

# READING EXAM TIPS & ADVICE

## A What skills do I need?

You are expected to:

- 1 understand the instructions for the activity
- 2 read the passage and answer accordingly – following any example answer provided.

## B Extra tips

- 1 If you're not sure of an answer, don't spend ages puzzling over it – leave it and come back to it if there's time at the end of the exam.
- 2 Read any small question words carefully so you don't misunderstand them:  
*Où?* (Where?)  
*Qui?* (Who?)  
*Quand?* (When?)  
*Comment?* (How?)  
*Combien?* (How many?)  
*Pourquoi?* (Why?)  
*Qu'est-ce que ...?* (What).
- 3 Read the instruction for each task very carefully to make sure that you're answering in the correct way. Don't assume that you know what the task is before you've read the instruction thoroughly.
- 4 If the exercise says tick four things, do just that – don't tick five or six.
- 5 You can scribble over the exam paper and cross things out if you want to – it's not like a textbook in class.
- 6 Try to leave time to go over your answers at the end of the exam to double-check them.

## C Remember

- 1 If it is a lengthy reading passage, read it through once to get the gist of it before working on the actual questions.
- 2 Look out for how many marks each question has – if there is more than one mark, then you'll need to give more than one bit of information in your answer.
- 3 Don't spend all your time on the first reading activity and not have time to finish the exam paper.
- 4 If the questions on the paper are in French, answer in French and if they are in English, answer in English, unless the paper tells you differently.
- 5 Watch out for the tenses in the reading passages and answer accordingly. You'll come across present, past and future tenses, so go into the exam prepared to recognise these.
- 6 In the Higher paper, there will be some unfamiliar vocabulary that you'll have to cope with, but don't panic. Some words look like their English equivalent – a picture on the paper might help you. The rest of the text or the exercise questions might help you understand it or you might even be able to complete the exercise without knowing it.

## Before the Exam

- Make sure that you have a vocabulary book or record that covers each area of experience included in the syllabus.
- Build up your personal vocabulary by learning a small number of new words every day.
- Get plenty of regular practice. Use past papers. Use this website - both the Revision Bites and the Test Bites. Try to go over your work with someone who can show you how to do better next time.
- Make sure you are familiar with different types of task that you might get on an exam paper, eg multiple choice, filling in a grid, matching, gap filling, answering in French, answering in English.
- Go over some questions with a friend. It will give you a chance to look at someone else's exam technique. You might learn from each other.
- Make sure you are confident with recognising the full range of words that introduce questions, eg 'Où?' 'Qui?' 'Comment?' 'Pourquoi?' 'Quand?' 'Que?' 'Quel(le)?' 'Qu'est-ce que?'
- Try to find opportunities to read something that interests you in French without the pressure of questions and time limits. For example French magazines, comics, newspapers and internet sites.

## During the exam

- You must come to the exam with a clear idea of the strategies that will help you work well under pressure. Here are some suggestions.
- Don't panic! You are not expected to understand every word of the text.
- Take a positive approach to your reading. Concentrate on what you can understand, not on difficult words and phrases.
- Have a good look at the title of the text as well as any illustrations. They may give you some important clues.
- Read the whole text before attempting to answer any questions. It is usually better to read the text twice at a brisk pace, than to struggle along once, slowly.
- Be clear as to exactly what each question wants. For example: should you give precise details or an overall impression? When you are clear, go back to the text for the words that you need, and ignore the rest.
- Be aware of different ways of finding out the meaning of words. For example: - can you guess the meaning of a difficult word in a sentence if you understand what all the other words mean? - can you find similarities between French and English words (eg 'gymnase' = gymnasium)? - can you find links with other French words (eg 'imprimer' = to print: 'une imprimante' = a printer)? - are you aware of language patterns (eg 're' in front of a word often means again: 'recommencer' = to start again)?
- Use your knowledge of grammar. For example: if you can identify a plural, a verb tense, an adjective, an adverb or a preposition, you will be in a better position to make an intelligent guess at a meaning.
- Now decide which strategies will work best for you and practise using them as much as you can between now and the day of the exam. The more you practise them, the more you are likely to remember to use them during the exam itself.

## Exam Tips

- Use your knowledge of France and French-speaking countries. For example, knowing about the French educational system could be very useful if you are working on a text about school.
- If you have to write answers in French, be as clear as possible; but remember - you will not be penalised for small mistakes.
- Don't spend too long on a difficult item. Come back to it later.