

URDU AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Paper 0539/01
Reading and Writing

Key messages

In Reading, candidates are expected not only to understand the information provided in the passage but also to be able to extract certain information, distinguish facts and recognise ideas and opinions. They are required to demonstrate the ability to extract relevant information from various types of written articles and scan for information, then organise and present it in the required format.

In Writing, candidates need to ensure that answers fulfil the requirements of the task as well as development of ideas, using appropriate register and format. Successful candidates should be able to demonstrate the ability to employ a variety of grammatical structures and vocabulary. Here, writing conventions such as paragraphing and accurate punctuation should be adhered to.

General comments

The question paper was well balanced for all abilities and was accessible to all the candidates who were correctly entered for this level. It also provided a fair degree of challenge for candidates.

The majority of candidates seemed to have previously learnt literacy skills in Urdu and, on the whole, they were well prepared for the examination. The overall performance on this component was encouraging and of a good standard. Most candidates did well in the reading exercises, displaying good general understanding of the reading passages. In writing, most candidates were able to write fluently and express their ideas. Many of the written compositions were subjective, distinctive and interesting to read.

Comments on specific questions

Exercise 1

Questions 1 – 6

The stimulus text for these questions was an article comparing recent holiday experiences. These short answer questions were designed to test skimming and gist-reading skills. The majority of candidates answered the questions in this exercise successfully, providing the precise information required. Some found **Question 3** and **Question 6** challenging. Some missed the mark for not giving sufficiently complete information. The passage was accessible and easy to understand. However, candidates were required to precisely understand what was being asked in the comprehension questions.

Question 1

Almost all candidates did well in this sub-question and gained a mark by providing the right answer which was five years ago.

Question 2

The majority of candidates responded well to this part by giving the right detail of a technical error.

Question 3

This question posed a challenge to the vast majority of candidates. Some candidates demonstrated partial understanding of this question and therefore did not score full marks. The required answers were having a

long wait and losing one day of the holiday. Some gave other details such as arriving without a suitcase or being unable to book another seat. These were not acceptable answers.

Question 4

Most candidates responded well to this question mentioning that it was due to office work. Those who missed the word **office** lost a mark. A small minority gave an incorrect answer such as to attend a friend's wedding.

Question 5

A good number of candidates did well in this question, providing two correct details: not having to pay for extra luggage and being seated in first class. However, a small minority did not provide the detail of the extra luggage or gave an irrelevant answer which meant they lost at least one mark.

Question 6

The majority of candidates responded well to this question and scored a mark. However, some missed the mark by giving the opposite answer or not giving complete information e.g. sleeping or lying down during the flight.

Exercise 2

Questions 7 – 15

The source text for the testing of multiple matching statements was an article about the news industry. Candidates were required to identify statements/sentences by matching each to the paragraph in which the idea appeared.

Nearly all candidates found this exercise accessible and achieved between 6 and 9 marks. Some candidates found **Question 14** rather challenging due to the time reference distractor placed in paragraph C. Some candidates guessed the option or did not manage to read all paragraphs properly which resulted in low marks.

Exercise 3

Questions 16 – 19

In this exercise, candidates needed to read a long text about agriculture and the use of fertilisers and to make brief notes under supplied headings by identifying and selecting appropriate details. Although many candidates performed well in this exercise, for some, **Question 18** was challenging.

Question 16

Nearly all candidates provided two details for the importance of agriculture: these were food supply and important role in the country's economy.

Question 17

Many candidates demonstrated good understanding of this question and scored two marks. They answered correctly by writing two reasons for using acid in the soil for farming. The correct answers were making the ground soft and increasing the fertility.

Question 18

In this question, candidates were asked to provide two details for farming difficulties in non-acidic soil. This part of the question proved difficult for lower ability candidates who got mixed up with the disadvantages of using acid in the soil. Some candidates did not give the exact detail of earth/land acting like a magnet to the fertiliser and of plants not being able to receive fertiliser. This question provided a fair amount of differentiation.

Question 19

Most candidates met the demands of this question and scored two to three marks by providing the appropriate answers. The question was about the benefits of the use of natural agricultural substances in the soil. If the candidate provided partial information or missed certain key words e.g. **barren** land and **fertiliser** in their responses, marks were not awarded.

Exercise 4

Question 20

In this exercise, candidates are required to write a summary on two aspects from the text in **Exercise 3** and to present them in a 100-word summary, using appropriate format and register. They can make use of relevant notes made under **Exercise 3** headings. For this summary, up to 4 marks are available for content and up to 6 marks for language.

