
A-LEVEL FRENCH

Paper 3 Speaking
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

The new A-Level Speaking test was well received by students, teachers and examiners. The Individual Research Project (IRP) provided students with the opportunity to research and to discuss topics that were of personal interest to them. The majority of students were well prepared for both parts of the test, and examiners of both T and V routes encountered many stimulating conversations. The IRP in particular enabled students to discuss their chosen topic with enthusiasm and conviction.

Administration

Visiting examiners reported very few problems regarding arrangements at centres. Examination rooms were usually large enough to enable the students to carry out their 5 minute preparation on a separate desk; chaperones were provided when necessary.

Recordings

For the teacher-conducted tests, recordings were not of the highest quality in some cases, with sound levels fluctuating considerably and the examiner's questions frequently being clearer and louder than the student's responses. Background noise, squeaky chairs, rustling of paper close to the microphone, announcements over the school tannoy system, phones and bells ringing – these all proved intrusive at times. Students can be disadvantaged if what they say is partly or totally inaudible.

Where problems are discovered with a faulty recording and a copy is requested, centres should ensure the replacement CD or memory stick is dispatched promptly. CDs often arrived in a paper or plastic cover, without any protective wrapping, and a number were damaged in transit.

Recordings should be saved in .mp3 format. File-names for individual student recordings should comply with the format laid out on page 12 of the *Instructions for the conduct of A level examinations*, which can be found in Secure Key Materials.

A considerable number of centres did not provide the information set out on pages 11 and 12 of the Instructions when sending memory sticks and CDs. This meant there was frequently no indication of the teacher-examiner's name, which is required for completing mark forms and Teacher Tester Performance Records.

Teachers who conduct their own tests are reminded of the importance of following all instructions regarding administration. This includes:

- Full announcement at the start of each test observing the prescribed wording in the instruction booklet
- CD insert/USB label showing the order of tests, the stimulus card used with each student and the teacher-examiner's name
- Correct labelling of tracks showing component, centre and candidate numbers
- Recordings saved in mp3 format
- Checking volume levels for both student and teacher.

Paperwork

Most centres provided the necessary paperwork for the IRP topic. In a few cases Candidate Record Forms (CRF) were not sent to examiners of the T option causing some delay in marking while the forms were obtained.

When completing the CRF it is important that:

- Both student and teacher sign it.
- The IRP title and all headings are in English.
- Sources including websites are clearly identified.
- Both options studied for Paper 2 are named on the form
- Handwritten forms are legible.

Additional Answer Sheets with students' notes for Part 1 should not be submitted with the media but should be retained securely by the centre until Results' Day, when they should be destroyed confidentially.

In the case of visiting examiner tests, it is useful if spaces 3-8 on the CRF have headings rather than being left blank, so that the visiting examiner has an indication of the scope of the discussion.

Preparation time

At A-level the students have a great deal to do within the allowed 5 minute preparation time (reading the two cards, choosing which to answer, preparing responses to the printed questions and preparing two questions to ask the examiner) and so teachers are encouraged to ensure that students have plenty of opportunity throughout the course to practise preparing effectively under timed conditions.

It is worth making students aware that lack of specific knowledge of an aspect of a topic covered in a stimulus card should not prevent them from choosing that card.

Conduct of the Examination

Teacher-examiners are reminded that the script for introducing tests is given in the instruction booklet and this is all the information that is required. In many cases, examiners are providing unnecessary details such as the theme and sub-theme of the stimulus card and the student's chosen Individual Research Project title. Lengthy introductions of this sort can be very unsettling for students who are eager to get the test underway.

The importance of teacher-examiners ensuring they have familiarised themselves with all the relevant training materials and guidance for conducting these new tests cannot be over-emphasised. Where tests were well conducted, students were able to realise their full potential and to score highly in all areas, and this will have proved a positive and rewarding experience for all concerned. However, there were many issues in conduct that had a considerable negative impact on student marks. Understanding exactly what the mark scheme rewards in both parts of the test and the crucial role the teacher-examiner has to play in ensuring that the questions asked provide the right opportunities for students to be able to access the top mark bands in each of the Assessment Objectives are of paramount importance.

Timings

Many teacher-examiners failed to appreciate the importance of respecting the prescribed timings for both parts of the test, thereby disadvantaging their students. Failing to realise that marking stops after 6 minutes for Part 1 meant that the two questions the student is required to ask of the teacher-examiner frequently did not materialise until after that 6 minute cut-off point and therefore could not be credited. This has a negative impact on the mark available for AO2. If the student asks only one question, the maximum mark that can be awarded for AO2 is 4; if the student asks no questions, the maximum mark that can be awarded for AO2 is 3.

