2024 VCE Japanese Second Language written external assessment report

General comments

In the 2024 written examination, most students demonstrated a sound awareness of the structure and expectations for each section, which reflected their preparation and efforts.

In Section 1 Part A and Part B and Section 2 Part A, responses generally demonstrated that the listening and reading texts were accessible in terms of speed and complexity, and students were able to understand the main ideas sufficiently. However, in the comprehension questions, many responses did not contain the precise details necessary to earn full marks. Students are reminded to practise recognising katakana words in listening texts in preparation for the examination.

In Section 2 Part B, most responses included relevant information from the stimulus reading text. However, responses did not always accurately reflect the features of the specified text type and writing style, and the photograph in the stimulus text was either overlooked entirely or only very superficially mentioned in a number of responses.

In Section 3, the topics covered in the questions were familiar to students from their previous studies, which allowed them to present a range of information, ideas and opinions with relative ease. However, students are strongly advised to read the question very carefully to understand the exact requirements of the task. Some responses were off-topic, containing generalised ideas related to the topic but not directly addressing what the question was asking.

Throughout the examination, rudimentary grammatical errors in verb conjugation, adjective inflection, particle usage and common sentence structures were noticeable in both short and extended responses in Japanese.

In general, students are encouraged to consolidate their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and kanji, while gaining a clear understanding of the writing styles and text type features they are expected to know at VCE level. Students should be able to apply their knowledge and writing skills to any given question type, rather than relying on pre-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 students’ capacity to understand and convey general and specific aspects of texts.

Question 1a.

* last Christmas

Although most responses demonstrated a good understanding of this question, some were missing ‘last year’.

Question 1b.

* at popular theme parks
* in front of big stations

Although a common phrase, 人気がある (popular) was often misinterpreted as ‘famous’, and the omission of 前で (in front of) from 大きい駅の前で (in front of big stations) was common in many responses. Some responses also misunderstood テーマパーク (theme park).

Question 1c.

* Japanese illuminations are colourful.
* The lights move with the music.
* It is like a concert.

Most responses demonstrated an understanding of the first point. However, very few accurately expressed how the moving lights and music work together to create a concert-like atmosphere, where the te-form of the verb 動く (to move) and the grammatical pattern ～みたい (looks like) were used together.

Question 1d.

* from the end of November
* to the start of January

Most responses correctly identified the names of the months; however, some overlooked specific details such as 終わり (the end) and 始め (the start) and/or から～まで (from – until), which often led to responses such as ‘the end of November and the start of January’ or simply ‘November and January’.

Question 1e.

* The outsides of houses are decorated with lights.
* Christmas trees are lit up at shopping centres.

A considerable number of responses were missing the verb かざる (to decorate).

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.

* しょうぎは日本のでんとうてきなボードゲームです。(Shōgi is a traditional Japanese board game.)
* 二人でします。(It is played by two people.)

While most responses demonstrated a clear understanding of what shōgi is, many responses did not spell the katakana words ボード (board) and ゲーム (game) correctly or grasp the precise meaning of the phrase 二人でします (it is played by two people). Many students misinterpreted カールトン (Carlton), (the location of the shōgi club) as ‘card’, which often led to the incorrect response カードゲームです (it is a card game).

Question 2b.

* 土曜日の午前九時から昼までです。(It is from 9.00 am to noon on Saturday.)

The great majority of responses correctly identified ‘Saturday’; however many missed either 午前 (am), 昼 (noon) or both entirely, while some confused 午前 (am) with 五時 (five o’clock). The frequent omission of kanji, particularly for 午前 (am) and 昼 (noon), was also evident in this question. Students are reminded to use kanji wherever possible in any response written in Japanese.

Question 2c.

* 15才から17才までです。

(They should be between 15 and 17 years old.)

* 考えるゲームが好きな人です。

(They should be someone who enjoys thinking games.)

* かんたんな日本語が分からなければなりません

(They should be able to understand basic Japanese.)

Many responses did not demonstrate an accurate understanding of the relative clause考えるゲーム (thinking game). Some concepts and vocabulary, such as 15才から17才まで (15 to 17 years old) and かんたんな日本語 (basic Japanese), were also used incorrectly in some responses. In some instances, students may have understood what they heard, but errors in particle usage inadvertently altered the intended meaning of their responses. For example, the phrase かんたんに (understand Japanese easily / without difficulty) was used instead of かんたんな (understand basic Japanese), and日本語を教えます(teach Japanese) was used instead of 日本語で (teach in Japanese).

Question 2d.

* 毎月日本の学校のしょうぎクラブとオンラインでしあいをします。   
  (Every month they play an online match against a Japanese school’s shōgi club.)
* しあいの日に日本のおかしがもらえます。   
  (They receive Japanese sweets on match days.)
* クラブの後でいっしょにおべんとうを食べます。   
  (After the club, they eat their packed lunches together.)

