



GCSE **French**

8658/SH

Report on the examination

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General Comments

The majority of the tests were well-administered and the *Instructions for the conduct of the exams* observed. Praise is due to the majority of teachers who administered tests in a wholly appropriate manner, balancing the demands placed on them and their students with encouraging their students and maintaining a positive atmosphere throughout.

Issues with volume levels, however, persist every year and present problems for a number of examiners and can impact on students' marks. In every annual report on the conduct of the current Speaking test I have commented that examiners reported difficulty in hearing some tests and AQA had to resort to attempting to enhance the volume level in order that assessment could take place. Furthermore, a reminder is given every year to the effect that teachers' voices tend to be louder so the volume level should **not** be judged as appropriate according to the teacher's production and any microphone must be placed closer to the student. Extraneous noise, sometimes caused by students fidgeting or noise in an adjacent room or on the corridor, but more commonly by teachers moving items on the desk and shuffling papers (which, when done close to the microphone, can obscure all speech) are a further challenge. It must therefore be concluded that some centres do not recognise their own poor practice in this area. It must be understood that, if the examiner cannot hear the student's response, it cannot be credited and, so, marks are lost.

Teacher-examiner Tester Performance Records (TTPRs)

The information provided on the TTPR is intended to provide teacher-examiners with feedback on the conduct of the speaking tests to inform the conduct of future tests. It is not possible to provide more detailed feedback than the information on the TTPR form. The feedback is provided on the basis of need only and will not be necessary in the case of every centres.

Although this is the last year of assessment for this specification, the advice given in TTPRs will generally be useful for future tests conducted according to the new specification since it tends to relate to general approaches and requirements.

A breakdown of marks for each section of the speaking test for each student in your centre is available free of charge in ERA (Enhanced Results Analysis). ERA is accessed via Centre Services.

Role Plays

In the new specification, there are no transactional role plays, and the context will always be that of a conversation with a friend. However, there are some issues which have arisen in the 2025 tests which may recur in the specification to be assessed from the summer of 2026 and, as such, are worthy of comment here.

Students must ensure that they address the task set. A lack of focus sometimes caused students to not score marks, when, for example they did not address specifically the detail of the task laid out on their card. Some gave extraneous information instead and could not be rewarded. Examples of this occurred in Role Play 12, Task 4, where some students spoke about school holidays but did not reference two activities. In Role Play 15, Task 5, some students spoke of their free time but did not specify where and with whom they spent it.

Examiners noted some misunderstandings which may be classified in the ‘false friends’ category. In Role Play 17, Task 2, *Journée scolaire* was sometimes taken to mean school journey and, in Role Play 18 Task 3, *Travailler pendant les études ...* was occasionally interpreted as travel which could result in some strange responses.

Other misunderstandings occurred for small numbers of students but, in Role Play 16, Task 1, *Emploi du temps* was often misinterpreted as referring to work.

Students generally performed well in the unprepared question task. Problems did arise in some Role Plays, however. For example, in Role Play 11, one of the questions, *C'est à quel nom ?* was often unrecognised and, in Role Play 15, students struggled to respond appropriately to *Quel jour voulez-vous venir ici ?* and *Et pendant combien de temps?* In Role Play 14, some students could not name a main course dish and / or a dessert.

Students often rely on using *Tu aimes ... ?* as their basis in the question task. This was sometimes inappropriate, for example, in Role Plays 11; 13 and 17 this year. Apart from this formula, many students also struggled to deal with producing a meaningful, unambiguous question in Role Plays 10; 12; 14 and 15. Congratulations to those students who were successful and who have gained a very useful skill, one of formulating straightforward questions.

Teacher-examiners must ensure they adhere to their script in the Role-play. Any variation from this is most likely to result in a student's response to a particular task being discounted. This practice will continue in the new specification tests.

Teacher-examiners have always been advised to split two-part questions, where possible, as this relieves some of the burden on students when they respond. It is regrettable to state that this practice is not followed by all teachers. The advice could be usefully employed in the new specification tests too.

Please see the published detailed mark scheme for suggested responses for all Role-play tasks and the marks these attracted. They are entirely in keeping with practice in previous sessions and the broad parameters will be maintained in the new specification.

Photo Cards

Teacher conduct was good and generally consistent. Some centres are reminded to adhere to timings and teachers should interrupt long answers. Where this was not done, students sometimes ran out of time to answer all five questions within the two-minute time frame.

The attention of teachers is drawn to the fact that, in the new specification, all timings apart from the total time of the test are only recommendations. Timings throughout the test will, however, need to be monitored to ensure that there is sufficient time left for the Unprepared Conversation section in order that students may give a good account of themselves in that task.