Teacher-examiners should ensure they have all the necessary materials for conducting a test ready before starting to record. In several cases, far too long was spent locating the IRP paperwork at the end of Part 1, wasting valuable seconds that could have been used productively by the student. While most teacher-examiners interrupted students after 2 minutes on the IRP presentations, some students were allowed to talk for over 2½ minutes. Allowing the sub-theme discussion and/or the presentation to overrun, meant that less time was available to gain credit for the IRP discussion, and students were therefore penalised as they spent considerably less than the minimum 9 minutes required discussing their IRP.

Part 1 – Discussion of the sub-theme

A considerable number of teacher-examiners moved quickly through the printed questions, without following up any of their students' answers, even when these had been extremely brief.

Teacher-examiners need to appreciate that when they move straight on from one printed question to the next without any follow up, students may not only fail to consider all the material on the cards, but are also denied valuable opportunities to demonstrate their ability to develop ideas and opinions and respond appropriately to unpredictable elements. This can have a detrimental effect on marks for both AO1 and AO2. Conversely, there were a few very able students who spoke with impressive fluency and at great length, so that their answers to the printed questions took over 5 minutes. While students should be made aware of the importance of developing points in response to the printed questions, they must also understand that, in order to score highly for AO1, they have to demonstrate their ability to respond appropriately to unpredictable elements. Teacher-examiners should not ask questions on the pictures, as students will not be credited for describing or discussing these, and valuable time that could have been put to better use will have been wasted.

Students need to appreciate the importance of reading both text and questions carefully before making notes in their preparation time. The few students who chose Card K did not all grasp the full import of the first sentence. The third question on Card G was often answered as if it had read *Que devrait-on faire?*, whilst the third question on Cards L and H gave rise to responses that were not totally focused on what had been asked. Several students failed to consider the *devenu essentiel* in the title of Card H or the *faut-il s'inquiéter?* which appeared in the title and the text of Card L. The two questions asked by the students were often very poorly formulated and, in a few cases, did not contain a conjugated verb or were simply incomprehensible. Many teacher-examiners were extremely sympathetic in interpreting and responding to some highly dubious questions. Some of their responses, however, voiced detailed and lengthy opinions, rather than being as brief as possible.

Students' use of numbers was far from convincing in many cases. Some wasted valuable seconds as they laboured over reading statistics from cards with varying degrees of accuracy, and dates were often highly dubious.

Throughout the discussion the teacher-examiner should be giving students opportunities to use their knowledge and understanding of the sub-theme in the context of a French-speaking country or community to develop their arguments, justify their points of view and draw conclusions. In some cases there were too many questions eliciting general opinions and views or questions directed at the students' own experiences, which could be rewarded for AO1 but could not be credited for AO4. Card A often gave rise to a number of questions on the student's experience with, and opinions about, their own grandparents with little specific topic-based knowledge being elicited.

Some teacher-examiners kept putting *en France* at the end of most questions in discussions on Card B but answers were frequently too general, with insufficient specific topic-based knowledge to support points to merit a high mark for AO4.

With Cards C and H there was some confusion between *bénévole* and *bénévolat* at times. Several students had obviously been very involved in voluntary work for different organisations and, although it was fascinating to learn about some of their projects, too much time was spent eliciting this information at the expense of topic-based knowledge to support relevant points and substantiate opinions.

Questions such as *Que penses-tu du droit de vote à 16 ans?* with Card J tended to lead to extremely general answers, with few if any francophone details to substantiate their ideas and points of view. In other cases students tried to include as many facts as possible on the sub-topic, whether they were entirely relevant or not, and teacher-examiners did not always help through failing to include enough opinion questions.

However, where questioning technique was good and students had prepared well for the test, the sub-theme discussions provided some very good critical and analytical responses.

Part 2 – Individual Research Project

Titles

All examiners commented very positively on how students had really engaged with the IRP. There were some truly outstanding performances on an enormous range of interesting subjects, that showed how students had acquired extremely thorough topic based knowledge and understanding and could demonstrate an excellent critical evaluation of their research subject with real enthusiasm and conviction.

The main reasons for inappropriate titles were:

- There was no explicit link to a French-speaking country (e.g. How can we defeat terrorism?)
- The scope was too broad (e.g. France before and after 1789)
- The title specifically included comparison with British society

A number of topic titles, while being appropriate, were rather general and lacking in definition, e.g. *Marine Le Pen; Peugeot; French film*.

Well worded titles indicated the scope and main direction of the student's research and suggested an analytical approach which is essential for a successful outcome. For example:

1. An analysis of the success of *En marche* and Macron's victory in presidentials
2. To what extent can Monet be seen as the main exponent of Impressionism?
3. What accounts for Stromae's popularity in the French-speaking world and beyond?

