

LOTE: Japanese Second Language GA 3: Examination

Oral component

In the second year of the Revised VCE Japanese course, most students were better informed on the oral examination procedures. However, some students did not understand the requirements as detailed in the study design (p. 97).

The first part of the oral examination is a seven-minute conversation with two assessors on any topics which come under the Prescribed Themes 'The individual' (study design p. 13). Students must be able to converse with assessors in a natural manner. Shortcomings in this section were 1) students were unable to cope with open-ended questions appropriately, and gave long, memorised answers; 2) students waited for a question to be asked by assessors then answered; and 3) students made basic mistakes in tenses and counters, and did not understand common interrogatives.

During the period between the Conversation and the Discussion, students have approximately 1 minute to inform assessors of their Detailed Study sub-topics and a brief outline of their study results including the texts used. Some students inappropriately prepared a two-minute presentation. The aim of this brief segment is to alert assessors to the possible direction which the discussion will lead.

The texts to be used for Detailed Study must be selected from 'a range of oral and written texts related to the selected sub-topics ... (that might) include feature films, short stories, songs, newspaper articles, electronic texts, documentaries, music, painting and oral histories' (study design pp. 91–92). Many students used textbooks for their Detailed Study source materials which do not meet the study design requirements. In order to clarify understanding of the materials to be studied, instead of the Japanese word *tekisuto* for 'texts', the word *shiryoo* should be used.

Students are advised to choose the Detailed Study topics carefully bearing in mind that assessors have not been pre-told about their topics. Generally speaking, topics that require a considerable number of specific vocabularies (such as technological, medical) should be avoided.

Most importantly, students should be able to demonstrate effective oral communication skills by using a good range of vocabulary and grammar, and by speaking clearly with correct pronunciation.

Section 1 – Conversation

Criteria

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

Generally speaking, students' performance levels reflected their degree of understanding of the course requirements and how well they prepared for the oral examination. While there was a group of students handling the conversation with ease, another group could only answer questions with obviously memorised answers.

Some suggested means for improving students' conversational skills are:

- Familiarise students with common interrogatives such as: いつ、いくつ、だれ、どうして、どうやって、どこ、どのぐらい、何、何ヵ月、なぜ、何で and how to respond to these promptly and appropriately without resorting to memorised answers. One of the coursework requirements in Unit 3 (Role-play) may be an ideal vehicle to do this if teachers do not overly prepare students for this task.
- Prepare students on how to cope with open-ended questions such as: 「12年生の勉強はどうでしたか。」 「VCEの一年はどうでしたか。」 「VCEの勉強はいそがしかったと思いますが、リラックスするために、どんなことをしましたか。」 「何が一番たいへんでしたか」 「今日は、どうやってここへ来ましたか」. Students should understand that these are only a few sample questions, and there are any number of ways assessors may open the conversation session. It is important for both teachers and students to bear in mind that 'general conversation' looks at students' ability to cope with unpredictable nature of oral communication.

- Increase students' range of vocabulary and grammar patterns.

The most common weakness among students was evidenced in tenses, particles and counters, and a limited range of vocabulary.

- Improve students' ability in repair strategies.
- Cultivate good pronunciation, particularly of loan words, clearly distinguish short and long vowel sounds (e.g. and こうこう、りょうり and りょこう), and learn to pronounce N-O, N-E as in 本を読みました (often pronounced as 'Honno yomimashita') , 日本へいきました ('Nihonne ikimashita').

Section 2 – Discussion

Criteria

- capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively
- relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinion and ideas
- accuracy of vocabulary and grammar
- range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar
- clarity of expressions

There is a short period between Section 1 and Section 2. An assessor signals to the student that they will move on to the next session by saying, for example 「では、次にいきましょうか。どくべつけんきゅうでは、何を勉強しましたか。」. The student should give brief information on the Detailed Study whether it was the Literature option or VET option, on his/her sub-topic, the texts studied, and outline of his/her study results including issues/ideas/opinions. This information is very important for assessors, because they are not predisposed to the student's sub-topic nor have any ideas about the student's study area. If the student intended to use some supporting materials (photographs, graphs, maps and etc.) he/she should inform the assessors. This part should be no more than one minute.

