2023 VCE Japanese Second Language written external assessment report

General comments

In the 2023 written examination, students generally demonstrated a sound knowledge of the format and requirements of each section.

In Section 1 Parts A and B and Section 2 Part A, most students were able to grasp the basic information and extract relevant information from the reading texts reasonably well. However, the listening texts presented significant difficulties for many students. They struggled to understand complex grammatical structures used within the content and potentially unfamiliar culture-specific words while keeping up with the pace of the listening texts. In general, meeting the level of detail required in responses to comprehension questions seemed to pose a considerable challenge for the students.

In Section 2 Part B, students generally managed to incorporate relevant ideas from the stimulus text into their responses, although the features of the specified text type and style of writing were not always reflected correctly, and the accompanying stimulus image was frequently overlooked.

In Section 3, students were able to present a range of information, ideas and opinions in their responses. However, students are reminded to read the question carefully in order to understand the exact nature of the task and avoid automatically replicating their previous work or solely relying on their prior general knowledge related to the topic.

Across all sections of the examination, rudimentary grammatical mistakes in verb conjugation, adjective inflection, particle usage and common sentence structures were evident in both short and extended responses in Japanese.

In general, students are encouraged to consolidate their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and kanji expected at the VCE level and develop a clear understanding of different styles of writing and text type features. They should be able to apply their knowledge and writing skills to a range of question types and not rely on what appeared to be prepared responses. Students should also use a variety of listening and reading resources when preparing for the examination to improve their comprehension and note-taking skills.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

Section 1

Part A – Listening and responding in English

This section assessed the students’ capacity to understand and convey general and specific aspects of texts.

Question 1a.

You can see various animals in nature.

While students generally understood that the question was about seeing animals, a considerable number were unable to accurately grasp the meaning ofしぜんの中で (in nature). Students should also be aware of the difference between ‘various’ and ‘many’.

Question 1b.

* You can feed monkeys with a guide at the zoo.
* You can ride horses in the woods.
* You can learn about animal life at the education corner.

Very few students were able to identify the first two points, ‘feed monkeys’ and ‘ride horses in the woods’.

Question 1c.

* You will get there 45 minutes faster than in the normal train.
* You will get a free animal character bento.

A majority of students correctly identified ’45 minutes’. However, the common error was assuming that the bus took 45 minutes from Tokyo Station to the safari park, misunderstanding the comparison with the train. Most students were familiar with the concept of kyaraben (character bento), but understanding むりょうで (for free) in the listening text proved to be difficult for many students.

Question 1d.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Takashi’s concerns | Solutions offered by Mika |
| * Many people will go to the zoo to see the baby lion. * He does not like waiting for a long time. | * Book one week in advance online. * Go there between Monday and Friday. |

This question was handled relatively well. However, some students struggled to grasp the accurate meaning of 一週間前に (one week in advance).

Part B – Listening and responding in Japanese

In this part of the examination, students were assessed on their understanding of the listening text and their ability to accurately convey appropriate information from the text in Japanese. The information presented in the response needed to be relevant to the question. Students were not awarded separate marks for content and language. Responses that included the relevant information and were expressed clearly in Japanese were awarded full marks.

Question 2a.

くつを ぬいで、家のスリッパを はきます。そして、くつを たなに 入れます。(They are asked to take their shoes off and put on house slippers. Then put the shoes on the shelf.)

Most students would have prior knowledge of the Japanese custom of removing shoes and wearing slippers inside the house, making comprehension of these points relatively easy. However, students struggled with the spelling and conjugation of the verbs ぬぐ (to take off) and はく (to put on), as well as the spelling of スリッパ (slippers). The text about placing shoes on the shelf proved to be challenging for many, and only a small number of students managed to include this accurately in their responses.

Question 2b.

* 好きな時に 朝ご飯を 食べます。(Have breakfast anytime you like.)
* 自分のおさらは 自分で 洗います。(Wash your own dishes.)
* 晩ご飯は ダイニングルームの外で 食べてはだめです。(Must not eat dinner outside the dining room.)

好きな時に (anytime you like) was often misunderstood as 好きな朝ご飯 (your favourite breakfast). Some students overlooked 外で (outside) in the phrase ‘outside the dining room’, leading them to conclude incorrectly that eating dinner in the dining room was prohibited.

Question 2c.

* 和室に とこのまが あって、生け花などの かざり物が あります。 (The Japanese-style room has an alcove, where there are decorations such as ikebana.)
* 夜 おし入れから ふとんを 出すと、和室は ベッドルームに なります。 (When you take the futon out of the oshiire at night, it becomes a bedroom.)
* 朝 おし入れに ふとんを 入れると、和室は リビングルームに なります。 (When you put the futon back in the oshiire in the morning, it becomes a living room.)

While most students were familiar with 生け花 (ikebana) and ふとん (futon), other culture-specific words such as とこのま (alcove) and おし入れ (closet) were not understood well. ベッドルーム (bedroom) and リビングルーム (living room) were easily recognised, but the spelling of these katakana words were problematic, and some students were confused by the idea of the dual-purpose Japanese room.

