



2009 LOTE: Chinese Second Language Advanced GA 3: Examination

Oral component

GENERAL COMMENTS

The oral examination is arranged into seven minutes of conversation, a one-minute introduction to the Detailed Study and seven minutes of discussion of the Detailed Study. Teachers and students are advised to follow the instructions and recommendations provided in the *VCE Chinese Second Language Advanced Study Design*.

The assessment criteria for the oral examination, Section 1 – Conversation, are:

- capacity to **maintain and advance** the exchange appropriately and effectively
- **clarity** of expression
- relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas
- accuracy of vocabulary and grammar
- range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar.

The criteria for Section 2 – Discussion are identical as those for Section 1 – Conversation, with the exception of the third dot point, which is:

- capacity to present information, ideas and opinions on a chosen topic.

The following areas should be addressed so that students maximise their performance during the oral examination. Students should:

- be **very** familiar with, and practise using, the criteria as part of their examination preparation
- understand that the conversation is an **exchange** and not a question/answer interchange. Replying with short answers and then waiting for more questions does not display adequate conversational skills and therefore does not score highly
- be willing to go beyond a simple response and build on comments made by the assessors by expressing opinions
- answer each question with some breadth and depth by **adding** information and **expressing an opinion**
- be able to use appropriate language and techniques including eye contact to engage in a **discussion**
- express and elaborate on ideas and opinions and be able to justify what they say spontaneously in unrehearsed situations without resorting to memorised information. Students need to prepare for a variety of questions
- understand that there are numerous ways of answering a question and be prepared for information to be questioned in a variety of ways. Although well prepared, some students seemed to struggle when questions were phrased differently
- acquire key vocabulary and grammar structures that enable them to make comparisons and comments
- use connecting words accurately
- provide appropriate answers to the questions asked and not resort to rote-learned work
- be able to self-correct, ask for clarification if necessary and develop repair strategies in order to avoid lengthy pauses
- know how to make reference and link their opinions to texts studied
- appreciate that what they say will often lead the assessors to ask questions about that information
- understand that visual aids can be useful if carefully chosen and the content rehearsed
- know that merely quoting rote-learned lines and dates may seem stilted.

Generally, students' oral performance levels reflected the degree of understanding of the examination requirements and how well they had prepared for the oral assessment. While many students handled the general conversation and Detailed Study with ease, others responded to questions with apparently memorised answers.

Students generally followed the assessors' questions, although some students did not listen carefully to given questions and gave irrelevant or off-topic responses. Some students demonstrated superior organisational abilities by planning their answers in a more logical way. Other students had some difficulty organising their thoughts. This may be improved in the future by helping students read and comprehend a variety of textual materials and verbal responses.



SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Conversation

Students were expected to interact with assessors and talk about aspects of their personal world, including family and friends, school and activities, interests and future aspirations.

Communication

This criterion assesses:

- the student's capacity to link with assessors
- effectiveness of communication and repair strategies
- degree of support necessary to maintain the exchange
- pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo
- effective control of languages to convey linguistic and culturally appropriate meaning.

Student performance was the highest on this criterion. Most students had prepared thoroughly and performed well. It is important that students give appropriate and adequate answers to the questions and ask for clarification when unsure.

Outstanding students had obviously anticipated the type of questions that might be asked and had prepared appropriate and interesting responses. Some students occasionally used English words in their conversation, for example, the names of their school subjects and activities. Students are reminded that they should not state their name or the name of their school.

Some students did not correctly pronounce or failed to differentiate the four tones, thereby confusing the assessors, for example, shíxíng 实行 was pronounced shíháng 实行; kuàì jì 会计 to huì jì 会计; jiàzhí 价值 to gàzhí 价值 and so on.

Content

This criterion assesses:

- relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas
- range of information/ideas
- capacity to support/elaborate on ideas/opinions with reasons/examples/evidence/new ideas.

Students were generally able to talk about their family, school, hobbies and ambitions. It is suggested that students would have performed better by focusing on the question itself rather than talking about something only slightly related.

Strong students were proactive and able to connect the different aspects of their life and situation so that the conversation became a real one. Some students tended to make up their own story or offer inconsistent information and opinions.

Students' performance on this criterion was slightly lower than for the communication criterion but higher than in the language criterion. Their capacity to support or elaborate on information, ideas and opinions with reasons, examples and evidence is crucial. Students' responses should avoid generalisations and stereotypes. It is better that students express their own opinions rather than memorise a statement made by someone.

Language

This criterion assesses:

- accuracy of vocabulary and grammar
- variety of vocabulary and grammar
- appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar to the context, audience and purpose of the task
- appropriateness of register.

The performance levels of students in this criterion varied. Some students were able to demonstrate an awareness of appropriate style and register such as respectful forms for older generations and modest ways of talking about their own strengths.

It would be advantageous if students were able to apply a range of expressions to the conversation such as 'although', 'since', 'not only but also', 'as long as' and 'prefer to'. Students must realise that the general conversation task is more than a dialogue test of their Chinese speaking skills. Often students neglected to use certain alternative phrases and a



variety of grammar to shape their speech. It is also important that students are able to self-correct their errors. Many students did not have a broad vocabulary but were able to successfully repair their sentences through simple and alternative self-correction strategies.

