



2011

Languages: French GA 3: Examination

Oral component

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2011 oral examination provided students with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and proficiency using the French language. During the seven-minute general conversation students discussed a range of topics, including family and home life, school and school subjects, earning money now and in the future, plans for further study and possible careers, as well as leisure activities. Students then introduced their Detailed Study topic, based on an aspect of French life. Students should have spent at least 15 hours of class time on their Detailed Study and been able to incorporate information and opinions about the topic in their discussion.

In no more than one minute, students introduce the general scope of their study, the scope of resources used and how the topic was approached, then give indications as to which aspects of the topic they most wish to discuss. When students choose the particular theme and desired direction for discussion, it allows them to talk about the topic in more detail. During the discussion, assessors may ask about the resources used by the student, their attitudes and opinions gleaned from the resources, how the resources relate to each other, what conclusions they have drawn, and in which ways their knowledge and appreciation of French culture has been enhanced by their study. Assessors may also ask simple and more difficult questions in order to evaluate the student's language level and assess them on the given criteria. It is thus imperative that students engage fully with the resource material and frame it in their introduction so as to allow themselves to achieve on all the assessment criteria.

Both elements of the examination are assessed on the same criteria but allow students to express themselves in very different ways. The conversation is a personal exploration within an open and free-flowing conversation, while the discussion requires a critical response, detailed knowledge and exploration of issues about French life and culture.

In general, students should:

- give as much detail as possible in all answers. The examination is an exchange and not a question and answer session
- choose a topic for the Detailed Study that allows for ideas and opinions to be expressed as well as information given
- learn and use language that displays accurate grammar, including agreements and verb tenses, rather than showy phrases using the subjunctive.

Further information and past assessment reports can be found on the VCAA website.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Conversation

In general, students were well prepared and able to elaborate on most topics. There was some excellent and sophisticated use of language.

In this section students' communication skills were assessed, including their skills of general interaction and also how they communicate in French, with particular focus on pronunciation and intonation.

Students should ensure that they have a range of material on which to converse as content is assessed in the oral examination. Some students were not well prepared and struggled to elaborate on their answers, which meant that assessors needed to ask further questions and students were not full conversational partners.

Grammar and vocabulary is also assessed in the oral examination, and maturity and breadth of knowledge is expected of students at this level. Common grammatical mistakes included the inappropriate choice of prepositions, poor use of object pronouns, masculine and feminine pronouns, verb tenses, and lack of agreement between subjects and verbs as well as between nouns and adjectives. Some students used anglicisms. The use of tenses was also problematic; many students were able to use the subjunctive, but were often unable to use the most common irregular verbs in different tenses correctly. For example, *Nous sommes voir a le debut*. Some students were not able to form full sentences and instead used individual words or disparate phrases, which hampered communication; for example, *Quand ete le jardinage*.



There was confusion between *matiere* and *sujet*, and the incorrect use of ‘*de*’ and its derivatives was also a problem. Pronunciation errors occurred on words such as *filles* and *femmes*. Some capable students were let down by poor pronunciation, especially last letters and the final ‘*s*’.

Most students were able to ask for clarification when they did not understand something, but students are reminded that they should not overuse this line of questioning as it indicates a general lack of understanding rather than a genuine search for meaning. While most students’ comprehension was sound, students who relied on rote-learning were confused by questions asked in different ways and often gave irrelevant answers.

Section 2 – Discussion

In this section the most successful students were able to draw conclusions, make links, and form opinions and ideas about what they had studied. However, the less successful students were often unable to reflect on or give opinions about their topic and the resources they used in its study. Many of these students repeated facts or general information and struggled to go into any detail.

Students are reminded that the introduction to the discussion is an opportunity to calm themselves between Sections 1 and 2 of the examination, showcase their Detailed Study work and direct the discussion into fruitful areas. Some students found it difficult to relate the themes mentioned in their introduction to their discussion, and some students’ topics and resources were unclear. Students may benefit from practising in pairs to ensure that the introduction and discussion link in meaningful ways.

Few students brought visual material to support their Detailed Study and in some cases this would have assisted students with their discussion. Visual material can provide a focus for students and assessors, an avenue for discussion or a timely highlight to a particular aspect of study. Students are reminded that they are able to bring visual material that supports their discussion, but it must have minimal writing on it. A map, for example, would be acceptable. The aim is to support the student without providing a reading text.

Students used a wide variety of resources, including articles, items from textbooks, songs, movies, Internet, TV reports, oral or written temoignages, documentaries, extracts from novels, interviews, surveys, poems, pictures or films. The sources are not assessed and the use of three different sources is the recommendation of the study design. Students who study fewer than three resources may be disadvantaged because they may lack material on which to form ideas and opinions. These students may only be able to offer minimal information on a topic and may miss out on the opportunity to enhance their linguistic knowledge and comprehension skills.

Some topics provided better scope for discussion than others. The best topics were couched in ways that allowed students to posit a question or a point of discussion rather than state them in purely informative ways. This section of the examination is not a presentation; it requires discussion and engagement with the assessors. Thus a topic such as *La cuisine francaise* does not allow students to develop a discussion and showcase their language skills. Many students remained at the level of description; sometimes the topic inhibited evaluation and analysis, and they were not able to score well. An area of study should be wide enough to allow scope for interaction and a breadth of opinions to be formed.

It must be noted that the topic of Immigration and its hybrids sometimes lacked specificity to French culture and highlighted a problem concerned with a lack of clarity. For example, the topic of *Problemes des clandestins en France* needs to draw a clear distinction between *immigrés* and *clandestins*. Some students used two films, but the films did not cover the same area or themes. This was also evident in some topics like *la France multiculturelle*, which dealt with immigration and *le port du voile* as concomitant concepts. Some of the most successful students were able to handle the disparity and breadth of the topic with mature consideration of the variation in concepts, but this was not the case for most students.

The choice of resources is important and resources should allow for vocabulary development. A relationship should exist between the resources to enable possibilities for thoughtful discussion. They should also allow students to explore the concepts of the Detailed Study in depth, which will give greater meaning to their oral performance. Some concepts are difficult, and if the resources used are not suited to the student’s ability, there is a risk of the student presenting superficial information and showing a lack of commitment to what they are discussing.