



GCSE **Bengali**

8638/SF Paper 1 Speaking Foundation Tier

Report on the Examination

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General comments

Notably, the 2024 GCSE Bengali Foundation Tier speaking test successfully allowed all students to demonstrate a certain level of oral proficiency commensurate with their ability. There were 131 students this year. The mean mark was approximately 51 out of 60. The overall impression is that student performance is similar to the previous series, owing to a consistent approach to tackling the role-play and photo card tasks.

This report provides a thorough overview of the Foundation Tier speaking test, focusing on both teacher conduct and student performance. It will highlight best practices and identify areas for future improvement.

Quality of Recordings

The majority of tests were conducted in appropriate venues with high-quality recording equipment. However, in a few instances, external background noise and poor-quality recordings negatively impacted the clarity of the students' responses.

Test Routine Procedures

Most teacher-examiners closely followed the guidelines provided in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations, ensuring a smooth testing process. This adherence helps put students at ease and facilitates the marking process later on.

Teacher-examiners should be reminded it is essential to include the role-play number, photo card letter and nominated general conversation theme when introducing these to each new student. During the test, procedural announcements should be made briefly in the target language, with suitable wording provided in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations. It is particularly important to clearly announce any change in theme during the general conversation. Teacher-examiners should also ensure that all questions are asked to prevent students losing marks.

Timings

Most students completed the photo card task comfortably within the Foundation tier time limit of two minutes. On the rare occasions when all five questions were not asked within the allotted time, this was usually due to the student's slow delivery or overly lengthy and repetitive answers, especially to the first question describing the photo.

The general conversation timings were generally within the required minimum and maximum limits. Very few conversations fell short of the minimum time but in some cases, the coverage of the second theme did not meet the minimum time requirement, which affected the communication score.

Centres are advised to note that the timing of the second general conversation theme starts as soon as the first question on that theme is asked. All time spent before this point is allocated to the first theme. Additionally, the teacher-examiners should remember that anything the student says beyond the maximum time limit is disregarded for assessment. There was evidence of not spending a similar amount of time on each theme of conversation.

Conducting the Role-play Task

Centres are reminded that teachers-examiners must adhere to the prescribed role outlined in the teacher's booklet. When scripts are altered this invalidates any subsequent student responses. In addition it must be noted that the role-play questions may be stated twice only. For two-part questions, especially those requiring an opinion and a reason, it is advisable to elicit each element separately. This approach, is beneficial to students.

Conducting the Photo Card Task

The majority of teacher-examiners asked the questions as they appeared on the card. While paraphrasing is permitted, any change in wording must preserve the exact original meaning of the question. Not adhering to these questioning techniques provides an unfair advantage to students, requiring that any subsequent response be invalidated to maintain fairness.

Teacher-examiners should remember that if a student begins to give an incorrect but incomplete answer, the full question can be re-asked. However, if a complete and incorrect answer is given, any response to a repeated question will be disregarded for assessment.

Conducting the General Conversation

Most teacher-examiners asked questions appropriate to the student's ability. (Advice to centres is to avoid using a set list of questions without considering the student's ability or interests.) Questions were consistently posed that allowed all students to express and explain opinions, which is necessary for accessing the top band for communication at the Foundation tier. Higher-achieving students were typically allowed to use three time frames, enabling them to access the 9-10 band for range and accuracy. It is important to note that successful use of three-time frames is only required for a top band mark in range and accuracy, and some students will be more successful answering a range of simple questions in the present tense.

When students misunderstand a question and provide an appropriate but incorrect response, the teacher-examiner needs to redirect the conversation by rephrasing the question or asking a follow-up question. Any irrelevant information given by the student cannot be credited and will negatively impact the accuracy of their performance.

Teacher-examiners should employ questioning techniques that allow students to clearly demonstrate spontaneity. While some tests were conducted in a way that facilitated this, resulting in authentic-feeling conversations, many performances were dominated by pre-learned responses.

In some examples of best practice, teacher-examiners allowed even the lowest-achieving students to demonstrate spontaneity through the use of simple follow-up questions. Such questioning techniques can greatly assist low-achieving students in sustaining a conversation.

Most teacher-examiners were aware of the requirement for the student to ask a question during the general conversation. Some students asked their questions at a time of their choosing, while others waited for the teacher to prompt them at the end of the test. Unfortunately, in some cases, the student was not prompted at all. There were also a few instances where the student asked a question that was not relevant to either of the two General Conversation themes. Unfortunately, for some conversations there were inaccuracies in following the given sequence card that resulted in overlapping the same theme for

the photo card and one of the conversations. Such responses have lost marks in the communication part of the conversation.

