
GCSE

FRENCH

8658/SH Speaking Higher tier
Report on the Examination

8658
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General Comments

Centres mostly coped well with the requirements of the new specification and much good language use was in evidence.

There proved to be many routes to the same total mark. Some students performed well in the role play and/or the photo card but not so well in the conversation element. More commonly, the conversation was the student's strongest part. However, success in the role play and/or photo card could lift an overall total mark to be on a par with that of a student who was much stronger in the conversation but had struggled with the first two elements of the test.

There is evidence to suggest that some Higher tier students may have fared better had they entered for the Foundation tier. It is recognised that the unavailability of a mixed-tier entry means that such decisions are complex.

Generally, tests were well administered but some centres submitted inadequate recordings. The problem was usually caused by the tests being recorded at a very low volume such that they were virtually inaudible. In other cases, the teacher could be heard clearly but not the student. Please remember that teachers are used to projecting their voice and therefore are likely to be louder; the microphone should be positioned closer to the student and the sound level should be set according to the student's output. On other occasions, there was extremely intrusive electronic noise from the recorder which made marking a very difficult exercise for the examiner. It is recommended that teachers spot-check recordings. Where centres send encrypted recordings, the necessary password must be supplied, under separate cover if so desired.

Some teachers did not adhere to the Sequence Chart, which is printed at the back of the Teacher's Booklet. Please note that the use of this is compulsory for the allocation of role plays and photo cards. It also clearly identifies the second Theme to be explored in the Conversation.

Role-plays

In order to achieve a good mark in this section, students need to be able to communicate fairly simple ideas in a defined context. The rubric and cues are set to assist students as much as possible to grasp the context without introducing vocabulary which students may wish to draw upon, since the presentation of such items would then preclude students earning marks when they use them. Where possible, cognates and very accessible vocabulary are used. Some students did not know certain items of vocabulary in the written cues; these were most frequently, at Higher tier, *trajet* and *devenir*. However, some students did not even recognise more common items, such as *où* and *quand*, when they appeared and therefore failed to score marks.

The unprepared item, indicated by !, was difficult for some but not as challenging as the ? item, which required students to ask a question of the teacher. The need for students to practise generating questions in class cannot be stressed enough. As the first hurdle, an inability to produce interrogative pronouns seriously undermined efforts to gain marks in this item. Some students asked a completely random question rather than one linked to the cue.

In responding to other cues too, students must understand the need for precision: sometimes they did not address the tasks but offered other, unconnected information. For example, when a cue stipulates something specific, such as *deux activités*, activities must be offered for marks to be awarded. Opinions will not be rewarded in place of activities. In addition, many students offered

opinions and reasons for these where they were not required. These are discounted by examiners unless they are relevant for consideration for marks (e.g. when the cue says *deux détails*). Some students did not adhere just to the information which they were required to communicate but elaborated, sometimes greatly, on their response. The introduction of extraneous material in the role plays must be discouraged as it lengthens the test unnecessarily and thereby tires the student sooner.

At times, teachers did not split two-part unprepared questions whilst others omitted to ask the second part. If the student unwittingly covered the second part in his or her utterance, it was, of course, credited.

Teachers are reminded that they must adhere to their script as printed in the Teacher's Booklet. Failure to do so meant that some students' responses could not be credited.

Below you will find guidance on certain tasks. Mostly, they are those which some students found challenging. Tasks that are not mentioned were generally executed well, especially those calling for opinions and, where appropriate, reasons. Reference to a lack of knowledge of interrogative pronouns is not made repeatedly but, as stated earlier, should be understood.

Role-play 10

Task b

A fair number of students did not pay attention to the use of *au* in the cue and spoke of their last visit to **a** restaurant.

Role-play 11

Although some centres expressed concern at this scenario, each individual task was within the capabilities of most students.

Task a

Récent was frequently overlooked or ignored and therefore some students spoke of wanting to buy a ticket.

Task c

Trajet was not always known but, for those students who did know it, two marks were usually earned.

Role-play 12

Task a

Inexplicably, a number of students failed to give a name and so were limited to one mark.

