



2013

Languages: Portuguese GA 3: Examination

Oral component

GENERAL COMMENTS

In general, the quality of students' performances in the 2013 Portuguese oral examination was excellent. Most students were confident throughout the examination and were able to understand and respond appropriately to assessors' questions. A few students struggled during the Conversation and many struggled during the Discussion.

Students are encouraged to advance the conversation but should not dominate it inflexibly. Some students had little to say unless they were prompted by assessors. This gave the impression that they may not have prepared adequately for the examination. The *VCE Portuguese Study Design* suggests that students be prepared to continue talking on the nominated topics and not just provide minimal answers. For example, if a student is asked to describe their family, instead of describing the members of the family physically, they could provide information about aspects of their family that are of interest; for example, an anecdote about a recent incident or a discussion of whether their own personality is similar to those of their parents.

Some students were not aware of the assessment criteria and did not understand that both sections of the examination are an exchange, not merely question-and-answer sessions. Students should be able to seek clarification from assessors, and express their own ideas and opinions throughout the examination.

Most students communicated well and had good pronunciation. Poor pronunciation affected weaker students' communication strategies as well as their capacity to link with assessors.

It was pleasing that many students gave in-depth answers on the various aspects of general conversation. These students appeared confident and were able to use a very good range of structures and vocabulary within a plausible context.

While students must learn information for the various sections of the oral examination, it is how well students internalise and master that information in order to present it in the examination that contributes to their success. It is also an indication of their linguistic aptitude. Students who present large amounts of pre-learned material and who ignore the key words in assessors' questions may not score well on Criterion 1 – Communication.

The topics and sub-topics chosen for the Detailed Study should reflect the life and culture of Portuguese speakers. The topic should allow the student to express some personal interest and be appropriate to their level of knowledge. Some students did not have the linguistic ability or the maturity to cope with some topics and may have performed better had they studied more appropriate topics.

Although students are not expected to be able to answer all questions asked, they are expected to have learnt strategies for handling different types of questions. Students are reminded that assessors may ask a range of questions for which they may not be as well prepared.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Conversation

Some students demonstrated a very good knowledge of the Portuguese language by sharing ideas, information and experiences. They expressed their comments in detail and interacted well with assessors. They also were able to use a range of vocabulary and grammar properly.

However, a few students struggled throughout the examination. These students were not able to respond properly to assessors' questions, and their answers showed that they did not have good knowledge of the language, especially the grammar.

The characteristics of a high-scoring performance included thorough preparation of familiar conversation topics (such as those listed in the study design). Students are encouraged to use anecdotes on various topics as they give students the opportunity to use a variety of structures and vocabulary, as well as more sophisticated language.



Criterion 1 – Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively

Many students communicated quite effectively, but often stopped talking after only one or two sentences. This may have given assessors the mistaken impression that the student required their support. Most students, however, moved easily between topics and displayed interest in communicating with assessors.

Criterion 2 – Relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas

Many students presented content that was of a very high standard. High-scoring students' topics were very interesting and engaging, and reflected the sophisticated opinions of the students. These students were able to expand on their comments and often introduced new and relevant ideas.

Criterion 3 – Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

Some students used poor sentence structures, omitted verbs or displayed only limited understanding of basic grammatical structures. They often used English structures and struggled to use verbs tenses properly. Some anglicisms were also present. There was often good use of complex grammar, although some students used pre-learned, overly complex expressions that did not fit well with the topic being discussed.

Criterion 4 – Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

Many students used appropriate vocabulary and grammar; however, some had difficulties in using tenses properly.

Criterion 5 – Clarity of expression

Some students were able to express their own ideas and opinions clearly. However, a few students struggled due to poor vocabulary and grammar.

Section 2 – Discussion

Students should be reminded that their one-minute introduction should be very clear and to the point. Students should be very familiar with the information they give in the introduction as assessors are likely to ask questions about anything mentioned.

