



Course report 2024

National 5 Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 282

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 408

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	332	Percentage	81.4	Cumulative percentage	81.4	Minimum mark required	84
B	Number of candidates	34	Percentage	8.3	Cumulative percentage	89.7	Minimum mark required	72
C	Number of candidates	23	Percentage	5.6	Cumulative percentage	95.3	Minimum mark required	60
D	Number of candidates	15	Percentage	3.7	Cumulative percentage	99	Minimum mark required	48
No award	Number of candidates	4	Percentage	1	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The course components performed as expected. Most candidates engaged with the question papers in a meaningful and constructive manner.

Candidates time management and exam techniques improved this year. This is evidenced by the successful handling of both the writing and reading question papers.

In general, there were a number of strong performances. The question papers covered a range of topics across all aspects and were of an appropriate level of demand and challenge for the level.

Question paper 1: Reading

In the reading question paper, candidates read three texts of approximately 150 to 200 characters in Chinese, and then answer in English the questions that follow each text. In this year's paper, the three texts covered the contexts of society and culture (text 1), employability (text 2), and learning (text 3).

Overall, the assessment was positively received by candidates, teachers and lecturers. Feedback suggests it was appropriate in terms of content and demand. Many candidates demonstrated good reading skills and achieved good marks.

Question paper 1: Writing

This question paper performed as expected.

Most candidates were able to address the four predictable bullet points in a balanced way, using detailed vocabulary and grammatical structures. The written responses displayed a good range of expressions, structures, and accuracy.

Most candidates addressed the two unpredictable bullet points, although many did so briefly. Overall, most candidates responded appropriately.

Markers noted that both unpredictable bullet points were relevant to the job advert and straightforward for candidates to address. Most candidates performed as expected in this question paper, showing that they had prepared well.

Question paper 2: Listening

The question paper performed as intended. The paper covered the context of society, candidates listened to item 1, a short monologue, in which Ailsa spoke about the time she spent studying Mandarin in China. In item 2, candidates listened to Wei talking to Ailsa about his exam and summer plans. After each item, candidates answered questions in English.

The topics used were familiar, with a range of vocabulary used across the two items. There was a good level of challenge and demand in terms of the content and the questioning.

Assignment–writing

The assignment–writing was reinstated for session 2023–24. Candidates performed well and many were able to use detailed language expected at this level. However, there is scope for candidates, teachers and lecturers to be more ambitious with their topic selection to better demonstrate candidates' abilities and potential.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading

Overall, candidates performed well in the reading question paper, with very few no responses.

Candidates' comprehension and handling of text have improved. Many were able to identify the correct information and responded appropriately.

Most candidates were able to engage well with the texts, which covered relevant topics. Many were able to access the full range of marks by reading the questions carefully and understanding the key sections of each text. The question paper provided an appropriate level of demand, which most candidates coped well with. The questions following each of the three texts were clearly worded and accessible to candidates, making it straightforward for most candidates to locate the answers in the text.

Text 1 (culture and society)

Overall, candidates performed well in this text. The supported questions worked well, enabling many candidates to gain full marks.

Text 2 (employability)

Most candidates showed good text handling skills and coped well with the questions on this text.

Text 3 (learning)

Question 3(a): this was a supported question, and most candidates were able to identify the correct information and complete the sentence accurately.

Question paper 1: Writing

The overall standard was very good.

Most candidates tried to include a range of vocabulary and structures appropriate to the level. In terms of content and language resources, many candidates are comfortable with what is required of the writing task.

Markers noted fewer 'one size fits all' written responses this year. However, candidates made fewer attempts to use advanced language resources, indicating a compromise between accuracy and risk-taking. Stronger candidates referred directly to the job advertised. Many were able to incorporate the prompts in the advert and adapt generic learned phases to suit the job application.

Question paper 2: Listening

This year there was a wider range of marks in the listening paper, with a few gaining full marks. Markers noted very few no responses in both items.

Generally, candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of vocabulary relating to the context and topics of learning.

Monologue

Questions 1(d) and (e): candidates were able to access marks where more than one answer was possible.

Dialogue

Question 2(a): this was a supported question, and most candidates were able to gain the mark.

Questions 2(d) and (e): most candidates gained the available marks for both questions. Some candidates continued to find the dialogue to be slightly more challenging, but many were able to successfully understand accessible parts of it.

Assignment–writing

Candidates performed well in the assignment–writing.

Performance–talking

The overall standard of candidate performance was high.

Candidates demonstrated good ability and knowledge to express their views and ideas about their chosen topic. Many candidates were able to use relevant content and detailed language features.

The conversations sampled included various open-ended questions for candidates to demonstrate a range of language resource. Generally, conversations were of an interactive nature and provided good examples of a spontaneous dialogue.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

Most candidates showed good text handling skills, although some found certain questions more challenging.