A typical sequence of information goes as follows:

Assessor: 「じゃあ、つぎにいきましょう。とくべつけんきゅうでは、何を勉強しましたか。」

Student: 「しりょうを使って日本のことばと文化をけんきゅうしました。トピックは (e.g. Life in Japan) で、サブトピックは (e.g. Japanese comic culture) です。しりょうは (e.g. a video version of Doraemon) と、(e.g. a comic magazine) と、(e.g. A taped interview with a Japanese person on Japanese love of comics) を使いました。けんきゅうのけっか、私は (a brief outline of the study findings and own opinions) ということ学びました。せつめいのために、(e.g. photo, graph, map) を持ってきています。」

Assessor: 「ああ、そうですか。では始めましょう。」

As mentioned, the Japanese word for 'texts' in this case should be しりょう not テキスト as the latter means 'textbooks' in Japanese. For the Detailed Study reference materials, the study design defines as 'The texts which form the basis of this study might include feature films, short films, short stories, songs, newspaper articles, electronic texts, documentaries, music, painting and oral histories ... at least three different kinds of text are selected' (study design, pp. 91–92).

There were some students who gave exemplary performances in this section. They explored their sub-topics in depth and were able to discuss these with assessors referring to information from a wide range of materials, and drawing a persuasive conclusion. Successful topics were robotic pets, mobile phones, Japanese tourists in Australia and school rejecters. On the other hand, there were a large number of students who were not adequately prepared. Some gave a memorised presentation rather than discussing their sub-topics, and there were students who had studied the same sub-topic from an identical angle and discussed it using exactly the same expressions and followed the same direction of arguments. This should not happen. It is clearly explained in the study design (p. 91) that '*One sub-topic may be selected for the whole class ... (in such a case) it will be important to select a sub-topic that is sufficiently broad to accommodate a range of interests and perspectives, so that each student can provide an individual response ... in the Discussion in Section 2 of the oral examination*'.

For example, if the sub-topic chosen for a class was 'Japanese food', each student should study the sub-topic from a different perspective, such as:

- 1) Traditional Japanese food and its impact on the European diet
- 2) Changing food culture in Japan
- 3) Japanese convenience food
- 4) Origin of 'sukiyaki' and 'tempura'
- 5) Changing diet and its effect on the Japanese people
- 6) Comparative study of Japanese diet in 1950's and in 2000.

The choice of a suitable sub-topic is very important. If the sub-topic requires specific vocabulary and some knowledge in a specific area, for example 臓器移植 (organ transplant), assessors may have difficulty in forming a question using the vocabulary they consider within the expected range for the Unit 4 students, or from a lack of expert knowledge in this field. In such a case, assessors can ask general questions which may not relate directly to the sub-topic.

Written component

Overall results for the written examination ranged between average and good. Those students who had sound knowledge of the grammar and a good range of vocabulary fared well.

Students are reminded to read **both** English and Japanese versions of the questions carefully during the reading time to pick up any subtle difference in nuance that can occur when translating from one language to another, and, if necessary, ask for clarification.

Answers must be clear and specific, for example not just 'Sunday' but 'Sunday evening'.

Section 1 – Listening and responding

Part A (answer in English)

Questions for Part A provided scope for a number of possible responses. Answers given here are a sample of the correct responses.

Text 1

Question 1

To go to a wedding ('wedding' only was not accepted)

Question 2

Because he didn't like the colour

Question 3

It's too expensive. OR It costs 59 000 yen.

Question 4

It costs 28 000 yen. OR It is cheaper. OR Any colour other than black.

Text 2

Question 5

Brad Pitt movie

Question 6

(Find) in the newspaper

Question 7

He may be able to take the night off.

Question 8

Sunday evening/night

Question 9

Will ring and discuss.

Text 3

Question 10

She will be a little late from work.

Question 11

Mention any 2 of 'meat, vegetables, and eggs'.

Question 12

To clean/tidy up the house.

Text 4

Question 13

Because he did not talk about the summer school.

How people in San Francisco took care of animals.

He mentioned a surprise incident that occurred while he was watching TV. etc.

Questions 14 and 15 (alternates)

There were many seals on the beach.

Many people went jogging with dogs.