The topic was agriculture, and candidates were required to mention four specific points on two aspects of the passage which were the disadvantages of putting acid in the soil and the benefits of using natural agricultural substances.

In order to score full marks for content, both aspects of the question had to be addressed.

Content

A good number of candidates responded well. They displayed a good range of knowledge by providing valid points relevant to both headings and kept their summary within the word limit. Nonetheless, this exercise proved challenging for low ability candidates. Some just wrote a summary which included irrelevant information e.g. non-acidic soil instead of acidic soil or they mentioned the required information at the end of very lengthy summary and lost marks due to exceeding the word limit.

There was plenty of opportunity available to get the highest content marks for this question. The content points were specific, clear and needed precise detail to achieve full marks. However, not managing to understand the question requirement/instructions, providing irrelevant information such as general information about agriculture and non-acidic soil in the introduction part of the summary and exceeding the word limit resulted in loss of marks for some candidates. It was obvious from some written responses that certain candidates had very little or no experience of summary writing.

It is advisable to cover the main points by reading all the paragraphs carefully, giving the specified information required and not exceeding the word limit. Candidates must make sure that they read the whole text carefully and give the precise information required which is directly relevant to the subheading given.

Language

Many candidates managed to get 3 to 4 marks out of 6 for language. Quite a few candidates scored full marks by using accurate and expressive language. Candidates should be reminded that if they rely heavily on lifting or copying directly the text for their summary, they are unlikely to achieve good marks for language. In addition to this, accuracy in spelling and correct use of a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical structures will determine the top band marks.

Exercise 5

Question 21

In this exercise, candidates write a short piece of functional prose. This series, they were required to write an email to a friend about taking part in a drama. They had to include the detail given in three short prompts provided in the question. For this written piece, up to 3 marks are available for content and up to 5 marks for language. The 3 content marks were based on the detail in the 3 prompts. If candidates fail to cover any of the prescribed detail in the prompts, they will lose a content mark. To get the top band mark of 5 for language, the requirement is for effective use of wide range of language, organised into well-constructed and linked paragraphs.

Content

This question was attempted very well by most candidates. Some candidates wrote very interesting emails following the format of an email/letter and managed to sustain the interest of examiners. They met the

assessment criteria and scored good marks for content. They provided relevant information and appropriate ideas and justified them too. Some candidates missed one point and lost a mark for content.

Language

The majority of candidates scored well for language. Those who gained 5 marks wrote more than one paragraph and fulfilled the task with appropriate register. In order to achieve the top band mark of 5 for language, there is a requirement for the candidate to use well-constructed and linked paragraphs. Candidates are advised to organise their writing into 3 short paragraphs to cover the 3 required prompts.

Exercise 6

Question 22

In this exercise, candidates were required to write a discursive essay of about 200 words on the topic of zoos being unnecessary in the present times, and that they should therefore be closed. The stimulus was provided in the dialogue form of 'for and against' statements which can be used as part of the discussion. It was interesting to see that most candidates found this topic accessible as it relates to everyday life. For this exercise, up to 8 marks are available for content and up to 8 marks for language.

The task was handled well by most candidates who wrote well-presented written pieces. The best written compositions integrated interesting, logical and functional accounts, also employing appropriate register/style and a variety of language structures.

Many written responses met the assessment criteria and scored good marks for content and language. They fulfilled the task consistently with appropriate register and provided interesting ideas and justification. In most written pieces, the language used was of good quality with successful use of a range of vocabulary and language structures. Nearly all candidates used paragraphs. It should be noted that there is a requirement to use well-constructed and linked paragraphs to get top band marks for content.

High performing candidates handled the topic discussion in their own way by adding other points to the stimulus ideas and by keeping the main title statement in focus. On the other hand, those who ignored the main title statement and did not weigh up or conclude the argument, could not achieve top band marks. The 'for and against' approach and one-sided argument were equally credited.

Candidates are reminded that the key to achieving top marks for content is clear relevance to the given essay title and ensuring that ideas are fully developed, opinions are expressed and justified with reasons. The written account should sustain the reader's interest. Similarly, in order to get top language marks, a range of language and complex structures need to be used effectively and a high level of accuracy needs to be maintained throughout. Candidates should avoid using English or English transliterated words, though transcribed words for certain names and places are permissible. Candidates are not penalised for writing beyond the word limit of 200 words but writing unnecessarily lengthy pieces can affect the mark awarded for language.

