

**EXAMEN DE FIN D'ÉTUDES SECONDAIRES CLASSIQUES**  
**Sessions 2023 – QUESTIONNAIRE ÉCRIT**

Date :	25.09.23	Durée :	14:15 - 16:45	Numéro candidat :	
Discipline :	Anglais		Section(s) :	CB / CB-4LANG / CC / CC-4LANG / CD / CD-4LANG / CE / CE-4LANG / CE-MATF / CF / CG / CG-4LANG / CG-COMED / CG-URBS / CI	

**I. Task 1 Reading comprehension (10 marks)**

**Layoffs by Email Show What Employers Really Think of Their Workers**

- 5 Google's parent company, Alphabet, recently announced that it would lay off around 12,000 people, 6% of its work force. Employees who were let go, some of whom had been valuable assets for the company for decades, got the news in their inboxes. "It's hard for me to believe that after 20 years at #Google I unexpectedly find out about my last day via an email," Google engineer, Jeremy Joslin, tweeted. "What a slap in the face."
- That **sting** is becoming an all-too-common sensation. In the last few years, tens of thousands of people have been laid off by email at tech and digital media companies, including Twitter, Amazon, Meta and Vox. .... **(a)** ....
- 10 Employees at a tech company called PagerDuty received notices last week that set a new low bar for a layoff announcement, starting off with a few hundred words of cheery **blather** and rounding out with a Martin Luther King Jr. quotation about overcoming adversity.
- 15 It's not just tech and media. .... **(b)** .... Informing workers personally is too complicated, they say — and too risky, as people might use their access to internal systems to perform acts of sabotage. (These layoff emails are often sent to employees' personal email; by the time they check it, they've been locked out of all their employer's platforms.)
- 20 As someone who's managed people in newsrooms and digital start-ups and has hired and fired people in various capacities for the past 21 years, I reckon this approach is not just cruel but unnecessary. It's reasonable to terminate access to company systems, but delivering the news with no personal human contact serves only one purpose: letting managers off the hook. It ensures they will not have to face the shock and devastation that people feel when they lose their livelihoods. It also ensures the managers won't have **to weather** any direct criticism about the poor leadership that brought everyone to that point.
- 25 Legally, companies have plenty of recourse if laid-off employees steal trade secrets or sabotage systems, and employees in need of finding new employment have little **incentive** to behave criminally, no matter how upset they may be. .... **(c)** .....
- Some defenders of the practice argue that there's simply no way to coordinate these things at such large scales, but that, too, rings hollow. .... **(d)** ..... If managers interact directly with their workers in everyday business, there's no reason to believe that would suddenly be impossible when it's time to lay them off.
- 30 The first time I had to fire someone, I was 25 and it was for cause. In theory, firing people because they're underperforming or insubordinate should be easier than when they're doing a good job and the company simply can't sustain its payroll, but this time it wasn't. I felt nauseated going into the meeting, and when the person I was firing began tearing up in the middle of the conversation, I had

35 no idea what to do. I stammered and apologized, and by the end of the meeting, the person I was firing was comforting me.

Since then, I've hired and trained first-time managers and taught them how to do this in a way that respects the dignity of the people who are losing their jobs: Look people in the eye. Answer questions. If someone is upset, show some sympathy. Treat people the way we would wish to be treated. .... (e) .... It is more effort than sending a platitude-laden mass email, but it demonstrates respect.

40 In the case of good employees who are being let go through no fault of their own, those conversations benefit the employer, too, because people remember how they're treated in their lowest moments — and word spreads fast. Future hiring prospects will be reading all about it on Twitter or Glassdoor. In a tight labor market, a company's cruelty can leave a lasting stain on its reputation.

45 Perhaps the most appalling aspect of termination by email is the asymmetry between what corporations expect of their workers and how they treat them in return. Employees in all kinds of jobs are routinely pressed to give the maximum that they can. In low-wage service jobs it can mean insane, unpredictable hours with no benefits. At higher-paying tech jobs it can mean sacrificing any semblance of a life outside the office, a requirement that is often justified by high-minded rhetoric about changing the world or the promise of some pot-of-gold reward in an unspecified future.

50 The expectation that an employee give at least a two-week notice and help with transition is rooted in a sense that workers owe their employers something more than just their labor: stability, continuity, maybe even gratitude for the compensation they've earned.

55 But when it's the company that chooses to end the relationship, there is often no such requirement. The same people whose labor helped build the company get suddenly recoded as potential criminals who might steal anything that's not nailed down.

60 At Twitter, where Elon Musk has embraced managerial incompetence as if it were an emerging art form that requires great creativity, employees were asked to sign a pledge to be "hard core," working even longer hours and sleeping in the office if necessary. Unsurprisingly, many instead decided to preserve their family lives and self-respect.

