

GCSE
CHINESE (MANDARIN)

8673/SF: Speaking Foundation
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

This year, it was very pleasing to see a much bigger increase in the number of centres that entered students for GCSE Chinese with AQA than in previous years. The growing number of participants in recent years has evidently generated an encouraging situation for Chinese language teaching and learning.

This was the first year that the new specification was implemented. Without a doubt, the new-style test encouraged a more authentic approach to speaking compared with the scripted learning that characterised the era of controlled assessment. The format of the new GCSE Chinese speaking test appeared to work well and allowed all students to demonstrate a level of oral proficiency that was commensurate with their ability. On the whole, the first series of this new specification was successful, with a lot of well-conducted tests in the majority of centres. However, it is well worth noting that in a minority of cases the specification requirements were not correctly followed, which resulted in some disadvantages to the students. The examiners would like to take this opportunity to highlight the key issues and show how they can be tackled for the benefit of students' marks.

Therefore, the following report aims to give a comprehensive overview of the 2019 GCSE Chinese speaking test, both in terms of teacher conduct and student performance. It will highlight best practice as well as signposting areas for improvement for the 2020 and subsequent tests.

Tier of Entry

The vast majority of Foundation tier students were appropriately entered at the correct tier. Centres are advised to make judicious entry decisions that will allow students to perform to their potential. For a small number of Foundation tier students, there is evidence to suggest that they may have fared better had they entered for the Higher tier.

Quality of Recording

Generally, tests were well administered by the centres with very clear recordings and correct encryption passwords, all of which contributed to a more efficient marking process. The centres should know that, for such a test, it is imperative that centres provide a suitable venue and use a quality recording device. Whereas this was usually the case, there were some cases where external background noise and/or poor quality recordings affected the audibility of what the students said, all of which made marking difficult. In a minority of cases, centres were requested to send replacement recordings for corrupt audio files, and accurate encryption passwords.

The centres are reminded that they should not stop or pause the recording at any time during the test.

Teacher Conduct

Test Routine Procedures

It is pleasing to note that most teachers conducted the tests in a highly professional way, adhering closely to the guidelines laid out in the *Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations*.

The prescribed combination of Role-play, Photo card and General Conversation in the sequencing chart was adhered to by the vast majority of teachers. Unfortunately, there were a small number of instances when the wrong combination was used, resulting in the theme of the Photo card being

duplicated in the General Conversation, or at times only one Theme being covered in the General Conversation. In such cases, the maximum mark for Communication that can be awarded is 5 out of a possible 10.

Once the test has begun, procedural matters should be announced succinctly in the target language. It means that the transitions between sections of the test should be very clear. There is no need for any use of English during the tests: each new section can be introduced in Chinese, for instance by using sentences such as ‘第一部分，角色扮演卡片1，我是你的朋友。’；to indicate to the student that s/he should begin his/her Photo card task, the teacher can say ‘现在进入第二部分，图片会话/or看图会话卡片E。照片里有什么？’；to indicate the transition from the photo card task to the General Conversation the sentences such as ‘现在进入第三部分，普通会话1，你选的是主题2……’ can be used. It is particularly important to announce a change of theme during the General Conversation such as ‘普通会话2，主题是……’.

Teachers are reminded that the students’ language should not be corrected during the test, nor should they be given key vocabulary, in that case, no credit could be given for that particular element.

Students are expected to use repair strategies, if needed, throughout the test. Part of this is to ask for clarification or repetition. Many teachers had taught their students to say things such as ‘请再说一遍？’ When students asked for repetition in English, the subsequent reply was credited for communication, but, in the case of the Role-play and General Conversation, it was something that could contribute to a lower mark for use of language.

At times, while the student was trying to answer the question, the teacher moved to another question before getting the answer from the student, or before the students finished the answer.

Timings

Timings were usually appropriate for the tier, but in a significant number of centres this was not the case.

The Role-play was not timed when being marked, however most students completed this section within approximately 2 minutes at Foundation tier as suggested. Sometimes the timing was too long due to slow delivery and repetition. Occasionally the teacher gave lengthy responses to the student’s question and this was also the case in the General Conversation.