URDU AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Paper 0539/02

Listening

Key messages

In order to do well in this examination, candidates should:

- Listen to the recording carefully to identify the specific information needed to answer each question.
- Read the instructions and questions with care throughout the paper and if a question consists of more than one element, be careful to respond to all parts of the question.
- Always attempt an answer rather than leaving a blank space.

General comments

The overall performance of the candidates was good. Many candidates appeared to be well prepared for this examination and responded adequately to the questions. There were also some very high-quality scripts where candidates were exceptional, not only in their understanding of the questions and their precise and to-the-point responses, but also demonstrating good spelling, grammatical accuracy and neat and clear handwriting. However, a few candidates could not perform well due to their limited exposure to the target language.

This paper assesses 'listening for understanding' and therefore all feasible phonetic attempts at answers are accepted as long as the meaning is clear. Nonetheless, candidates must ensure that their responses are comprehensible and unambiguous. If the response is spelled in a way to form another word that changes the meaning (e.g. نسیروں instead of گھڑی or تصویریں instead of گھڑی) then a mark is not awarded.

As there is no compulsory requirement for the use of Urdu or English numerals, it is advisable for candidates not to take chance with using Urdu numerals if they are not completely sure of their accuracy.

Comments on specific questions

Exercise 1

Question 1–8

These questions were based on eight different brief recordings. Candidates had to respond to questions identifying the key information they gathered from them. The majority of candidates understood this task and **Questions 1, 4 and 7** were well attempted by almost all ability levels. However, a few candidates could not comprehend **Question 2** and **Question 6** properly or reproduce the required information accurately due to their limited knowledge of the target language. The questions which proved challenging for some candidates are as follows:

Question 2

Many candidates faced difficulty in answering this question. The requirement was to write a specific instruction given by the customer about the cake she ordered (i.e. it should not be too sugary/sweet). Some candidates could not write an acceptable spelling of the word مٹی and lost a mark; others could not figure out the correct answer due to their limited understanding of the target language and suggested that she wanted to give it to her friend or that she wanted to get it packed.

Question 6

Candidates were asked what Faheem was telling children not to waste through his poem. The only acceptable answer was وفت. Some lower ability candidates lost a mark for writing 'excessive use of mobile phones' or other ambiguous phrases for their answers.

Candidates should be able to identify the required information according to the question and also differentiate between the key information and secondary or extended information when answering these questions. The answers should also be clearly legible and must indicate that the text, as well as the question, is properly understood by the candidate. Multiple answers for a question cannot be accepted, even if they include the required answer as well.

Exercise 2

Question 9

Candidates had to fill in the blanks with correct words or phrases from the recording of information about Ants. There were many responses showing a very good attempt at understanding the text and writing correct spellings of required answers. **Question 9d** was answered very well by all ability levels. Although all feasible phonetic attempts at answers were accepted as long as the meaning remained the same, many candidates found the spellings of مکھیوں، آنکھیں، اللہ etc. rather challenging. Some lower ability candidates lost a mark when they wrote words that grammatically do not fit in with the given sentences like اللہ for **Question 9h**.

Question 9a proved a bit challenging for some candidates mostly because they could not spell the word مکھیوں appropriately and wrote مکی / مکیوں and lost a mark. It is also very important for teachers to equip the candidates with enough practice in Urdu writing so that they do not lose marks for writing inaccurate words when they know the answer.

Question 9b was wrongly answered by many candidates, because they had to specify that the collective weight of ants in the world is more than the collective weight of the human population. Candidates who only wrote دنیا کی پوری انسانی ابادی instead of دنیا کی پوری انسانی ابادی could not achieve a mark.

Exercise 3

Question 10

Question 10 was worth 6 marks. This part required candidates to match the statements given in column one with the correct answers in column 2. The statements were based on recordings of six different people giving their opinions about learning the English language. Candidates were given seven statements ((a)–(g)); from which they had to choose six correct statements and match them with relevant opinions in the second column.

Generally, candidates performed well on this task and many scored good marks. Only those with a limited understanding of the target language could not match a few answers accurately and lost marks. Candidates should carefully write their answers in the box alongside the second column and if they change their mind afterwards, they must strike through the previous response, otherwise the answer inside the box is taken as the final answer.

Exercise 4

Questions 11–18

Questions 11 to 18 are multiple choice questions. Candidates had to listen to an interview with a famous blogger about her life and achievements on social media. Candidates were given three different answers for each of eight questions, and they were required to identify the correct answers with a tick. This part was also very well attempted by the majority of candidates, and they scored good marks. **Questions 12 and 13** were answered very well by all ability levels. However, some lower ability candidates faced difficulty in understanding the question and identifying the required information for **Question 14** and **Question 16**. For **Question 14**, they were asked the incentive behind her starting to write her own blogs. Candidates who could not fully understand the response in the recording selected a wrong answer instead of option B (to present her own opinions) and lost a mark. Similarly, for **Question 16** they were asked the reason why she does not find her own childhood interesting. The required answer was option A (due to very common use of technology); this was missed by some candidates.