65 For them, this was just the first indignity. Many terminated employees found that their severance offers didn't materialize for months — and some were called back to work when it turned out the site couldn't run without them.

Approval of unions is already at 71 percent. Dehumanizing workers like this is accelerating the trend. Once unthinkable, unionization<sup>1</sup> at large tech companies now seems all but inevitable.

70 Treating employees like disposable units who can simply be unsubscribed to ultimately endangers a company's own interests. It seems mistreated workers know their value, even if employers — as they are increasingly **prone** to demonstrate — do not. (972 words)

(by Elizabeth Spiers on [https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/29/opinion/mass-tech-layoffs-email-google.html?te=1&nl=opinion-today&emc=edit\\_ty\\_20230130](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/29/opinion/mass-tech-layoffs-email-google.html?te=1&nl=opinion-today&emc=edit_ty_20230130))

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<sup>1</sup> Organizing themselves in trade-unions that defend the employees' interests and rights

**READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**

**A) Insert sentences into the text (-1 per wrong or missing answer)**

*Choose which sentences (1-7) best fit into the gaps (a-e) in the text. Write the correct numbers into the box below. There are two sentences which you do not need to use.*

1. Companies in a range of industries claim this is the only efficient way to do a lot of layoffs.
2. Many take their complaint a step further fighting for their rights.
3. The backlash from affected employees has been swift.
4. But even so, concerns about liability shouldn't preclude treating employees like human beings.
5. There is no rule that all layoffs have to happen simultaneously.
6. That is the devil's argument.
7. At the very least this demands an actual human conversation.

Write your answers here:

Gap in text:	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
Sentence:					

**B) Vocabulary (-1 per wrong or missing answer) Match the expressions from the article with the definition/synonym that is closest to their meaning in the text. Circle the best option – a, b, or c. There is only ONE correct answer per example.**

1. sting (line 6)	a. sharp pain b. unusual habit c. easiness
2. blather (line 10)	a. humbug b. turmoil c. flattery
3. to weather (line 21)	a. to pass on b. to endure c. to use nice words
4. incentive (line 24)	a. bonus b. disinterest c. motivation
5. prone (line 70)	a. inclined b. obliged c. averse

**C) True / False / Not Stated (-1 per wrong or missing answer) Decide if the statements are True (T), False (F) or Not Stated (NS) in the text. For each sentence, circle T, F or NS.**

1. The boss used Martin Luther's quotation to explain why the employee was dismissed.	<b>T F NS</b>
2. The first person the author had to sack was an employee who did not work to her satisfaction.	<b>T F NS</b>
3. Eventually the author abstained from laying off the first employee she was about to sack.	<b>T F NS</b>
4. The person that is being laid off is generally treated as if he or she were a confirmed criminal.	<b>T F NS</b>
5. Employees are given a fortnight's notice and help with the transition in the company.	<b>T F NS</b>

**II. Task 2: - Reading into writing (20 marks)**

You are going to read two texts in which the authors discuss the situation of female students in Afghanistan.

**Text 1:****'Being a girl is a heavy crime': Afghan women in despair over university ban**

by Zahra Joya

It was late evening in Kabul, and Sabra, a fourth-year medical student, saw a WhatsApp message on her phone. A friend had shared a news report suggesting the Taliban had banned women from higher education.

Afghanistan's ministry of higher education issued a letter to all government and private universities, ordering an indefinite ban on university education for women after most female Afghan teenagers had already been banned from secondary school education earlier.

Sabra said the news felt like cold water. "I studied with all my heart for four years. I only had one year left to graduate from university."

The decision was quickly and globally condemned as a "chilling step backwards for Afghanistan". The US government said it was unacceptable, with the US secretary of state announcing that he was "deeply dismayed".

Rina Amiri, a US special envoy for Afghan women and girls, said the ban removed any doubt that the Taliban were reverting to the extreme policies from the 1990s, when they last controlled Afghanistan.

"The world must reject, as Afghans have, that this is about culture or religion. In Afghan history, only the Taliban have enacted policies forbidding girls' education. In no Muslim-majority country, nowhere in the world, are girls denied an education," Amiri wrote.

"We are at an inflection point. As a global community, we must take a firm stand against these extreme policies. Failing to do so could embolden the Taliban, inspire hardliners elsewhere [and] imperil the rights of women, girls and at-risk populations far beyond Afghanistan."

Staff and security at Kabul universities turned away female students who had arrived to study. In Jalalabad, groups of men and women protested outside a campus.

Sabra had initially refused to believe rumours that the Taliban would ban women from higher education. "Was this not my right as a girl who came here ... with money from embroidering and weaving carpets and who wanted to become a doctor?"