Section 2

Part A – Reading, listening and responding in English

In this part of the examination, students were assessed on their understanding of general and specific aspects of the reading, listening and visual texts. The information presented in the response needed to be relevant to the question.

Question 3a.

* They have a special way of separating rubbish.
* The rate of recycling is more than 80%.

This question was generally handled well. Some common mistakes included confusing分ける (to separate) with 分かる (to understand), struggling to read the kanji in 分け方 (how to separate) and overlooking the word 以上 (more than).

Question 3b.

* There are no garbage trucks.
* The residents must take their rubbish to the rubbish centre and sort it into 45 different categories.

Most students understood that garbage trucks do not exist in this town, yet confusion arose when トラック (truck) was misinterpreted as ‘track’ or ‘tracking’ with rubbish collection. Although many students mentioned ‘45 categories’ in their responses, they frequently omitted specific details about people separating rubbish into these 45 categories.

Question 3c.

* You receive a discount on your coffee at the café if you bring your own cup.
* The café’s lunch menu only offers one dish.
* If you want to buy local produce at the café, you need to bring your own shopping bag.

Students grasped the main idea quite well but often overlooked specific details such as ‘coffee’, ‘lunch’ or ‘at the café’, resulting in a loss of marks.

Question 3d.

There was a lot of rubbish on the beach, and the sea was dirty.

This question was generally managed quite well. Nonetheless, some students struggled with differentiating between ビーチ (beach) and 海 (sea) in determining whether it referred to the strip of sand or the water when discussing the issue of rubbish.

Question 3e.

* There are not many rubbish bins.
* Children are not taught how to properly dispose of rubbish from a young age.
* There are many people who are unaware of the impact of rubbish on the environment.

While most students understood the first point about the lack of rubbish bins, providing an accurate level of detail from the listening text as required for this question, along with the complex grammatical structures used, posed a challenge for them in their responses.

Question 3f.

* In Kamikatsu, children do rubbish separation activities at the rubbish centre with their parents.
* In this town, children learn how to sort rubbish at school from a young age.
* In Japan, everyone makes sure to put rubbish in a bin whenever there is one available.
* In Japan, students clean their school.

Students generally understood the last point about cleaning their school quite well; however, specific details in the texts, such as where children learn about rubbish separation and engage in the act of separating rubbish, along with the phrases ゴミのすて方 (how to dispose of rubbish) and ゴミの分け方 (how to sort rubbish), seemed to have created some confusion, often leading to responses that were too generalised and lacked the necessary details.

Question 3g.

* Hand out free second-hand clothes at recycling shops.
* Share car rides.
* Reduce the amount of rubbish.
* Hold special community events at school such as the Clean Up Australia Day.

In this question, ‘sharing rides’ and ‘reducing the amount of rubbish’ were the common points that students included correctly in their responses. Many students also mentioned recycling shops and community events, yet details about handing out second-hand clothes free of charge and where these community events are to take place were frequently overlooked.

Part B – Reading and responding in Japanese

Students were required to demonstrate an understanding of the stimulus text and to address the requirements of the task by conveying the relevant information from the text that was appropriate for the audience and the prescribed writing style and text type.

The reading text included a visual stimulus. Students who scored highly were able to successfully incorporate information from the visual stimulus in their responses.

Student responses were assessed holistically according to the assessment criteria and the expected qualities published on the VCAA website. Students were not awarded separate marks for content and language accuracy; however, language accuracy was an important expected quality that was considered in the assessment.

Question 4

In this task, students needed to include some of the key information about the kimono rental shop, such as the range of kimonos and services available, store location, hours, prices and online booking details. The majority of students demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the stimulus text, yet many responses had a tendency to be informative and lacked a personal tone. They primarily focused on relaying factual information rather than sharing the author’s perspective on the experience of renting a kimono from this shop. The accompanying image was often overlooked altogether.

Additionally, students needed to address both positive and negative aspects of their experience; however, a noticeable number of students placed greater emphasis on the negative elements, only superficially mentioning the enjoyable part of the experience. It should also be noted that the response to this question should be written primarily in the past tense to recount the author’s experience and emotions.

Students should be mindful that independent wording is an aspect of the assessment criteria they need to pay closer attention to. It is important to develop an ability to manipulate the language from the stimulus reading text to convey the original meaning in their own words. High-scoring responses skillfully incorporated relevant information and expressed the content with minimal reliance on the language in the reading text while meeting the requirements of a personal blog. Students who did not score well were more inclined to copy substantial portions of the text into their responses.

While the specified character range for this section is 300 ji, as the stimulus reading text contained numerous points that could be crucial for this task, students often found it challenging to include sufficient information within this constraint. As a result, many opted to use the entire page of genkō yōshi for their responses to ensure the relevance, depth and breadth of content.

The following is a sample response.

