

In Text C, the activity, matching the beginnings and ends of sentences (questions 23 – 25), tests both comprehension and grammar and many candidates find it challenging. On the other hand, candidates do well in the activity: in the sentence... the word... refers to... (questions 27 – 29) which also tests grammar and comprehension of the text. Weaker candidates gave answers which were too vague or too general. For example, in question 29 the answer “people” is too vague. The precise answer is people in need.

In Text D, the answers to the true / false questions with justification (questions 32 – 37), must be focused and demonstrate understanding of the statement. For example, the focused answer for question 35 is: False: are also working to collect several thousand dollars more (to pay for the costs). The part of the sentence in brackets indicates a tolerance level for the answer. However, the justification given by many candidates: ‘He and his wife have received money from various organizations’ is irrelevant to the statement and suggests that the candidate has not clearly understood the question. In question 36, the statement: Dr Baghdasarian is concerned about the weather on the journey. It contains two ideas: concerned (it is a little frightening) and weather (big storms). Both parts are necessary for the justification. Question 37 states: Dr Baghdasarian is looking forward to the journey. The answer given by many candidates, ‘I want to play my part to help the environment’ is not relevant. When this sentence is given together with the correct answer: On the other hand,

I'm excited about the adventure of being an explorer, the examiner cannot tell if the candidate has understood the question or not and the candidate does not receive a mark.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Teachers should use techniques to help students acquire a strong vocabulary basis. Memory games, dictations, deducing meaning from context, brainstorming words linked to a visual stimulus, for example, are activities which could be practised on a regular basis.

All Paper 1 examinations from previous sessions continue to provide useful material for reading comprehension practice. The teacher could omit Text D (the written response) or create a set of comprehension questions on this last text.

Teachers should continue to practise the following questions types:

- True / false questions with justification
- Grammar in context: to whom and to what does this word refer
- Matching the beginnings and ends of sentences.

Candidates should be reminded that in the examination:

- It is not necessary to write in complete sentences
- The answers must be focused
- Handwriting must be legible
- They should not leave blanks.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 12	13 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 21	22 - 25

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

There are few changes to the format and expectations in Paper 2, written production. The examination consists of two sections: the candidate must answer one question in each section. In section A, the information to be provided is given in a bullet point list whereas in section B, the question is slightly more open to the candidate's own input. Each question is clearly contextualized and the required text type is specified.

The change to this examination component is nevertheless significant. While the requirements of the tasks have not changed, there is a reduced minimum word count and consequently a shorter examination time (one hour). While all candidates completed the two tasks within the allotted time, many candidates did not appear to have had the time to reread their work. Mistakes in basic grammar and structures (especially in the final paragraph of the essay in section B), omission of basic information (where, when...) suggest that some candidates were pressed for time. The importance of using the key characteristics of a specific text type is still not clear for all candidates.

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

Nevertheless, overall, the results are very satisfactory. Candidates continue to make progress and the requirements of the examination appear to be clearly understood by the majority. Despite some linguistic and lexical inaccuracies, almost all candidates were able to communicate the appropriate message. The majority have understood that all information listed in the question must be provided in the answer. The stronger candidates provide examples, details and explanations. The structure and cohesion of the tasks have also improved. More candidates write in paragraphs and many use basic linking words.

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

Section A

Task 1, the planning of a high school celebration, was chosen slightly more often than the second task, the cancellation of a football game. In question 1 a few students misunderstood the task and suggested a time and place for the celebration itself rather than those of the meeting to plan the celebration. Others omitted to give two suggestions for special activities. In question 2, the information "How the players can keep fit between matches" was omitted by the weakest candidates.

In both tasks in this section (a blog and a notice), the essential characteristic to indicate format is a title.

Section B

In section B, the stronger candidates not only provide the required information with some details but are able to present it in a clear and logical form. This includes the use of paragraphs and simple linking words (firstly, secondly, next, however, on the one hand, on the other).

Question 3, the cooking competition was the most popular topic followed by question 5, work during the holidays and finally by question 4, the protection of the environment at school.

Most candidates who chose question 3, the cooking competition, provided complete and detailed answers. In question 4, the responses were rather succinct but most candidates did make a reference to the use of paper, electricity and water. Not all candidates realized that the brochure was about the school environment. Not all candidates had the necessary vocabulary to write about the topic or the language abilities to encourage their fellow students. The answers

to question 5 were detailed although not all candidates understood that they had to mention three jobs and give the advantages and disadvantages of each one.

Criterion A: Language

Punctuation continues to be the greatest challenge for many candidates. The number of candidates who do not write in sentences is astounding. Sentences should be short for clarity: a sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with a full- stop. Many of the “sentences” were so long that the message was unclear or incomprehensible.

Although there are some vocabulary inaccuracies (confusion between: bored / boring; interested / interesting; to sell / sale; earn / win; funny / fun; to assist/ to attend; to hope/ to expect; to realize; to carry out; cooker / cook ...) candidates mainly possess the vocabulary adequate for the tasks.

The most common grammatical errors are incorrect verb tenses and form, agreements between adjectives and nouns when there are none in English, missing subjects of verbs and missing articles.

Register was generally appropriate although some candidates use the informal “thanks” or “guys” in formal text types.

Criterion B: Message

In order to answer the question successfully, candidates should be advised not to choose a question where they do not understand all the words. Marks are lost for missing information and a message which is off topic is penalized. Candidates should be advised to highlight or underline the information to be provided in the question and to recheck at the end if they have provided all the required information.

A clear and logical structure is important and candidates should be taught to use paragraphs and linking words.

Criterion C: Format

In section A, the blog and the notice both require a title.

Section B question 3, requires the candidates to write a formal letter. This text type requires a date, an opening greeting (Dear Chefs) and a closing formula. Paragraphs are essential as is the use of simple cohesive devices for coherency. In question 4, few candidates use the characteristics of a leaflet which requires a title. Stronger candidates used subtitles or lists and contact details for further information. In question 5, the required text type is an article. The characteristics of this text type include a title, paragraphs and the name or initials of the journalist.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Candidates should be given several opportunities to practise choosing and writing two texts within the examination time frame (one hour).

Candidates should be taught the basic characteristics of each text type. Although the marks available for format have been reduced, format is worth three marks over both sections and can be important for the final grade. Above all, these marks should be easily accessible to all candidates. The list of appropriate text types for each section is specified on page 25 of the ab initio language guide.

The candidate should be reminded to:

- choose a question in which he/she understands all the words
- highlight, underline or number the pieces of information to be provided
- identify the text type and note the characteristics to be included in the answer
- check after writing that all the information in the answer has been included
- use a range of simple cohesive devices
- re-read the text paying attention to verbs, form and use and basic grammar.