Most students completed the Photo card task comfortably within the time limit at both tiers. At Foundation tier, where the time limit is two minutes, there were some cases where not all five questions were asked within the time allowed. This was occasionally due to a very slow delivery by the student but more often the result of an overlong and repetitive type of answer to the first question eliciting a description of the photo. The problem was at times also caused by the teacher not adhering to the script in the Teacher’s Role

At both tiers, most General Conversations adhered to the minimum and maximum timings. Some failed to reach the minimum time per Theme for Foundation: one and a half minutes; there were some occasions when both of the themes or one of them did not meet the minimum time requirement. This impacted on the mark awarded for Communication, so it is vital to allocate the time for the two themes appropriately. Centres are advised to note that the timing of each General Conversation theme starts immediately the first question on that theme is asked. Centres are

reminded that anything said by the student beyond the maximum time limit (two and a half minutes) is disregarded for assessment.

Conducting the Role-play Task

In the Role-play, the prescribed role in the Teacher's booklet was adhered to by most teachers. In the minority of cases where teachers re-worded the script, any subsequent response by the student was invalidated. Centres are reminded that the target language phrases provided can only be changed if a student's response makes them inappropriate. It was noted that at times some teachers asked the students to give a self - introduction at the beginning or asked some irrelevant questions which are unnecessary. Occasionally some teachers continuously asked the students 还有吗? in order to elicit more items of information while actually the student had already given sufficient items of information.

In the case of two-part questions, often ones requiring an opinion and reason, most students responded very well by using the conjunction word of '因为' to give the justification immediately after expressing an opinion. It is good practice to elicit the two elements separately to ensure the task is fully completed.

Conducting the Photo Card Task

The questions focus on a specific topic and invite students to present their ideas and views once they have described the contents of the photo. A demonstration of the ability to develop responses is one of the criteria in the upper bands of the mark scheme.

Unlike in the Role-play, in the Photo card task a question may be paraphrased. When considering any paraphrasing of Photo card questions, the exact original meaning of the question must be maintained. This can be achieved through the substitution of an individual word with a synonym or, in some cases, the use of a different language structure. However, no additional elements, which aim to clarify the question further, are permitted.

Overall, the two-minute maximum time for the photo card was adhered to and the time allowance proved ample for the students to answer all five questions. The vast majority of teachers followed the guidance and asked the questions as printed in the Teacher's Booklet, or made minor changes but kept the same meaning. However, some changed or added to the questions significantly, which meant that the student's response could not be credited. Some follow-up or added questions also caused lengthened time and affected overall marks. Some teachers tended to interrupt students when they were developing their answers and the timing of this part of the test revealed that further elaboration from the student would have been possible in the time allowed. In the Teacher's Booklet, it states: *No supplementary questions must be asked.* All student responses to such questions were not considered for assessment and reduced the amount of time available for the student to answer the prescribed questions.

Conducting the General Conversation

In general, this part of the test was far more spontaneous than controlled assessments from the previous specification. The students were provided with sufficient opportunities to give of their best in responding to all the questions, including producing at least one question to ask the teacher during the General Conversation. However, there are some areas which need to be improved and also some good points which need to be commended.

Many teachers conducted their tests well and asked different questions of different students, reflecting their ability and interests. Unfortunately, there were teachers who had a set list of questions per topic and kept to that list for all students, no matter what their ability. This usually seemed to have a negative effect on the marks, especially for the least able who were unable to answer the more difficult questions. When moving from one theme to another, most teachers did as requested and referred to the change of theme on the recording, as mentioned at the above section: Test Routine Procedures. This was useful for the student and also for the examiner, who had to make a note of the time spent on each theme.

Timings were usually good. The timing of the conversation at Foundation tier is between three and five minutes. However, the time spent on each theme is equally important. If a student spent less than one and a half minutes on one or both themes, there was a deduction of two marks for Communication.

The other area where a deduction applied was in the asking of a question by the student. If the student did not ask an understandable question of the teacher, there was a deduction of one mark. The question could be on either of the two themes covered in the conversation. The teacher is allowed to prompt the student to ask a question by saying 你有问题吗? or 你有问题要问我吗? Sometimes the question was asked after the prescribed time (max. two and a half minutes) and so the one-mark penalty had to be applied. Teachers are advised to encourage students to ask a question early on in the conversation to ensure it does not fall outside the time allowed.