Text 2

Questions 2(b)(i)(ii)(iii), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g): some candidates attempted to predict their responses through logical reasoning, instead of reading the text carefully to locate the required information.

Question paper 1: Writing

Although most candidates did address the unpredictable bullet points 5 and 6, at times these lacked detail and contained inaccuracies.

The three main factors affecting accuracy was dictionary misuse, interference from candidates' mother tongue or other languages, and literal translations of phrases. These factors were most apparent when addressing the last two unpredictable bullet points.

Some examples of inaccuracies:

Misuse of dictionary:

- ◆ 事情 = work: 我每个星期事情四十个小时
- ◆ 为 = for: 我在咖啡馆工作为三年

At character level:

- ◆ inversion of the character 和
- ◆ 是: there is a gap between 日 at the top and the rest of the character
- ◆ 母天 / 每天
- ◆ 今天 / 今天
- ◆ 牛 for 年: markers came across numerous 年 with the vertical line protruding above the top horizontal line

Confusion over visually similar characters:

- ◆ 住 & 在 – 住在 / 在住
- ◆ 住 vs 往
- ◆ 在 vs 左
- ◆ 未 vs 末 – 未来 & 末来; 周末 & 周末

Question paper 2: Listening

Most candidates coped well, but there were questions that some candidates found more challenging, for example:

Item 1

Question 1(b): many candidates found it challenging to handle '3,000' and did not gain the mark.

Question 1(c): candidates found handling time an issue. Some did not gain the mark because they did not listen to the end, for example identifying 7am instead of 7.30am. Some candidates failed to indicate am or pm when giving the time.

Assignment-writing

There were instances of misuse of dictionaries and inaccuracies with spelling and grammatical structures. There were a few assignments without titles on the cover page of the answer booklet.

Candidates made fewer attempts to include the use of a range of tenses and the use of connectors, indicating a compromise between accuracy and risk-taking.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read questions carefully then respond by giving the correct amount of information, ensuring that they give enough detail
- ◆ follow instructions carefully, for example when asked to 'tick' a correct box, put a 'tick' not a 'cross' or any other symbol
- ◆ make their handwriting legible, as this can affect their mark
- ◆ strikethrough any errors or mistakes with a single line
- ◆ continue to develop dictionary skills as part of the course and think about the context of a word to decide which meaning is most appropriate
- ◆ read through answers carefully to ensure they make sense in English

Question paper 1: Writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read the job advert carefully and learn to use the prompt appropriately in their responses
- ◆ take time to check spelling, especially with common sight characters, such as 是, 和, 住, 在, 今, 年
- ◆ practise manipulating the language in a range of unfamiliar bullet points
- ◆ know that they should not provide a formal introduction and/or end to the job application as this can prevent candidates from having enough time to perform well in the required areas of the job application
- ◆ provide detailed language, for example taking it beyond a simple subject-verb-object structure, when responding to the unpredictable bullet points
- ◆ write enough accurate and detailed language for the unpredictable bullet points
- ◆ leave time to read through their piece of writing to ensure all bullets have been covered and basic mistakes have not been made, for example spelling and words missed out

Question paper 2: Listening

It is important to remind candidates that the listening exam is not a memory test. Encourage them to take notes while they listen, preferably on a separate piece of paper.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read questions carefully then respond by giving the correct amount of information, ensuring that they give enough detail
- ◆ avoid making a long list of answers or including guesses as this could negate the correct information and result in not gaining marks
- ◆ make their handwriting legible, as this can affect their mark
- ◆ present their answers clearly, for example there should be a clear distinction between answers and notes
- ◆ practise note-taking, as this helps candidates improve their performance in listening
- ◆ make use of the third listening to check the accuracy and specific details of their answers

Assignment–writing

The assignment–writing should be on the contexts of either society, learning or culture, and teachers and lecturers must ensure that candidates tick the correct box on the answer booklet.

Candidates must not write on the context employability as this is covered in the writing question paper. Although the stimulus given to candidates is not required for SQA purposes, we encourage teachers and lecturers to provide a more detailed title. The title should be in English.

The choice of topics should be appropriate to the age and level of candidates, allowing them to be able to produce accurate and detailed language based on what they have been studying during the course. As this piece is based around a topic that candidates have been studying, teachers and lecturers should encourage them to include more detailed language and grammatical structures appropriate to National 5.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking should be conducted in appropriate surroundings, eliminating the possibility of disruptions and background noise, as described in the assessment conditions in the [National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification](#).

Teachers and lecturers should consider allowing for more personalisation in the choice of topics. This can provide candidates with a good opportunity to show a range of structures to express various opinions and ideas.

We remind teachers and lecturers that at National 5, candidates must demonstrate adequate coverage of two different contexts in the presentation and conversation respectively.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).