Task c

Devenir was often unknown so some students spoke of being a member and why this was a good thing. In such cases, the second piece of information earned a mark.

Task d

Some students struggled with the unprepared questions but their responses were marked discretely so, if they had interpreted the two questions as referring to this particular visit to the

sports centre rather than a membership, their responses were credited. For example, *Maintenant* and *Deux heures* earned two marks.

Role-play 13

Task e

The unprepared question proved very challenging for some students, which was unexpected.

Role-play 14

Task a

Renseignements did not have to feature in the question formulated by the students. A request for a type of information would also work, for example *Vous avez une liste de ... dans la region ?*

Role-play 15

Students are reminded to ensure that they give the number of details (or, in other scenarios, the number of activities, etc.) requested in order not to be penalised unnecessarily.

Role-play 16

Task d

Students sometimes mentioned only one activity and gave more than one detail related to it. When the rubric mentions **deux activités**, this is what is required for two marks.

Role-play 17

Task e

Poor pronunciation, generally a broad anglicising of both *emploi* and *idéal*, caused some utterances to be awarded a maximum of one mark since it was deemed that even a sympathetic native speaker would struggle to understand them. The message, therefore, was only partially conveyed.

Role-play 18

There were no specific problems with any of the tasks.

Photo cards

This section is designed to allow students to explore a Theme more freely. The questions focus on a specific topic and invite students to present their ideas and views once they have described the contents of the photo.

The time allowance was ample for both tiers. Students could acquit themselves as well as they might in the time available. Some teachers tended to interrupt students when they were developing their answers and timing of this part of the test revealed that further elaboration from the student would have been possible in the time allowed. Please remember that a demonstration of the ability to develop responses is one of the criteria in the upper half of the mark scheme. Generally, there was little development of the first response, probably arising from a lack of specific vocabulary. However, some students had been usefully trained to employ the *ils sont en train de*

... construction. Others employed *avoir l'air* or *sembler* plus an adjective to describe people in the photo.

Many students at both tiers did not have *homme* or *femme* in their active repertoire of basic vocabulary items. *Fille* was used but the pronunciation was frequently poor. *Garçon* was mostly absent. At times, this did not matter as the scene featured was in a school context and *professeur* and *élèves* were appropriate. However, the pronunciation of *élèves* was often very faulty and, at times, virtually unrecognisable. In Photo Cards G and P three women were featured. Students of both tiers commonly referred to them in terms of *ils*.

As in the role plays, some teachers did not split two-part questions whilst others omitted to ask the second part.

A weaker performance often resulted from a lack of vocabulary or appreciation of grammar but, on the whole, students could respond to the first three, prepared questions and then managed to say something in answer to the two unseen questions. Some Higher tier students acquitted themselves very well and the openness of some questions enabled them to draw on more complex vocabulary and structures. At both tiers, a lack of development of responses was the greatest barrier to scoring high marks.

Teachers are reminded that it is possible to paraphrase questions but great care should be taken since, if the original meaning is not retained, the student's response is inadmissible. It was, unfortunately, quite common for teachers to introduce their own questions and students failed to gain credit as a result. Teachers are advised to adhere strictly to the guidelines, which are very clear on this point.

General conversation

For most students, the Conversation element of the test was where they performed best. This was to be expected as it is the section with the greatest continuity from the previous specification.

There were some impressive and spontaneous conversations from the highest-achieving students. For some students, there was an imbalance between their exploration of their nominated theme and that of the second theme in terms of quality of communication. Where there was a great imbalance in the time spent on the two Themes, a penalty of two marks may have been incurred. Please see the mark scheme for details of penalties examiners were instructed to apply.

In their questions, some teachers strayed beyond the Theme which was being discussed. Please check which sub-topics fall into each Theme to avoid this. Where only one Theme was covered in the Conversation or where a Theme was discussed in the Photo card task and then again in the Conversation, a maximum of five marks could be awarded for Communication.

In terms of Communication, centres are reminded that marks are based on the amount of information successfully conveyed by the student. Marks also take into account any ambiguity introduced and reflect how much the student elaborated on their answers. More able students should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce longer strings of communication. For all students, individual accounts are more impressive than those that appear to have been generated by a 'template' approach.