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Candidates who ticked more than one answer for any question also lost a mark as they are expected to choose only one correct response. If they change their mind later, they must strike through the previous tick and clearly indicate which option they have chosen as their final answer.

URDU AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Paper 0539/05
Speaking

Key messages

In order to do well in this examination candidates should:

- Be aware of the syllabus requirements and examination procedures so that they are well prepared for their speaking test.
- Choose a particular aspect of a topic for their presentation prior to the examination.
- Focus on this selected aspect of a topic rather than deal superficially with a wide area.
- Be prepared for spontaneous conversation in the topic conversation.

General comments

This year there were a limited number of entries for this component.

The majority of candidates seemed to be prepared for the examination and demonstrated an understanding of syllabus requirements. There has been an improvement in conducting the speaking test by some centres. However, in other centres, aspects of the speaking examination need to be improved so candidates can be appropriately awarded for their skills in speaking. Further understanding of syllabus requirements needs to be imbedded to avoid confusion. The examiner should select different topics for Part 3: General conversation for each candidate. They should ensure that one topic is selected from areas A to B and that a second topic is selected from areas C to E.

Comments on specific parts of the examination

Part 1: Presentation

All examiners started the recording by stating the centre number, candidate number and examination series which is good practice.

Candidates are expected to select a specific aspect of a topic prior to the examination. This should be an area in which they have a personal interest or some personal experience so that they are able to share their opinions and ideas. The examiner should announce that they are starting Part 1 of the test and then invite the candidate to start the presentation. To allow for the development of ideas and conversation, it is better if candidates focus on one particular aspect of a wider topic, for example, talking about a hobby, or a holiday or school life. The presentation should last for 2 to 3 minutes in total. In general, candidates should provide an overview of their chosen topic. This will help them to stay within the suggested 2 to 3 minute time frame and prevent them from rushing in order to fit in a great deal of content.

Most candidates appeared to have good understanding of the requirements for the presentation. They demonstrated knowledge of their prepared topic. Most candidates presented the selected topics in a confident and a fluent manner for the required length of time. They were aware of the need to focus their presentation and demonstrated their knowledge of contemporary society. It would be helpful if each candidate prepared their presentation on a different topic. For example, all candidates from the same centres should not choose the Urdu language.

Some of the examiners created a warm and welcoming atmosphere for the candidates.

Part 2: Topic Conversation

This part of the examination is linked to Part 1 and should last for 3 to 4 minutes. The examiner should ask open-ended questions to explore the information given during the presentation in more detail. Most candidates performed this task well as they had prepared their topic well and were able to discuss it further. Examiners should ask short and clear open-ended questions so that candidates can demonstrate their ability in speaking. This task should take 3 to 4 minutes in total and the examiner should end the Topic conversation by saying 'we are now moving onto Part 3 of the test'. A small number of examiners were not sure how to tackle this part of the test and this had an impact on candidate achievement.

Part 3: General Conversation

In this section, the examiner and candidate should engage in a conversation which lasts between 3 and 4 minutes. At least 2 topics must be covered from the general topic areas listed in the syllabus. The examiner should ensure that at least 1 topic from topic areas A to B is covered as well as 1 from areas C to E. For example, the examiner could select 'family relationships' from area B and 'future plans' from area D. It is vital that candidates prepare for several topics for this part as they do not know in advance which topics will be covered by the examiner. There is no need to cover more than 2 topics in the General conversation and the time limit does not allow for this either.

In general there has been an improvement in the conduct of Part 3: General conversation.

Most candidates managed to respond well to the examiner's questions and score reasonable marks. Some candidates demonstrated a wide vocabulary and usage of complex sentence structures. A variety of topics were covered in this part, including family and school life, holidays, festivals, education, food and drink, places and customs, geographical surroundings, weather and future plans. However, examiners need to be reminded that they only need to cover 2 to 3 topics in this part of the test. Some tried to cover more than 3 topics and this kind of approach puts candidates under unnecessary pressure, meaning topics are covered superficially rather than in depth.

Examiners must read the procedures and syllabus requirements well before the speaking tests are due to take place. Candidates need to have rehearsed role plays several times during the year in class, prior to the examination, to get a fair idea of what is expected of them in the test.