
GCSE

FRENCH

8658/SH: Speaking Higher
Report on the Examination

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General comments

The vast majority of tests were well-administered and the *Instructions for the conduct of the exams* observed.

Teacher-examiners are encouraged to remind themselves of good practice in the administration of Speaking tests prior to an exam series. Some specific points are highlighted in this report, alongside the commentary on this year's tests.

Quality of recordings has improved this year but teacher-examiners should take care not to obscure recordings with noise from moving items around on the desk and shuffling papers.

A lack of key vocabulary prevented some students from completing a task in the role play or photo card section. However, it was pleasing that far more students knew *homme* and *femme* this year compared to 2018, although they still found pronunciation of these two words difficult.

A copy of the Speaking Score Sheet used by examiners can be found at the back of the 2019 mark scheme.

Teacher-examiner Tester Performance records (TTPRs)

The information provided on the TTPR is intended to provide teacher-examiners with feedback on the conduct of the speaking tests to inform the conduct of future tests. It is not possible to provide more detailed feedback than the information on the TTPR form. Feedback is provided on the basis of need only and not for every teacher-examiner.

Centres are reminded that a breakdown of marks for each section of the speaking test per student is available free of charge in ERA (Enhanced Results Analysis). ERA is accessed via eAQA.

Role-plays

The biggest challenge for students in this section of the test was dealing with interrogatives. If their understanding of these was poor, students struggled to formulate a question where required.

Some students did not pay sufficient attention to the context laid out in both English and French on their role-play card and this would account for some inaccurate or irrelevant responses. In addition, some students missed certain details in the prompts and then used information they knew on a topic which did not fit the scenario. For example, some students gave an opinion when this was not part of the task on the card.

In the question task, less able students sometimes asked a question which was totally unrelated to the prompt or simply read the prompt aloud which could not be credited.

Teacher-examiners should keep to the script of the role-play because failure to do so may result in a student's response to a particular task being discounted. If students have prepared sufficiently well in the 12-minute preparation period, they should have notes which they can read from.

The published mark scheme has more detail as to the kind of responses that were worthy of two, one or zero marks per task. Additional comments on individual role plays are provided below.

Role-play 10

Task c

The need for a past tense reference was not always recognised.

Task d

Students were happy to give their views on school uniform and this was clearly an item that had been well prepared in class.

Role-play 11

Tasks a and b

These were generally well dealt with.

Task c

Some students interpreted the prompt as referring to a visit to a school. Provided that they expressed that the visit would take place in the future, this was accepted.

Task e

Emploi du temps was not always known and students therefore made reference to a job.

Role-play 12

Task b

Often students did not cover both elements in their response. The importance of providing the required information for each task is highlighted.

Task c

The issue here tended to be that *où* was either overlooked or not known. Teacher-examiners are reminded that splitting two-part questions can be advantageous.

Role-play 13

Students who read the prompts and context-setting information carefully would have understood that they had already arrived at the hotel (prompt b required them to address a problem with the room).

Task a

Some students used a future time frame, which then made task b rather odd.

Task b

There was no problem in suggesting an issue.

Task c

Many students did not, at least initially, understand the question *Quel est votre nom ?* whereas the question about room number provided few problems.

Task e

Some had difficulty in generating a question; *ouvert(e)* was probably their easiest option.

Role-play 14

Task b

The impact of *alimentaire* was often overlooked or unknown as students made reference to fitness regimes. Others coped well and made reference to what they ate and drank.

Task d

Students could often not respond appropriately to the mention of *légumes*.

Task e

It would appear that *conseil* was widely unknown.

Role-play 15

Task e

The major challenge in this role play was in forming a question.

Role-play 16

Task b

The use of the demonstrative adjective was not noted as many made reference to a visit to 'a' restaurant.

Task e

For most students this was no problem, but some did not understand *patron*.

Role-play 17

Task a

Students had clearly discussed this idea in class as opinions were freely given.

Role-play 18

Task e

Forming a question was the most challenging task in this role play.

Photo cards

Teacher-examiners are reminded that responses to the first question must be rooted in the photograph. On occasions, students mentioned items which were not in the photo and elaborated with detail which was clearly unrelated to the visual they had. These utterances could not be credited.

Students should avoid reference to colours which cannot be substantiated, eg a blue shirt. Reference to hair colour is best avoided or made by an expression of conjecture. Similarly, where students referred to items of clothing which were clearly not shown in the visual, this could not be credited. A greater degree of precision in their responses would assist students to communicate their ideas.

Some students often, in reference to the photo, used *il* or *elle* without clarifying which individual featured was being described. Similarly, *il y a un homme et une femme* is inaccurate if there are three people of one sex and two of the other shown (as in Photo card R).