Responses generally demonstrated a clear understanding of the information, but some responses did not include the specific details required to achieve full marks. Keywords such as 日本の (Japanese) or 日本の学校の (Japanese school) were often missing from responses. Spelling errors with おかし (sweets), いっしょに (together) and おべんとう (packed lunch) were also common.

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.

* from the summer of their third year to the autumn of their fourth year at university

Responses generally demonstrated a good understanding of this question.

Question 3b.

* They send their resumes to companies they would like to work for.
* If the resumes are good, they sit an exam made by the company.
* After that, they can attend an interview.

While most responses scored well for this question, students are reminded to listen and read carefully for specific details such as 働きたい会社 (the companies they would like to work for) and 会社が作ったしけん (an exam made by the company), as these details were often misinterpreted or omitted entirely.

Question 3c.

* You must wear ‘recruit suits’ to interviews, seminars and exams.
* You are not allowed to dye your hair.
* People with long hair must tie it back.

The majority of responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the rules about hair. However, some responses did not determine what リクルートスーツ (recruit suits) referred to or correctly interpreted the grammatical pattern ～だけでなく (not only) used in the same sentence.

Question 3d.

Relevant responses included any four of the following:

* He goes to company seminars every week.
* There are more than 10,000 students at popular seminars.
* He has to take time off university classes.
* Trains and buses cost money.
* There is no freedom in your choice of suit and hairstyle.
* The job-hunting rules in Japan are too strict.

Responses that mentioned either or both of the last two points demonstrated some confusion between where job seekers have ‘freedom’ and what is considered ‘too strict’. These responses did not adequately clarify whether the freedom applied specifically to suits and hairstyles or to the broader job-hunting rules.

Question 3e.

* You get better at talking with others.
* You think more about your own future.
* You learn how to use language correctly.
* You learn the manners required to work in society.

For the last point, a considerable number of responses confused the word 社会 (society) with 会社 (company), leading to the incorrect response ‘to work at a company’. This confusion likely arose from the fact that these words share the same two kanji in reverse order. Students are reminded to pay close attention to such details in both the listening and reading texts.

Question 3f.

* Seminars should be held on weekends.
* Students should be allowed to dress in the style they prefer, as in Australia.
* Japanese companies should value the identity of those students.
* Japanese companies should offer students more freedom in their job-hunting style, as with overseas companies.

Most responses demonstrated a general understanding of this question; however, some did not include key points from the listening text or sufficient detail from the reading text. Some responses did not accurately identify the ‘styles’ in the context of dress and job hunting, or how these relate to practices in Australia and overseas companies. The verb 大切にする (to value) was commonly misinterpreted as the adjective ‘important’.

Part B – Reading and responding in Japanese

To address the requirements of the task, students were required to demonstrate an understanding of the stimulus text and to convey the relevant information that was appropriate for the audience, the prescribed writing style and text type.

The reading text included a visual stimulus. High-scoring responses successfully incorporated information from the visual stimulus.

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

It was possible to achieve a high score for this question without exceeding the specified character limit, which is shorter than the limit specified for Section 3.

Question 4

For this task, students were required to write a personal journal entry reflecting on their experience with ‘wellness tourism’. To score highly, responses needed to include the key information on the outdoor, spiritual and cultural activities offered on the wellness tour they participated in, as well as a discussion of how their health and wellbeing benefited from the trip.

Most responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the stimulus reading text. However, the writing style adopted tended to be more informative than reflective, lacking a personal tone. Responses primarily focused on presenting factual information rather than offering insights into the author’s personal experience, feelings and reflections on the wellness tour. Most responses employed the accompanying image reasonably well, though in some instances it was overlooked entirely. While journal entries are conventionally written in the plain form, it was acceptable for students to use either the plain or polite form, provided it remained consistent throughout the response.

Students should be aware that independent wording is one of the key components of the assessment criteria that requires careful attention. It is important to develop an ability to manipulate the language from the stimulus reading text while maintaining the original meaning. High-scoring responses effectively integrated relevant information and conveyed the content with minimal reliance on the wording of the reading text while meeting the requirements of a personal journal entry. Lower-scoring responses included significant portions copied from the text without any modifications.

The specified character range for this section was 300 ji. Students were provided with two pages of genkō yōshi to write their responses. As the stimulus reading text contained numerous points that could be crucial for the task, a number of responses significantly exceeded the specified limit. Students are reminded to manage their time during the examination as some likely spent too long on this section, resulting in incomplete responses in Section 3.

The following is a sample response that includes the relevant points from the stimulus text and the image.