浅草の着物レンタル　　　  
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　 ビー・カー　  
　今日 浅草駅の近くの新しい着物レンタルの店へ 行ってみた。日本語が少し読めてもウェブサイトで着物をよやくするのは たいへんだった。でも、はじめての着物なので、私も弟もワクワクしていた。  
　店には せが高い人とひくい人のために 色々な着物があって、とくに 女性のスタイルは 多かったから、私は よかったけれど、弟には スタイルが 少なくて、ちょっと がっかりしていた。夏なら 3200円で ゆかたが かりられて、男性のも 多いらしい。でも、今回は 店のオープンキャンペーンの着物レンタルで、1万円で けしょうとへスタイルも してもらえたし、しゃしんも とってくれたので、よかった。  
　着物を着て 浅草の町を 歩いていたら、みんなが 私達を見て すてきだと言ってくれて、うれしかった。  
でも、食べ歩きが できないし、3時に行ったから 2時間しかなくて、もっと早く行けば よかった。  
　 今日はすばらしい思い出に なった。

　　　　　　　　　　　 Asakusa Kimono Rental  
 　　　　Vee Carr

Today we visited a new kimono rental store near Asakusa Station. Even if I can read a bit of Japanese, it was difficult to book kimonos on the Japanese website. But my brother and I were quite excited to try on our first kimono.

They had a variety of kimonos for both tall and short people, with a wide range of styles for women. This was great for me, but unfortunately there weren’t many options available for men, so my brother was a little disappointed. If we came in summer, apparently you can rent yukata for 3,200 yen with more styles for men as well. However, on this occasion, they were running a store opening campaign, and for 10,000 yen we had our makeup and hair done as well. We also had a photo taken there, so that was great.

As we strolled around Asakusa in our kimono, we were delighted when people approached and complimented us on how beautiful we looked. But we couldn’t eat while walking in kimono, and we didn’t arrive at the shop until 3:00 so we only had two hours. I wish we had gone there earlier. It turned out to be a wonderful memory of the trip.

Section 3 – Writing in Japanese

Questions 5–8

In this part of the examination, students were given a choice of four questions: informative article, persuasive speech, evaluative letter or imaginative story. They were required to produce a response of 400–500 ji in Japanese to one of these questions.

Students who scored highly successfully conveyed significant and original information relevant to the task, which was integrated effectively into the required style of writing and text type. They demonstrated a strong command of the language enabling them to express their ideas with a high level of accuracy and sophistication.

Most responses were written reflecting the appropriate style, text type features and audience specified in the task, but with a varying degree of relevance, comprehensiveness, sophistication and accuracy.

Question 5

Quite a few students opted for this question. The task was an informative article for a high-school newsletter in Japan about the sports commonly coached by students in Australia and the benefits of taking on a coaching role. Responses highlighted several prevalent sports such as AFL, netball, cricket, and soccer, and provided various examples of the advantages, including enhanced communication and leadership skills, fostering camaraderie, financial gain, better health and improved sporting abilities. While most students adhered to the task description, some veered away from the topic and discussed the popularity of sports in Australia or the specific sports Australians engage in, losing focus on the aspect of sports coaching by students. Some responses were more persuasive in urging readers to consider becoming a coach rather than presenting an informative article as required by the question.

Question 6

Fewer students chose this question. The task was a persuasive speech to the school council advocating for a festival celebrating Japanese culture. Students who scored highly not only highlighted Japanese cultural practices and values, but also explored potential cultural activities accessible to all students in the school during the festival. They were able to link the proposed activities to enriching intercultural awareness and tailored their persuasive language and arguments toward the school council, aiming at the adults responsible for decision-making. They also articulated how celebrating Japanese culture could ignite a greater interest in the Japanese language, potentially leading to increased retention of students studying Japanese. Some students deviated from the intended purpose and specified audience of the question, focusing primarily on the explanation of familiar Japanese festivals, customs or cultural products they had previously studied.

Question 7

This was by far the most popular choice of question attempted by a majority of students. The task was an evaluative letter to a Japanese friend to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using apps on their smartphone. Many responses, despite a seemingly appropriate opening and closing in the letter format, were often written as an article rather than a letter addressed to their friend and did not elicit engagement from the audience in the evaluative discussion. Some students veered away from the topic and merely discussed smartphone use, while others delved into detailed explanations of specific apps. In contrast, students who scored highly maintained the focus on the topic and the intended audience, elaborating on advantages and disadvantages that are personally relevant in their daily lives. Some examples of benefits included sharing photos with close friends and family, staying connected through social media, listening to music while exercising, and using educational apps to help with studying. Examples of disadvantages included security risks, distraction from studying and potential risks of developing an addiction to smartphone apps.

Question 8

Very few students chose this question. The task was to write an imaginative story for a youth magazine recounting the student’s Halloween adventures with a stranger they met in Shibuya, who was dressed in an identical costume and make-up as them. Students needed to use descriptive language to set the scene, develop the plot and bring the piece to a climax in an engaging and convincing narrative. High-scoring responses demonstrated a well-crafted storyline with impressive creativity; however, most responses lacked narrative qualities and resulted in becoming an explanatory list of events.