Popular IRP topic areas included: fashion and designers; francophone music; other films by directors on the prescribed list for Paper 2; the Charlie Hebdo attack and its consequences/implications.

Centres are reminded that there is an IRP Adviser for French allocated to each centre who can be contacted at any time outside the 5-week window when tests are conducted with regard to queries relating to the IRP and the appropriateness of titles. Centres are advised to contact the IRP adviser to seek approval of their titles. For contact details of their IRP adviser, centres should contact mfl@aqg.org.uk

Presentation

There was a tendency for presentations to be on the short side in many centres, lasting around a minute in a few cases, and frequently barely 1½ minutes. While students should not be allowed to talk beyond the specified 2 minutes for their IRP presentations, they should be advised to maximise the time available to them to demonstrate how well they have understood and assimilated research-based knowledge through the development of key findings.

Presentations were of variable quality. Some students just used them as an introduction to the discussion, setting out, in vague terms, points that were going to be covered. Others devoted much of the time to giving personal reasons and anecdotal accounts as to why they had chosen that particular topic, or else spent too long talking about resources used. A few students just dealt with the historical/ literary/ cinematographic background to their chosen topic, without actually presenting any details about their title until the end. There is useful information in the specification about the mark-scheme for this part of the test including amplification of the descriptors in each band.

IRP Discussion

Some teacher-examiners just followed the bullet points/headings provided by their students in chronological order, allowing them to deliver mini-presentations in each case, and therefore generally failing to engage in what should be a discussion. As a result they ran out of questions before the 9 minute point and so put the onus back on the students to continue talking by asking them if they wanted to add anything. As students, in terms of how well they engage in the discussion, are credited for the way in which they deal with unpredictable elements, teacher-examiners must ensure opportunities for following up and/or challenging points made in initial responses are not neglected. The teacher-examiner's questions should be sharply focused on the title of the IRP, as listed on the Candidate Record Form. Questions on broader aspects of the topic area, particularly those seeking largely factual information, do not provide the necessary opportunities for the student to give appropriate evidence to support his/her arguments, or justify conclusions that would demonstrate an excellent critical evaluation of the chosen topic. While students had obviously learnt an amazing array of facts and figures in some cases they were denied access to the top band(s) for AO4 when teacher-examiners largely failed to move beyond the factual to elicit views and opinions that could be justified and defended using evidence from the topic researched.

AO4: The AO4 focus seemed to get lost in some discussions, sometimes as a result of poor questioning technique on the part of the teacher-examiner. Teacher-examiners must appreciate that they have to have familiarised themselves with the title, headings and bullet points of an IRP prior to the test, so that they are confident in their own ability to question each student responsively for the full 9-10 minutes, eliciting knowledge that has been acquired during research and providing suitable challenges for them to support their views with evidence from their studies. Some teacher-examiners spent too long asking about sources used, which often didn't prove a very fruitful aspect to cover. In some discussions students thought they were required to ask questions, as in Part 1, and teacher-examiners often compounded the problem by giving lengthy answers as well as asking if they had any further questions to ask or comments to make.

AO3: In IRP discussions in particular students demonstrated an impressive grasp of a wide range of varied vocabulary and complex structures, though the application of grammar was not always as accurate as it might have been. Familiar common and sometimes serious errors were still too frequent

Conjugation of verbs: *je parler, ils aller, vous peuve, je n'ai pas allé, j'ai li, après avoir le dire*

Impersonal Verbs: *la France faut, l'Etranger est s'agit de...*

Subjunctive (or not): *bien qu'ils sont, il veut que ses chansons sont comprende, pour qu'ils peuvent, elle veut tout le monde d'être, je pense qu'il ne soit pas*

Passive: *il a influencé par, j'ai frappé par*

Negatives: *ils n'ont pas rien, il n'y a rien de chanteurs*

Pronouns: *selon il, avec leur, de laisser ils, elle a lui aide, les choses que elle était victime de*

Possessives: *ils...ses, sa père, il musique*

Adjectives and adverbs: *un état bien, le seulement travail, mal santé, un poids santé*

Comparisons: *comme important que, plus bien, différent que, plus important comme avant, beaucoup plus mieux*

Confusion with: *parce que and à cause de; penser à and de; faire and rendre; connaître and savoir; peintre and peinture; bénévole and bénévolat; surprise and surprenant; choquant and choqué; temps, fois and heure; chose and choix, qui, que and dont*

Faux amis: *sentence, éventuellement, issue, prejudices, actuellement*

Invented words: *involver, reconniser, protéger, expected, criticiser, performer, experiercer, attracter, relevant, especialement*

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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