2024年8月15日 日曜日　はれ   
　今日は日本でのさい後の日だ。ここへ来る前は、毎日のストレスで つかれていたが、今週 はじめて ウェルネスツーリズムにさんかして、気分も体も すっきりした。  
　この一週間、うつくしい自ぜんの中で 山のぼりやハイキングを 自分のペースで 楽しんだり、しずかなお寺で ヨガやめいそうをしたりして、心が おちついた。ホテルでは ふじ山を見ながら、おんせんで のんびりできたし、何も考えないで ゆっくり すごせた。  
　ベジタリアンの私は 何を食べたらいいか、旅行の前は 少し 心ぱいだったが、日本のでんとう料理は えいようてきにバランスもいいし、やさいやとうふだけでも おいしくて、びっくりした。それに、書道や茶道など ふだんできない事も 体けんできて、本当に よかった。  
　ストレスもへって、夜も よく ねられるようになったし、体も元気になったから、ぜひ また来よう。

Sunday 15 August 2024. Sunny.

Today is my last day in Japan. Before coming here, I was worn out from the stress of daily life, but after participating in the wellness tour, I feel refreshed in both mind and body.

This past week, I enjoyed mountain climbing and hiking at my own pace in beautiful natural surroundings, as well as yoga and meditation at a quiet temple, which helped calm my mind. At the hotel, I also got to relax in the hot spring with a view of Mount Fuji and unwind without thinking about anything.

As a vegetarian, I was a bit worried before the trip about what I should eat, but I was pleasantly surprised by how nutritionally balanced traditional Japanese food is and how delicious it was, even with just vegetables and tofu. Not only that, but I also had the chance to experience things I don’t usually get to do, like calligraphy and the tea ceremony, which was great.

My stress has gone down, I’m sleeping better at night and I feel much healthier, so I’ll definitely come back again.

Section 3 – Writing in Japanese

In Section 3, students were required to produce a 400–500 ji response to one of the four questions. This response was to take the form of an evaluative essay, a persuasive email, an informative speech or an imaginative story.

High-scoring responses effectively conveyed relevant and original information, seamlessly incorporating it into the required writing style and text type. They demonstrated a strong command of the language and expressed ideas with accuracy and sophistication.

Question 5

The task was to write an evaluative essay about the pros and cons of teenagers not using technology for a week. This was one of the more popular choices, as the topic of technology and writing an evaluative piece on such a subject is familiar to students.

High-scoring responses effectively addressed how a week without technology would impact teenagers, exploring both positive and negative aspects with equal consideration. In contrast, lower-scoring responses strayed from the task, focusing instead on the general advantages and disadvantages of technology.

Examples of positive aspects:

* spending more quality time with family and friends
* health benefits, such as increased physical activity and reduced eye strain
* fostering independent thinking during study

Examples of negative aspects:

* inconvenience and safety concerns due to the inability to contact parents easily
* difficulties communicating with friends without social media
* inability to research, access study resources for homework, or email teachers

Question 6

The task was to write a persuasive email to a Japanese friend encouraging them to join a volunteer activity next month, with a photograph of volunteers cleaning up a beach. This was another popular choice and a familiar topic for many students.

High-scoring responses maintained a clear focus on the beach clean-up activity itself, using persuasive language to highlight the importance and benefits of participating in this volunteer opportunity. Some responses deviated from the task by discussing environmental protection in general or volunteer activities unrelated to the prompts or encouraging the friend to join the environment club instead.

Examples of benefits:

* reducing pollution and protecting marine life by removing rubbish from the beach
* creating a cleaner, safer beach for both residents and visitors
* gaining personal satisfaction from contributing to the environment and the community
* meeting new people and expanding your social network

Question 7

The task was to write an informative speech about how students in Australia celebrate their final day of Year 12. Some students chose this option, as the topic was relevant to their recent experiences. However, some responses veered off-task, typically focusing on schoolies or similar post-exam activities instead.

Many responses did not demonstrate an understanding of the correct features of an informative speech. High-scoring responses, on the other hand, adhered to the task and explored the unique final-day celebrations at school, presenting original information that was relevant and engaging for the intended audience.

Examples include:

* final Year 12 assembly
* dressing up in themed costumes
* decorating the school grounds and classrooms
* organising pranks around the school
* signing each other’s uniforms, taking photos and emotional farewells
* sharing special meals such as a Year 12 breakfast

Question 8

The task was to write an imaginative story for a children’s magazine about the student’s adventures with a talking cat on Aoshima Island. Few students chose this option.

High-scoring responses featured a creative storyline and narrative arc, illustrating how the protagonist transformed throughout the story by facing various events and challenges. This added depth to the narrative, making it more engaging for the audience. Lower-scoring responses did not set the scene as clearly or develop a narrative arc that culminated in a fitting climax for an imaginative adventure story.