Teachers are advised that there is no need to cover every topic within a Theme. Indeed, such an approach can lead to a very disjointed exercise which in no way resembles a conversation and potentially puts students at a disadvantage as there is no flow to the questions put to them. The exploration of topics worked best when there was some variation in approach, and differentiation according to ability level. A standard set of questions is unlikely to elicit the best performance of the whole ability range. Similarly, the use of the same questions for each student will not necessarily allow a demonstration of individuality or personal expression unless this has been encouraged in class.

The attention of centres is drawn to questioning technique. Closed questions are of very limited usefulness. They may be employed, for example, to re-focus a student who is struggling before the teacher reverts to open questions, but students cannot earn marks if they do not demonstrate use of the language themselves.

With regard to the Range and accuracy of language strand, high marks were achieved by capable students who demonstrated their ability to incorporate more complex structures and a wider range of appropriate vocabulary. Teachers are reminded that a set of utterances which is mainly error-free but very simple will not attract the highest marks. The higher ranges of the marking criteria are for successful use of more ambitious structures and a wider vocabulary at Higher tier. Additional ways of introducing a wider range of vocabulary and structure could be by encouraging students, where appropriate, to employ a range of verbs rather than repeatedly reverting to *est*, *était* and *il y a* and/or by using different persons of the verb. For example, if asked *Qu'est-ce qu'il y a à faire dans ta ville ?* a student might, in addition to *il y a*, use *nous avons*, *on peut visiter* and *il faut voir*, all of which would demonstrate a wider repertoire.

The quality of pronunciation varied greatly between centres. Where poor pronunciation seriously hinders comprehension, this could also have an impact on the Communication mark. Pronunciation was frequently undermined where students attempted to present language items with which they were generally unfamiliar and, as such, resorted to reciting rather than delivering with any understanding.

Where students were allowed or encouraged to engage in long monologues, no spontaneity could be rewarded. In order to give the student an opportunity to demonstrate an ability to respond spontaneously, teachers need to interject. More able students might be given the opportunity to show their interactive skills, and thereby access the full range of marks for Spontaneity and Fluency, by the introduction of questions which are designed to stretch them by seeking further detail, clarification and examples. For other students, simple queries or requests for further detail may be appropriate.

Teachers are advised that there is no need to announce the full title of Themes in the Conversation. Indeed, this reduces the overall time available and limits the opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability. Correct timings were generally observed but the vast majority of teachers only invited the student to ask a question at the very end of the conversation. Quite frequently, this was out-of-time and therefore could not be credited. Your attention is drawn to this practice as it clearly leads to the loss of a mark.

We thank teachers and centres for their industry and efforts this summer to provide their students with a positive experience and the opportunity to achieve in this qualification. Below we present some key aspects of good practice which we hope you may find useful for future sessions.

Good practice

- Check recording equipment before the day of the first test. Check sound levels are adequate.
- Prepare yourself so that the student's experience is smoother and yours more efficient. Be well organised before the start of each test. For example, close email software or at least silence the arrival of new emails. Know which cards the next student has been given.
- Conduct the whole of the test in French, including the introduction of the different sections.
- Introduce each student clearly, in terms of the candidate number and name.
- Label recordings adequately to ensure the correct identification of each candidate.
- At the start of the test, announce the Role play, Photo card and nominated Theme for the Conversation chosen by the student. In 2018, some teachers did not announce anything.
- Do not shuffle papers or move items around on the desk during the test. Such distracting practices can be unsettling to the student. With regard to recordings, the extraneous noise produced can obscure utterances.
- Pay attention to what the student says. In 2018, some teachers asked a question the information for which the student had just given. This clearly bewildered some students.
- Adhere closely to timings.
- Invite the student to ask a question in the Conversation in good time rather than at the very end.
- In 2018, some centres provided examiners with a grid showing the Role play, Photo card and nominated Theme for each student. This greatly assisted examiners but may also be useful to teachers to ensure that they keep to the Sequence Chart, printed at the back of the Teacher's Booklet.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.