The choice of topic and sub-topic is very important for the Detailed Study. Some students were able to discuss the topic in detail, whereas others struggled to talk for an appropriate length of time. If the topic is too difficult or students are not interested in it, it is very hard for them to maintain the discussion and express their opinions and ideas. Some students brought a photograph or poster to support their discussion.

The sub-topic should suit the linguistic ability and level of the student; it should promote an easy, fluid exchange and give students the opportunity to express opinions and ideas.

When discussing the Detailed Study, students should be able to discuss and express opinions and ideas, use the language spontaneously, maintain the appropriate structures and vocabulary, use appropriate repair strategies when required, communicate efficiently, engage in the discussion and refer to the texts studied.

Most students had a very good knowledge of the language, had prepared their topic very well and presented excellent work and, as a result, they were able to interact with and answer questions from assessors easily. On the other hand, there were a few students who found it difficult to engage in the discussion as they had not prepared well, because the topic was too difficult or because they did not have enough information. Some students had memorised information and had difficulties when they were interrupted and asked questions that they were not expecting.

It is important that students practise the skills that are needed for the oral examination, especially the skills for maintaining a conversation. Also, students should be given the freedom to choose a topic that they have an interest in, particularly one that they can discuss and give their opinions on. Some topics make it difficult for students and assessors to engage in a conversation.

Criterion 6 – Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively

There were many confident and well-prepared responses. However, the less successful students were often unable to elaborate on or defend their ideas. It is useful for students to anticipate questions based on their introduction, and practise possible answers, elaborating on their themes. This will allow students to build confidence and to provide responses that contain more than an extension or repetition of a basic response.

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Criterion 7 – Capacity to present information, ideas and opinions on a chosen topic

The more successful students provided general as well as their own opinions and this demonstrated their command of the topic effectively. However, some students had only prepared their Detailed Study very superficially; further ideas and details were needed in order to explore topics more thoroughly.

Criterion 8 – Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

Responses ranged from poor to exceptionally good. Some weak students used very simple and/or predictable language, while stronger students used a wide variety of structures. Some used anglicisms and English structures or incorrect verb forms.

Some students did not know how to extend the discussion. It was evident that these students had memorised information and were unable to discuss it properly.

Criterion 9 – Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

Most students used appropriate vocabulary and grammar; however, some struggled to use tenses properly. Other students failed to use the appropriate vocabulary and did not have enough information to discuss.

Criterion 10 – Clarity of expression

Most students were able to express their own ideas and opinions clearly.

To achieve excellent results, it is essential that students prepare well for the examination. This means regular long-term practice, not last-minute revision. Being well prepared includes not only studying the structure of the examination, but also practising what to expect from the assessors in terms of the administrative side of the exam so that students are not stressed when the assessment moves between sections.

The following are some general comments related to the Detailed Study.

Some topics presented by students were not sufficiently detailed and the work of some students on these did not reflect 15 hours of scheduled class time. The use of three resources should give students a deeper understanding of some topics. The use of only one, or five or more, resources may not be beneficial. Many students should have included more specific detail and opinions to give the discussion more substance. Strong students were able to summarise their topic and make effective, even interesting, references to their resources. Many students made good use of resources, often linking them and the topic to their own interests. Weaker students merely tended to list resources but clearly were not familiar with them.

In some topics presented by students, there was a lack of depth and understanding of a specific period in history. This tended to present issues for assessors as it did not always enable them to ask relevant questions. Weaker students repeated information and had little foundation material to discuss. To reiterate, students and teachers should choose topics that provide the opportunity for depth of study and scope for students to present their opinions.

The complexity of some topics for the Detailed Study challenged the less successful students and affected the language they used.

Good topics

- generally contained a question where the answer required an opinion
- offered possibilities and lent themselves to a range of questions
- required analysis and offered the opportunity to take a stance on the topic
- provided a lot of discussion material
- focused on a student's own interests.

Poor topics included those that

- were purely informative
- did not have any cultural component relating to Portuguese-speaking communities
- were too technical and did not allow average or weak students to extract meaningful opinions from them
- were superficial and did not provide students with opportunities to highlight their opinions
- allowed students only to 'present a topic' rather than engage in a discussion.