



2012 Languages: Chinese Second Language GA 3: Examination

Oral component

GENERAL COMMENTS

Many students were well prepared for the Conversation and Discussion sections of the 2012 Chinese Second Language oral examination. They responded readily and clearly to questions, giving interesting information and opinions. Some students were very willing to participate and responded appropriately. Most students did well, although at times their language contained some vocabulary and grammatical errors. Some students had trouble sustaining the exchange, most often due to a lack of preparation. Some students needed more examination strategies and confidence in order to support and further elaborate on their ideas and opinions.

Students should be reminded that thorough preparation and confidence are needed. Students who were well prepared appeared to enjoy interacting with assessors and found that the 15-minute oral examination went much faster than they had expected.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Conversation

The seven-minute Conversation is about the student's personal world, including school and home life, family and friends, interests and aspirations. This section assesses students' ability to speak Chinese in a linguistically and culturally appropriate way.

Communication: Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively
Clarity of expression

Many students were able to interact well with assessors and demonstrate effective communication and repair strategies. Some students provided extensive responses to the questions asked, confidently moving the exchange forward while using accurate language, a sophisticated range of vocabulary and complex structures. A number of students engaged the assessors with eye contact and appropriate body language. However, there were some students who relied too heavily on rehearsed responses and found it hard to maintain a natural flow of interactive conversation and give extra information. Some students began answering before hearing the complete question. It is vital that students listen very carefully to assessors' questions and respond relevantly and appropriately.

Listening skills are essential for success in the oral examination and it is important that students understand the key phrases in the questions in order to respond relevantly and appropriately. Students should also pause to allow assessors to ask further questions as the Conversation is an exchange rather than students' own mini-presentation.

Students should not reveal their name, their teacher's name or discuss the specific features of their school. Several students used some English words in the conversation, such as 'I mean ...' or 'Oh, sorry', etc. It is important for students to know that once they enter the examination room, everything they say, except their student number, needs to be in Chinese.

Content: Relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas

Most students were able to maintain a relevant conversation and efficiently convey their ideas. Students who performed well expanded on and explored their ideas with ease and engaging content. These students were keen to initiate topics and were able to sustain the conversation without much support from assessors. Some students expressed themselves naturally and were eager to tell the assessors about their personal world. Others were unable to expand on their answers. Weaker students gave monosyllabic responses and waited for further questions. Several students used Chinese proverbs and sayings appropriately in the conversation. Some were able to explain the meaning of these proverbs and sayings, but others who had learnt them by heart had little idea about the meaning.

Language: Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

Many students used a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar, expressing themselves clearly in a linguistically and culturally acceptable way. A number of them showed consistent use of style and register and were able to rephrase if necessary. However, some students struggled when using complex sentence patterns. Students need to pay attention to the accurate and appropriate use of measure words, such as, 我家养了一只猫 (My family has a cat)



rather than 我家养了一个猫 and 我哥哥比我大三岁 (My older brother is three years older than me) rather than 我哥哥大我三年。

Section 2 – Discussion

In the one-minute introduction to the discussion of the Detailed Study students were required to indicate the main focus of their chosen sub-topic, alerting assessors to any objects brought in to support the discussion. It is the students' decision whether they would like to have three or four aspects in their Detailed Study. There must be a good focus that allows scope for elaboration and that can be explored by the assessors. It is not necessary for students to pause between aspects and wait for the assessors to write down each aspect they have mentioned.

Most students performed competently in the Discussion; however, some were underprepared and had difficulty in responding to unexpected questions. Some students did not specify the focus of their Detailed Study in their one-minute introduction.

Communication: Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively **Clarity of expression**

In the discussion, many students were able to handle questions well and had sufficient knowledge to maintain an even flow of discussion. Excellent students were able to direct the discussion and make interesting contributions. Supporting objects often worked quite well as they helped the student develop answers and sustain the discussion. However, it is important that objects make very minimal use of Chinese characters. If assessors consider that the number of characters on a supporting object gives a student an unfair advantage, the assessors may withhold the object for the duration of the exam.

Some students need to improve their communication strategies during the interaction with the assessors. They need to know how to ask for clarification when they are not sure of a question. Students cannot assume that assessors will only ask them the questions they have practised at school.

Pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo are also assessed in the communication section. Strong students maintained a smooth conversational flow. Some students' pronunciation was good but their intonation could be improved. Students who did well used accurate vocabulary, expressed themselves clearly and used a wide range of sentence structures. Some students spoke too softly and avoided eye contact with assessors.

Content: Capacity to present information, ideas and opinions on a chosen topic

Many students chose a topic that not only reflected their interests, but suited their linguistic ability and promoted discussion. However, some students relied too much on pre-prepared material and often answers were irrelevant or, at times, repetitive. Students who bring supporting material to the examination need to be familiar with its details. Some students had covered too many aspects in their Detailed Study and as a result all aspects lacked depth and focus and this did not lead to a good discussion.

A number of students were able to keep the discussion relevant, provide a good range of information/ideas on the topic chosen and support their opinions with good examples. Their discussions were very well focused, demonstrating good breadth and depth. Some students relied on assessors to prompt them and lead the conversation. These students' responses were too short at times. Some students were not sufficiently prepared for their Detailed Study and were able to provide only factual information.

Some assessors experienced difficulty understanding some students, especially the names of the sub-topic and some words used in the discussion. It is very important for students to practise the pronunciation of difficult words in order to express themselves clearly.

There were some interesting Detailed Study discussion topics, such as 餐桌的礼仪 (Manners at the Dinner Table), 苏州园林 (Suzhou Gardens), 大米 (Rice), 五色文化 (the Culture of Five Colours), 中国家庭 (Chinese Families), 中国茶 (Chinese Tea), 天安门 (Tiananmen) and 中国中学生教育 (the Education of Secondary School Students in China).

Language: Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

Students who did well used appropriate vocabulary, expressed themselves clearly and provided a wide range of sentence structures. They also maintained the flow of conversation. The vocabulary and grammar used by most students was generally accurate. Some students' pronunciation was good but their intonation could be improved.