Key Advice for Teacher-Examiners

Role Play

- **Stick to the Script:** Follow the script as outlined in the Teacher’s Role. Deviating from it will result in the student receiving a mark of 0 for Communication in that task.
- **Intervene if Necessary:** If a student begins to give an incorrect answer, stop them and repeat the question. Once a student has completed an incorrect answer, they will receive a mark of 0 for Communication for that task, even if they answer correctly after the question is repeated.
- **Repetition:** If a student asks for the question to be repeated or does not answer, you may repeat the question.
- **Handling Two-Part Questions:** In an unprepared task with a two-part question, ask the first part, wait for an answer, and then ask the second part. Failure to do this often leads to the student needing to ask for a repetition.

Photo Card

- **Paraphrasing:** You may paraphrase a question as long as the meaning remains unchanged. Be careful to ensure the meaning is consistent, or the student’s response may not be credited.
- **Ask All Questions:** Ensure you ask all five questions listed in the Teacher’s Booklet but avoid asking any follow-up questions.
- **Manage Time:** Monitor the timing carefully. If a student’s responses are very lengthy, and you may not have time to ask the final question within the two-minute maximum, it may be better to interrupt and move on to the next question.

General Conversation

- **Encourage Variety:** Encourage students to use a wide range of language structures and vocabulary.
- **Opinion Justification:** Train students to provide and justify opinions without necessarily being prompted. This can serve as a basis for different starter activities.
- **Sensitivity to Ability:** Be mindful of the student’s ability. For example, a student struggling to describe their town is unlikely to succeed in discussing more complex topics like social and global issues.
- **Tailor Questions:** Try to ask questions that reflect the individual student’s interests rather than asking identical questions to all students.
- **Promote Spontaneity:** Foster a more spontaneous conversation by asking follow-up questions based on the student’s previous response.
- **Announce Theme Changes:** Announce any change in theme in Bengali.

- **Time Management:** Keep track of the time. If one of the themes is covered in less than 1 minute and 30 seconds, marks will be deducted for Communication. The General Conversation section should not exceed five minutes; anything beyond this will not be marked.
- **Prompt Questions:** Remind the student to ask you a question if they forget to do so. It's better to prompt them to ask about their nominated theme to avoid missing it later.
- **Address Nonsensical Questions:** If the student's first question doesn't make sense, ask them to try again with a different question.

Student Performance

Role-play Task

Most students demonstrated strong ability in decoding the target language bullet points and provided appropriate, concise responses that included a verb. It was encouraging to see that very few students simply lifted and used the subject pronoun or possessive adjective from the bullet points to complete the task. Students of all abilities recognised and responded well to the standard formulation and the most commonly used opinion structure was ‘আমি মনে করি’ paired with a justification ‘কারণ’ and a simple adjective ‘ভালো/ভালো না/খারাপ’.

Some students extended their responses beyond what was necessary. It's important to note the number of details required to complete a task, as indicated in brackets at the end of each bullet point.

As happened in the previous series, students found the transactional role-plays more challenging than the informal scenarios. Some of the students were well-prepared to recognise when a request needed to be made, as indicated by the words ‘আপনাকে কীভাবে সাহায্য করতে পারি?’, but many students could not link it properly to the given context in the relevant bullet point. It is essential for students to carefully read each task during preparation time to ensure they provide relevant responses.

Many students effectively formed questions based on the prompt word(s) provided for the question (?) task, but often was inappropriate for the prompt words provided.

Some students struggled to respond appropriately to the unprepared (!) task. Those who succeeded typically had a good command of question words and were trained to give a short but suitable response.

Specific Foundation Tier Role-play Comments

The following role-play tasks were particularly challenging for students:

- **Role-play 1**
 - Task 5: A surprising number of students did not recognise the word ‘নামকরা খেলোয়াড়’.
- **Role-play 2**
 - Task 2: Students often successfully understood the word ‘উপহার’ but struggled to form a question from it.

- **Role-play 3**

- Task 1: Some students did not recognise the word ‘ব্যায়াম’ in the bullet point and to link with the prompt ‘আপনাকে কীভাবে সাহায্য করতে পারি?’.

- **Role-play 4**

- Task 1: Same as in role-play 3, some students could not link the ‘শহর ঘুরে দেখা’ element in the bullet point and the prompt ‘আপনাকে কীভাবে সাহায্য করতে পারি?’.