Grammar and language misuse was an issue for some weak students. For example, 今个 (这个), 认识 (熟悉) 书, 表现 (表示) 意见, 学个学程 (课程), 对 (和) 女生沟通不好意思, and so on. Students should check with their teacher or a dictionary to confirm appropriate phrases.

Section 2 – Discussion

This section included a one-minute introduction and seven minutes of discussion on a chosen topic related to the texts studied. Students are reminded that there is no longer a need to introduce their selected topic for Detailed Study with the sentence 'I have studied language and culture through Literature and the Arts'.

In the Discussion students need to:

- indicate a sub-topic
- give a brief one-minute introduction of main focus
- make reference to resources used. It is suggested that a range of different kinds of texts might include books, movies, articles and so on
- remember that cue cards are not allowed in Second Language Advanced examinations.

Teachers and students may determine the conditions for the Discussion, including access to resources and notes. Students should be advised that if their topic relates to a Chinese instrument, there is no need to bring the instrument to the examination. It is also not necessary to bring reference materials such as books or magazines.

The Discussion should focus on an issue related to aspects of the language and culture of Chinese-speaking communities and be based on a sub-topic that relates to one or more of the topics prescribed in the *VCE Chinese Second Language Advanced Study Design*. Students are encouraged to use a range of texts as resources to support their Detailed Study.

In the Discussion, better performance requires that the student:

- identifies and comments on culturally specific aspects of language, behaviour or attitudes
- presents an opinion or information about an aspect of the culture associated with the language, with a range of ideas, opinions and comparisons effectively supported by relevant evidence from the texts studied
- capably maintains and advances the exchange, using effective communication and repair strategies
- uses a broad range of appropriate language, including vocabulary and grammatical structures, and achieves a very high level of accuracy
- uses appropriate language consistently for the audience, context and purpose
- demonstrates excellent pronunciation, intonation, register, stress and tempo.

It was very encouraging that topics chosen by students this year for the Discussion ranged from tea, wedding and funeral ceremonies, historical figures to modern buildings. It seemed that students had thoroughly engaged in their Detailed Study.

The topics chosen reflected the interests of students and inspired them to elaborate on information and to respond with their opinions. Topics that were too narrow, too broad and sophisticated to organise and topics that were too superficial or lacked depth, proved problematic.

Some chosen topics did not meet the criterion of relating to Chinese language and culture. Examples included 'Never give up' 永不放弃, being thrifty 节俭, and the idea of regarding men as superior to women 重男轻女. Students who would really like to present topics such as these should ensure that they are related to Chinese language and culture.

The Detailed Study needs structure and the title should not be ambiguous. The texts selected should be appropriate for the cohort of students and should lend themselves to discussion.

Communication

This criterion assesses:

- student's capacity to link with assessors
- effectiveness of communication and repair strategies



- degree of support necessary to maintain the exchange
- pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo
- effective control of languages to convey linguistic and culturally appropriate meaning.

Choosing topics and sub-topics that suit students' interests and levels of proficiency is crucial. Some students tend to choose difficult or rare topics to demonstrate their unique choice. This is acceptable as long as the topics chosen conform to the study design and are related to the Chinese-speaking community. However, some students were not able to construct the content at their own level and instead pieced information together. Some students did not choose appropriate topics that allowed them to extend their development. Topics chosen such as exam pressure, the advantages of living in the city versus the country and study life are not specific to the Chinese community and thus are barely related to the requirements of Chinese Second Language Advanced Detailed Study.

Some students tended to recite content and were unable to respond when they were asked unexpected questions. Students are expected to give their opinion on the topic and support their argument with relevant information.

Content

This criterion assesses:

- relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas
- range of information/ideas
- capacity to support/elaborate on ideas/opinions including reasons/examples/evidence/new ideas.

Students who performed well prepared their Detailed Study logically and sequentially and were able to recount their knowledge of the subject, their opinions and their own analyses. The use of resources such as books, movies and documentaries is recommended. Students are allowed to use support material, such as photographs or diagrams, provided that it has very minimal language in Chinese.

Some students' topics were too abstract and did not allow them to have a detailed discussion. Consequently, they were often presentations of information only, with little scope for expressing opinions or ideas about the chosen topic.

Only a few students were unable to answer the questions related to the topic they had chosen. They need to understand that the discussion should be an analysis of their chosen texts rather than the introduction of a broad topic. It is recommended that students focus on a particular topic or sub-topic. Students also need to learn how to keep both depth and breadth in balance within the seven-minute discussion.

Some students obviously compiled the information from their resources and references. When asked what they had learned from the resources and references, they either could not connect with the topic they had chosen or responded that this was not a part of their research.

Language

This criterion assesses:

- accuracy of vocabulary and grammar
- variety of vocabulary and grammar
- appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar to the context, audience and purpose of the task
- appropriateness of register.

Students who performed well on this criterion had selected a topic that interested them and at a language level that suited their ability. Generally, students had prepared well for this criterion, although a few students made mistakes with sentence structure and grammar.

Students should be aware that following their initial answers assessors will often ask further questions. Rote-learned passages will not help them to cope with spontaneous questions.