There was a large department store for pets. etc.

While watching TV, suddenly siren went off.

There were TV announcements about earthquake.

There was no special training (for the public) what to do when earthquake or a terrorist's attack occurred etc.

Part B (answer in Japanese)

Criterion 1 Capacity to understand general and specific aspects of texts

Criterion 2 Capacity to convey information accurately and appropriately

Text 5

Question 16

- (明日の)バンジージャンプはキャンセルです。OR
(明日は) バンジージャンプをしません。
- (かわりに) リアルタワーに行きます。
- カメラを持っていったほうがいいです。OR
カメラをわすれないで (ください) 。

- 10時に出発します。
- 朝食は8時半に出ます。OR
朝ごはんは8時半です。

Note: 出ます has two meanings, 'to leave, depart' as in 電車は2時に出ます, and 'to be served' as in 朝食は8時半に出ます.

Text 6

Question 17

- 8300 円
- 9センチ
- しゃしん (をとる)。
- インターネット (を見る)。
- せかいのどこでも使える。OR
フランスでも使える。OR
パリ・外国でも使える。

Section 2 – Reading and responding

Part A (answer in English)

Text 7

Question 18

- Eat Christmas cake. ('Eat cake' was not accepted)
- Exchange presents.
- Children play in the snow.

Question 19

Any two of:

You can go shopping/Go out/Go to church.

Question 20

- (Christians) increased.
- The number of Christians increased from 1% in 1990 to 3% in 1995.
- A new church was built in (the rural area of) Hokkaido.
- Even though the weather was bad on the Christmas Day, many people went to church.
- More than 1000 people attended the largest church in Tokyo on Christmas Day.

Text 8

Question 21

Time consuming/It takes time.

Uses many different kinds of food/Many different kinds of food have to be prepared.

Question 22

Because she values tradition.

It's tastier if cooked at home.

It's fun/enjoyable to prepare.

Question 23

They don't think traditions are important.

Question 24

With her sister's family (in Kyoto).

Because her son's family will be travelling (and won't be home).

Question 25

She always works during the New Year.

Her friends won't be home.

Shops are not open.

Part B (answer in Japanese)

Criterion 1 Capacity to understand general and specific aspects of texts (5 marks)

Criterion 2 Capacity to convey information accurately and appropriately (5 marks)

Text 9

Question 26

Students should cover two topics: 1) What kinds of school camps there are in Australia, including different activities; and 2) Differences between school camps in Japan and in Australia. The response must be “speech script” written within the word limit of 250 to 300 *ji*. Because *genkoo yooshi* is provided, students must follow the correct usage including paragraphing and punctuation. Transcribing from the text given was penalised.

Section 3 – Writing in Japanese

Criterion 1 Relevance, breadth and depth of content

Criterion 2 Appropriateness of structure and sequence (including style, text type, use of *genkoo yooshi* and word length)

Criterion 3 Accuracy, range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar (under this criterion, kana and kanji spelling were also included).

For this section, all questions were written **both** in English and in Japanese. It was particularly important for students to read both versions carefully. Generally speaking, students need to develop better understanding of the basic grammar (tenses, counters, and particles, in particular).

Question 27

This required students to write an email to send back from Japan to his classmates in Australia explaining what Japanese students, parents and teachers thought about the recent introduction of the 5-day a week system in Japan.

Not many students could present a concise outline within the required word length covering opinions of students, parents and teachers. Also, a number of students did not use *genkoo yooshi* correctly. Even though the text type was email, students should have followed the correct use of *genkoo yooshi*, making paragraph indentations.

Question 28

For this question, different text types were given in the English version (journal entry) and the Japanese version (article). When marking, both text types were accepted.

Question 29

Students were asked to write a persuasive letter to a Japanese exchange student urging him/her to join the school camp. This was by far the most popular topic. However, a number of students who chose this topic transcribed sentences and/or expressions from Question 26.

Students are reminded that writing tasks of Section 3 are closely related to the Unit 3 Outcome 3 coursework requiring students to ‘express ideas through the production of original texts’.

There were a small number of excellent pieces of writing under this topic.

Question 30

There were some very well written stories describing what happened to a lost Australian animal such as a koala and a wombat.