Students commonly tried to express their ideas in a present continuous tense, reflecting English usage, for example, *ils sont mangeant* or *ils sont manger*. Practice in describing common actions featured in pictures or photos would be beneficial so that students become accustomed to generating sentences using common verbs such as: *il/ils (etc) parle/parlent; mange/mangent; regarde/regardent la télé; étudie/étudient*. As mentioned in last year's report, a small number of centres had trained their students to use appropriately the construction *être en train de ...* which proved very effective.

In the other four questions too, students' responses must be relevant to the question asked. Unrelated material cannot be rewarded, therefore teacher-examiners are advised to discourage their students from introducing material which has a very loose, or no, connection with the information requested in the question.

Teacher-examiners are advised to read carefully the guidance in the mark scheme on paraphrasing questions. Some did this well where others, in their quest to assist students to respond to a question, did not convey the meaning of the original question or added to it such that they gave additional assistance, often via interpretation or explanation of the question. This often had the effect of negating the student response as key vocabulary had been provided by the teacher-examiner.

Below are some comments on individual Photo cards:

Photo card J

Item 3

Gagner de l'argent was not always understood in the context of earning.

Item 4

Patron was not always known.

Item 5

There was sometimes difficulty here, perhaps in understanding *seul(e)* or *équipe* or both.

Photo card K

Item 5

Conseil was often unknown.

Photo card N

Item 3

For some students, expressing their ideas in the imperfect tense proved to be problematic.

Item 5

Some students interpreted the question as asking about their normal journey to school, rather than a trip, thus failing to grasp the import of ... *que tu voudrais faire*.

Photo card O

Item 3

An appropriate tense was not always in evidence.

Item 4

The *à l'étranger* element was not always incorporated into answers.

Photo card P

Item 3

Some students did not make reference to a special occasion, merely to time spent with the family.

Item 4

Surprisingly, some had difficulty in referring to the qualities and simply described their best friend.

Photo card Q

Item 4

For some students, it was challenging to explain why free time is important.

Item 5

A part le sport was sometimes totally overlooked and sporting activities listed.

Photo card R

Item 2

Many students gave their pre-prepared response on a trip to the cinema rather than describe the film that they had seen recently.

General conversation

Please note that a presentation is not an acceptable format for this part of the test. The emphasis is on dialogue, not monologue.

There were some impressive and spontaneous conversations from the highest-achieving students but most relied heavily on pre-learnt material. In the case of some students, there was an imbalance between their exploration of their nominated theme and that of the second theme in terms of quality of communication.

The required length of the general conversation is between five and seven minutes. Each theme must last for a minimum of two and a half minutes and, if one or both are under that time, there is a deduction of two marks for Communication. Timing of the first theme begins when the teacher-examiner starts to ask the first question relating to that theme. The timing of that theme ends, and the second one begins, when the teacher-examiner asks the first question relating to the second theme. In other words, the changeover time between themes is added on to the first theme. Timing of the second theme ends when the teacher-examiner says 'End of test'.

In their questions, some teachers strayed beyond the theme which was being discussed so it is important that teacher-examiners are clear about which sub-topics fall into each theme to avoid this. Where only one theme was covered in the conversation or where the theme was discussed in

the photo card task and then again in the general conversation, a maximum of five marks could be awarded for Communication.

In terms of Communication, teacher-examiners are reminded that marks are based on the amount of information successfully conveyed by the student. Marks also take into account any ambiguity introduced and reflect how much the student elaborated on their answers. More able students should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce longer strings of communication.

It is beneficial for all students if questions are tailored to their ability level; individual accounts are more impressive than those that appear to have been generated by a 'template' approach. Similarly, a standard set of questions is unlikely to elicit the best performance across the whole ability range.

Teacher-examiners are advised that there is no need to cover every topic within a theme. Indeed, such an approach can be very disjointed and in no way resemble a conversation and potentially puts students at a disadvantage as there is no flow.

Question technique is an area which can be improved upon. Closed questions are of limited usefulness. They may be employed, for example, to re-focus a student who is struggling before the teacher-examiner reverts to open questions, but students cannot be rewarded if they do not demonstrate use of the language themselves.

With regard to Range and accuracy of language, high marks were achieved by able students demonstrating their ability to incorporate more complex structures and a wider range of appropriate vocabulary.

The quality of pronunciation varied greatly. Where poor pronunciation seriously hinders comprehension, this can impact on the Communication mark. Clear pronunciation was frequently undermined where students attempted to use language with which they were generally unfamiliar and, as such, resorted to reciting rather than delivering with any understanding.