- **Role-play 5**

- Task 1: Many students overlooked the requirement to state the duration of their school hours and referred to when the school starts instead.

- **Role-play 6**

- Task 2: The element ‘চাকরীতে সফল হওয়ার জন্য কোন যোগ্যতা’ was found very challenging to the students and many could not score in this task.

Photo Card Task

Most students were well-trained in preparing appropriately developed responses to the first three questions, notably on the first question. A fully developed response typically includes three clauses, each containing a verb. Some students either provided too little information or gave overly long responses, which affected clarity and the marks awarded.

Most students could give a simple three-clause response to the first prepared question, ‘ছবিতে কী কী দেখছেন?’ Many mentioned the setting, the number of people, descriptions of the people, and the weather. Occasionally, students inferred the mood of a person based on facial expressions. Students should remember the requirement of a reference to at least three things in this task and good to include an opinion and justification here.

Most students successfully gave and explained their opinions. A few students were restricted to the 1-3 band due to a failure to offer an opinion or missed out on the 10-12 band because they did not explain their opinions or missed out on their tasks.

There was a mixed performance regarding students' ability to recognise and appropriately respond to questions requiring answers in a past or future time frame. At the Foundation tier, this type of question will always be the second or third prepared bullet point.

One common difficulty was recognising questions in the third person or third person plural. Each Photo card includes at least two questions that require a response not in the first person, so students must be trained to respond appropriately.

Specific Foundation Tier Photo Card Comments

The following Photo card tasks were particularly challenging for students:

- **Photo card A**
 - Task 3: Some students did not understand the question at the first attempt and the teacher-examiners had to rephrase the word ‘বন্ধুত্ব গুরুত্বপূর্ণ’.
- **Photo card B**
 - Task 3: Some students could not decipher the element ‘বিশেষ খাবার’ and the teacher-examiners had to remind or emphasise this part of the element.
- **Photo card C**
 - Task 1: The photo used on this card was found to be comparatively difficult for some of the lower-ability students to go into further details required in this question.
- **Photo card D**
 - Task 5: The meaning of ‘সবচেয়ে উপযুক্ত’ was not widely recognised.
- **Photo card E**
 - Task 4: The element of providing an opinion on timely attendance to school posed a challenge to some of the students.
- **Photo card F**
 - Task 2: With the element ‘তোমার প্রিয় বন্ধু কলেজে পড়ার ব্যাপারে কী ভাবছে?’, a surprising number of students rather than emphasising their favourite friend’s thoughts on studying at the college, referred to the subjects they would study at college.

Foundation Tier General Conversation

Overall, students generally sustained a conversation across two themes for the minimum required time. Most students made an effort to develop their responses, especially to prepare questions from the nominated theme, often giving and sometimes explaining opinions in addition to basic factual information.

Many students relied on simple structures and vocabulary, which were sometimes repetitive, to convey basic messages. Opinions often used the same adjectives, such as ‘ভালো’, ‘ভালো না’ and ‘মজা’. Some students were able to accurately incorporate a broader range of structures. However, on some occasions, intended messages were not communicated because the vocabulary and structures attempted were too complex for the student's ability.

Many students attempted to demonstrate the use of different time frames, with varying degrees of success. Some students relied heavily on anglicised words or colloquialisms.

The standard of pronunciation varied, with only some students consistently enunciating basic non-aspirated and aspirated sounds such as ‘ক-খ/ব-ভ’. Many students pronounced words understandably but lacked intonation to convey meaning effectively.

Some students managed to deliver reasonably fluent performances by incorporating some pre-learned responses. However, this was often balanced by a lack of opportunity to respond to simple follow-up questions.

Advice for Students

- **Use Preparation Time Wisely:** Make the most of the 12 minutes of preparation time.
- **Prepare Your Responses:** You can write down exactly what you plan to say for the role-play tasks and the three questions on the photo card.
- **Photo Card Responses:** Aim to prepare answers of at least three sentences, each containing a verb, for the Photo card questions.
- **Listen Carefully:** Pay close attention to the questions your teacher-examiner asks during the unprepared role-play and photo card questions, as well as all questions in the general conversation.
- **Learn Common Question Words:** Familiarise yourself with common question words.
- **Request Repetition in Bengali:** You can ask for a question to be repeated at any point in the test but ensure you do so in Bengali. For example, you can say ‘প্রশ্নটি আবার করুন/দয়া করে আবার বলুন’.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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