Students found ample material to describe in the photos presented. Centres are reminded that responses to the first question must be rooted in the photograph. Personalisation of the photo is inappropriate in this task. For example, students should not refer to any individuals depicted as *mon père* or *mon cousin* etc. Equally, reference to an opinion of the photo and a reason for that opinion are discounted. For example, some students included in their response opinions such as, *J'aime la photo car il fait beau*. Any utterances which referred to anything that was absent from the photo were similarly rejected.

As in the Role Play, a small number of teacher-examiners strayed from the questions printed. Whilst paraphrasing in the Photo Card section is permitted, the alternative must wholly reflect the original, add nothing and give no extra assistance to the student. Failure to observe these premises resulted in a student's response to a particular task being discounted. Furthermore, undue emphasis or repetition of only part of a question, carried out in order to give the student extra assistance, was similarly rejected.

General Conversation

Mostly, examiners reported a balance of time given to the exploration of the nominated theme and that of the second theme.

In their questions, a small number of teachers strayed beyond the theme which was being discussed. Teachers are reminded to check which sub-topics fall into each theme to avoid this.

In order to give students an opportunity to demonstrate an ability to respond spontaneously in the test, we have recommended that teachers incorporate simple queries or requests for further detail in their general classroom exchanges so that students learn to expect this approach. There were examples in the tests heard this year where teachers engaged in this practice superbly and to great effect.

It was pleasing to note that some teachers invited students to ask a question during their conversation on the first theme. As this was the theme the student had chosen, they had the opportunity to be better prepared. It also meant that the student's question did not run the risk of coming out-of-time.

The comments which follow relate to this year's test. However, they are equally valid as a preparation base for the new specification test.

Teachers are advised to prepare and use a range of questions rather than a restricted bank of these. When the very same questions are used with all or nearly all students, it can suggest that students are aware of the questions they will be asked, and such practice is inappropriate.

The use of sentence builders with set expressions was evident as students repeated the very same language. Teachers are asked to reconsider this approach as it leads to students not expressing themselves but rather repeating stock answers.

In terms of Communication, teachers 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. High attaining students should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce longer utterances. This can be achieved by students being encouraged to develop responses of three or more clauses when possible.

It is beneficial for all students if questions are tailored to their interests and ability level; individual accounts are more impressive than those that appear to have been generated by a 'template' approach. Similarly, a standard set of questions is unlikely to elicit the best performance of the whole ability range.

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 attention of teachers 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 score 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 students successfully demonstrating reference to three-time frames, the use of more complex structures and a wide range of vocabulary.

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

Pronunciation will obviously gain an elevated status in the new specification, specifically in the Reading-Aloud-of-the-text task. Common problems are the sounding of (silent) final consonants and such everyday vocabulary items as *eau*. A famous brand of bottled water once ran an advertising campaign centred on the pronunciation of this word as a simple expression of surprise in English (*oh*). Although this does not wholly reflect the French pronunciation, it is a closer approximation than most English native speakers normally produce. Such short-cut tactics may be required to assist students.

Advice to teacher-examiners based on the specification examined in 2025 but which is equally applicable to the conduct of tests in the new specification

- Carry out a short test recording before the first student's Speaking test to check volume levels and clarity, preferably with another participant who should sit in the seat students will use.
- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly but remember that teachers tend to be accustomed to projecting their voices, so position the microphone closer to the student, who is likely to be more softly spoken.
- The *Instructions for the conduct of examinations* document is on the AQA public website and should be reviewed by teachers conducting speaking tests to ensure a compliant administration of tests.
- In the document mentioned above, there are instructions on how to introduce each student in English. You must include these details at the start of the recording for every student.
- Everything said by both the teacher-examiner and student must be clearly audible. Examiners will refer instances of whispering to AQA.
- Once you have introduced the student and the specific details of the elements to be covered in his/her test, use French throughout the exam itself. Announce the transition from one part of the test to the next using simple signposts such as *on passe au texte numéro ... / On passe maintenant aux photos ...* Not only is this good practice, it will deter students from reverting to English in any exchanges with you. The *Instructions for the conduct of examinations* document contains recommended phrasing for transitions.
- Respond positively to what students say, even if it is not accurate or effective French. It will encourage them for the rest of the test.
- Practise pronunciation as often as possible.
- Monitor the time throughout the test. As stated previously, the only stipulated time is the total for the whole test. The advice to teachers contains recommendations for each task but these are flexible. However, please ensure that adequate time is given to each area and that the Unprepared Conversation, as the final task, is not curtailed by time running out.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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