Another female student had taken three years after leaving secondary school to persuade her father to agree to let her enrol in a university, only to now be banned by the government.

"Being a girl is a heavy crime and tonight I want to curse my creator for creating me so that I can be so miserable and humiliated," she wrote.

Numerous Afghan civil and women's rights activists abroad are calling for the Taliban to reverse "this medieval crime" that will "impose absolute isolation on Afghan women and girls and expose women to violence, poverty and exploitation".

Afghanistan's former intelligence chief, Rahmatullah Nabil tweeted from his exile that the Taliban sought with the ban "to keep society in the dark because they consider their survival and growth dependent on the ignorance of the young generation".

Another female student, enrolled at a private Kabul university, said she had worked hard to continue her education, but the Taliban had now taken away this right. "All my hard work is worth nothing. No matter how hard we girls work, it doesn't pay off."

(499 words, adapted from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/dec/21/afghanistan-women-react-university-ban-taliban>)

### **Text 2:**

#### **Hypocrisy or a reason for hope? The Taliban who send their girls to school**

by Emma Graham-Harrison

In Afghanistan, girls have not been legally able to attend high school for nearly a year, because of a Taliban ban. Officials insist the ruling is only temporary, but have set no conditions or timeline for lifting it.

The ban triggered a wave of depression and anger inside Afghanistan, and widespread revulsion beyond its borders. It also caused less immediately visible splits within the movement itself, reflecting deeper fractures among former insurgents struggling to adjust to running a government.

It is an open secret that several senior figures in the leadership educated their own daughters while living outside Afghanistan and continued doing so secretly, even after moving back to Kabul. Less elite members of the movement have been looking for options closer to home. One secret school for girls in the capital has enrolled the daughters of four or five Taliban families.

In the private commitment of some Taliban members to securing an education for their own girls at any cost, other Afghans see both hypocrisy and some hope for change. It is likely to be a long fight, however, because opposition to women's schooling comes from the very top of the Taliban movement.

Supreme leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, and his inner circle ordered one of the cruellest moments of the last year, when high-school girls who had been summoned to restart class were ordered home again soon after the first day of classes.

Diplomats and Afghans with leadership ties said the ministry of education had been genuinely planning to get girls back into schools, with preparations including checks that facilities met Taliban standards for segregated classes. The ministry was blindsided by the last-minute ruling from Kandahar, where Haibatullah is based.

He described a recent gathering of thousands of clerics as an attempt by other frustrated Taliban factions to out-manoeuvre the leadership and claim legitimacy for girls' education.

Despite taboos on criticising the leadership, some senior Taliban figures have spoken out against the ban.

In May the deputy foreign minister attacked the prohibition of girls' education in a televised speech defending the rights of "half the population of Afghanistan".

Taliban cleric Rahimullah Haqqani, killed by an Islamic State suicide bomber, had previously told the BBC that Afghan women and girls should be able to access education: “There is no justification in the sharia [law] to say female education is not allowed.”

“All the religious books have stated female education is permissible and obligatory, because, for example, if a woman gets sick, in an Islamic environment like Afghanistan or Pakistan, and needs treatment, it’s much better if she’s treated by a female doctor.”

Since the ban is officially only temporary, and the Taliban has always said it supports the principle of women’s right to education, some officials with younger daughters are willing to be open about their own attitude towards schooling.

A spokesperson for the ministry of higher education, highlighted efforts to adapt universities so women could study while meeting Taliban requirements for strict gender segregation, as a sign of the group’s commitment to women’s education.

(504 words, adapted from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/14/hypocrisy-or-a-reason-for-hope-the-taliban-who-send-their-girls-to-school>)

### **Writing task**

Write a structured **analysis** of **200-250 words** in which you do the following:

Analyze, compare and contrast the overall points of view expressed in the two texts (referring to 2-3 main arguments put forward in each text).

Your **analysis** must represent **± 2/3** of your answer, i.e., ± 140-170 words. Explain what your point of view is on the issue and why. Your **personal opinion** should be about 60-80 words.

Use your **own words** as far as possible. Do not copy from the text, except for short quotes (with quotation marks).

**Indicate your total word count at the end.**

### **Task 3 – Essay writing (30 marks)**

*Write a well-structured essay of between 300 and 400 words on ONE of the topics below. Indicate your choice of topic clearly and include the word count.*

1. “AI does not have to be evil to destroy humanity.” (Elon Musk) Discuss.
2. Luxembourg, Belgium, Cyprus and Greece are the only European countries where the participation in elections is compulsory. Is this a curse or a blessing?
3. Ditch the forty-hour week! Unlike their parents, the new generation is no longer willing to sacrifice their lives for work. Discuss.