At both tiers, questions were consistently asked that allowed all students to give and explain opinions, necessary for accessing the Foundation tier top band for Communication.

At Foundation tier, most able students were given the chance to use three time frames and thereby access the 9-10 band for Range and Accuracy.

There were some impressive and spontaneous conversations from the highest-achieving students but some relied heavily on pre-learnt material.

An open-ended question such as ‘你去年暑假做了什么?’ enabled more able students at this tier to give an extended response by maybe narrating events. Closed questions often are of very limited usefulness. In their questions, some teachers strayed beyond the Theme which was being discussed. Teachers are advised that they should check which sub-topics fall into each Theme to avoid this. As mentioned above in this report, where only one Theme was covered in the Conversation or where a Theme was discussed in the Photo card task and then again in the Conversation, a maximum of five marks could be awarded for Communication. Furthermore, the teachers should be aware that where students engaged in long monologues, spontaneity could not often be rewarded. The students should be given an opportunity to demonstrate an ability to respond spontaneously and develop answers.

Student Performance

Students mostly coped well with the requirements of the new specification and much good language use was in evidence. However, it was found that at Foundation tier, a couple of students responded ‘我不知道。’ to the teacher’s questions throughout the test, so a zero score was awarded. At times, where poor pronunciation and tones resulted in unclear messages, credit could not be given for that particular item of information.

Student Performance in the Role-play Task

It is pleasing to note that most students were able to access the bullet-points and were able to formulate an appropriate and succinct response. Sometimes students did not address the tasks but offered other, unconnected information, or did not answer the questions a straightforward way, which showed that they were relying solely on pre-learnt experience.

The unprepared item, indicated by !, was difficult for some but not as challenging as the ? item, which required students to ask a question of the teacher. The need for students to practise generating questions in class is important.

A significant number of students at both tiers did not understand the scene-setting statement where the Role-play was taking place, eg at a supermarket. Students should realise the importance of carefully reading the Role-play scenario at the start of their preparation time. On occasions, and at both tiers, students gave far more information than was necessary to accomplish the task.

Specific Foundation Tier Role-play Issues

Below are those which appeared most challenging for some students. Tasks that are not mentioned were generally executed well, especially those calling for opinions and, where appropriate, reasons although at times it sounded very pre-learnt such as ‘因为有意思，因为有用，因为好玩儿’.

Role-play 1

Task d

Some students did not answer the question in a straightforward way: ‘上网好不好?’, replied as ‘我喜欢上网’.

Role-play 2

Task b

Omission of a measure word as ‘我要一茶。’ to respond to the question ‘你要喝什么?’
Some students were unable to respond to the ? task by using the interrogative pronoun ‘怎么样’.

Role-play 3

Some students missed the time word ‘每天/or天天’ or used the wrong order of the time word to respond to the ? task.

Role-play 4

Some students could not give a detailed description to the ! task and instead, gave a simple response ‘好 or 不好’ to the question 那儿/(那里)的天气怎么样?

Role-play 5

Task d

Some students were unfamiliar with the meaning of ‘兼职’.

Role-play 6

Task a

Students are advised to read the rubric in English on the Student’s Role because this can make them aware of what they are expected to do. This is especially true of the transactional Role-plays.

Here, the scene was at the supermarket. This would make students more aware of the fact that the first task was to ask for a certain way of **coming** to work. It was found that some students could not use the verb ‘来’, instead they used ‘去’.

Student Performance in the Photo Card Task

Generally, students seemed well prepared for this part of the test. Most students were able to give a reasonably well developed response to the first prepared question ‘照片里有什么?’ In the case of less able students, this tended to take the form of descriptions of people in the photo. Almost all the students were able to give personal opinions and reasons.

There were a small number of cases where students spoke only briefly about the content of the photo before giving a personalised response that became irrelevant to the question. Understandably, responses to the three prepared questions were usually more developed than those to the two unseen questions. At Foundation tier, only some students tried to give developed responses to all five questions and accessed the 13 -15 band.