Where students were allowed or encouraged to engage in long monologues, spontaneity could not be rewarded. In order to give the student an opportunity to demonstrate an ability to respond spontaneously, teacher-examiners need to interject; this was admirably displayed in some centres without the questions being too challenging for students. More able students can be given the opportunity to show their interactive skills and thereby access the full range of marks for Spontaneity and Fluency by the introduction of questions which are designed to stretch them by seeking further detail, clarification and examples. For less able students, simple queries or requests for further detail may be appropriate.

Teacher-examiners are advised that there is no need to announce the full title of themes in the general conversation. Indeed, this reduces the overall time available and limits the opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability. Correct timings were generally observed but many teacher-examiners only invited the student to ask a question at the very end of the general conversation. By the time the student had responded, they were often out of time and incurred a one mark deduction in line with the mark scheme. It is advisable to try and get the student to ask a question during the first theme. In this way, if the question makes no coherent sense, the teacher-examiner can prompt another question later in the conversation.

The requirement for students to generate a question in this section means that an interrogative must be produced. Formats such as *Décris* or *Parle-moi de ...* do not fall into this category. Also, *et tu ?* on its own without a context is not an accurate question.

Advice to teacher-examiners

General

- Do a short test recording before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity.
- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly.
- The *Instructions for the conduct of examinations* document is in the Secure Key Materials (SKM) area of e-AQA, available via the AQA website. If you do not have access to SKM, ask your examinations officer to download the document for you. It is *essential* that you follow the instructions in that document.
- In the *Instructions* document, you are told how to introduce each student in English. This is what you should say at the start of the recording for every candidate:

GCSE French examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, candidate number ____, candidate name _____. Role-play number ____, photo card letter ____, general conversation theme chosen by candidate Theme (1, 2 or 3).

- Everything said by the teacher-examiner must be clearly audible. Instances of whispering will be referred to AQA.
- Use French throughout the exam once you have introduced the student and his/her role-play and photo card combinations and the nominated theme for the general conversation in English.
- Respond positively to what students say, even if it is not accurate or effective French. It will encourage them for the rest of the test.
- Practise pronunciation as often as possible. It can be a good use of the Foreign Language Assistant's time, if you have one.

Role-play

- Keep to the script as laid out in the Teacher's Role. Not to do so will mean that the student's response will receive a mark of 0 for Communication in that task.
- If you see that a student is starting to give the wrong answer to your question, stop him/her and repeat the question. Once the student completes an incorrect answer, a mark of 0 for Communication is given for that task, even if you repeat the question and a correct answer is given subsequently.
- If a student asks for repetition of your question or if there is no answer, you may repeat the question.

- If there is a two-part question in an unprepared task, ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. Failure to do so often leads to the student having to ask for repetition.

Photo card

- You may paraphrase a question, provided the same meaning is maintained. However, be careful that that is the case or the student's reply will not be credited.
- Ask all five questions in the Teacher's Booklet, but do not ask any follow-up questions.
- Keep an eye on the timing. If a student's replies are very long and it looks as though you may not be able to ask the final question in the three-minute maximum time, you may be better to interrupt an answer and ask the next one.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible. Opinions and adjectives are the most obvious areas to focus on.
- Train students to give and justify opinions without necessarily being asked to do so. This can form the basis of different starter activities.
- Be sensitive to the ability of the students – someone who struggles to describe his/her town is not going to be successful discussing more challenging aspects of the topic, for example the impact of global warming.
- Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests. Do not ask all students identical questions.
- In order to achieve a greater sense of spontaneity in the conversation, follow up a student's response by asking about what they have just told you.
- Announce the change of theme in French: *On va changer de thème et on va parler au sujet du thème numéro ... etc.*
- Keep a close eye on the time. If one of the themes lasts for less than 2'30", there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.
- The maximum length of the general conversation is seven minutes. Everything after that will **not** be marked.
- Remember to prompt the student to ask you a question if they do not do it without being asked. It is better to get them to ask you the question in their nominated theme so that you do not forget to do it later on.
- If the first question the student asks you makes no sense, get them to ask you another one.

Advice to students

- Use the 12 minutes' preparation time wisely. You can write down exactly what you are going to say in the role-play tasks and in response to the three prepared questions on the photo card.
- For the photo card questions, try to prepare answers of at least three sentences, using a verb in each one.
- Listen carefully to the questions that your teacher asks you for the unprepared questions in the role-play and photo card and to all questions in the General conversation.
- Make sure you know common question words.
- You can ask for repetition of a question in any part of the test, but make sure it is in French.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.