Specific Foundation Tier Photo Card Issues

In order to score in the top band, students needed to answer all questions clearly and develop three (‘most’) answers by using several clauses. There was no extra credit given in this question, for complex language as this question is for Communication only. Accuracy and pronunciation however, are important factors in order to achieve clarity. Lower marks were mainly caused by misunderstanding of the questions, giving short answers, no responses, wrong responses, lack of vocabulary and linguistic structures, or serious mispronunciation.

Photo Card A+B

The majority of students were able to respond, no significant problems.

Photo Card C

The last question ‘在你家里谁最喜欢做运动?’ was not clearly answered by some students, the key word 谁 in such grammar structure is used to elicit non - first person information and was not promptly understood.

Photo Card D+ E

The majority of students were able to respond, no significant problems.

Photo Card F

Like in **Photo Card C**, ‘你们班谁想做科学家?’ was not clearly answered by some students, the key word 谁 in such grammar structure is used to elicit non - first person information and was not promptly understood.

Student Performance in the General Conversation

For most students, the Conversation element of the test was where they performed best. This was to be expected as it is the section with the greatest continuity from the previous specification. At both tiers, most students were able to use the target language to ask for repetition and say they didn’t understand.

The Foundation Tier General Conversation

Generally, students managed to sustain a conversation for the minimum amount of time across two themes. Most students made an effort to develop responses, particularly to prepared questions from the nominated theme. Students often gave and sometimes explained opinions in addition to basic factual information. On occasions, there was a large discrepancy between the amount conveyed on the nominated theme and the prescribed one. When this occurred, it inevitably impacted on the overall mark for Communication. Most students relied on simple structures and vocabulary, which was sometimes repetitive, to convey basic messages. These students often struggled to make successful statements using past and future time frames.

Students in some centres should be commended for being able to use three time frames in one sentence in the general conversation eg ‘你最喜欢什么科目？现在我最喜欢数学，我以前喜欢美术，我将来想做科学家。’

Some students were able to deliver a reasonably fluent performance using rehearsed responses. However, balanced against this, was the lack of ability to interact spontaneously, meaning that the top mark of 5 in the category of Spontaneity and fluency could not be awarded to this level of performance.

Advice to teachers

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.
- Make sure that your own and the students’ mobile phones are switched off (not just on silent) before the recording begins. Students should not have access to their mobile during the preparation time or during the exam, in accordance with examination regulations.
- Avoid shuffling papers or moving items around on the desk during the test. With regard to recordings, the extraneous noise produced can obscure utterances.
- 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.
- 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 student:
GCSE Chinese examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, student number ____, student name ____. Role-play number ____, photo card letter ____, general conversation theme chosen by student Theme (1, 2 or 3).
- Use Chinese 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.
- Use appropriate Chinese translation for some English terms such as ‘Role-play card: 角色扮演卡片; Photo card: 图片会话/or看图会话卡片; theme: 主题; topic: 话题’.
- Respond positively to what students say.

Role-play

- Follow the script laid out in the Teacher’s Role.
- 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.

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 two-minute maximum time, it may be better to interrupt an answer and ask the next one.
- 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 in the unprepared task almost invariably leads to the student having to ask for repetition.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible, such as giving more opinion words, adjectives, time expressions, verbs, modal verbs, conjunctions, and the like to enhance communication skills and enrich conversation contents.
- 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. Don't 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.
- Keep a close eye on the time. If one of the themes lasts for less than 1'30', there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.
- The maximum length of the general conversation is five minutes (max. 2'30''per Theme). Everything after that will *not* be marked.
- Remember to prompt the student to ask you a question if they don't do it without being asked. It is better to get them to ask you the question in their nominated theme so that you don't forget to do it later on, alternatively let the student ask the question in the conversation to ensure it does not fall outside the time allowed.
- 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 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, including opinions and justifications.
- 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.

- You can ask for repetition of a question in any part of the test, but make sure it is in Chinese. You can say ‘请再说一遍？’, for example.

Overall, well done. We thank teachers and centres for their industry and efforts this summer to provide their students with a positive experience and the opportunity to achieve in this qualification. Best wishes to all students who will participate in this specification next year.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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