



General Certificate of Education

French 1651 *Specification*

FRE2T/V Speaking

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - June series

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General Comments

The first section of this report deals with key points relating to the conduct of the test and is thus of crucial importance to teacher-examiners. Failure to comply with these requirements **will** (rather than may) disadvantage candidates. The second section then deals with aspects of candidate performance.

Administration

There was, perhaps understandably, some confusion over paperwork this summer because the legacy specification Unit 3 speaking test was still in operation. This problem will right itself next year. There are still cases, nevertheless, of incomplete or inaccurately completed documentation and centres are urged to make every attempt to get this right and to ensure that the nominated topic stated on the STMS is indeed the candidate's nominated topic. This is particularly important if a centre has opted for a Visiting Examiner. Errors here can result in a lack of coverage of all topic areas.

Quality of recordings

A number of centres this year recorded tests on computers and submitted tests on USB sticks or CDs. The quality of these recordings was generally excellent. This method of recording can assist in getting the timings right too, as the running time of the test is displayed on-screen as the test is taking place.

All centres should pay particular attention to the quality of recordings submitted for marking to ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged. Examiners can only mark what they can hear. It is essential that the equipment for recording the tests is tested in advance of the tests to ensure both candidate and teacher-examiner can be heard clearly and there is no background hissing or hum.

Section 1: Aspects of conduct of the test

Part 1 Discussion of the stimulus card

The assessment of this first part of the test is divided between the candidate's performance in response to the five printed questions on the stimulus card – worth 5 marks – and the candidate's response in the more general discussion of the sub-topic given on the stimulus card – also worth 5 marks. It follows that the time taken for these two sections should be as evenly balanced as possible. Unfortunately, this was often not achieved because many candidates gave only brief answers to the printed questions and failed to 'develop relevant points', as the mark scheme envisages. It was therefore often not possible to award the higher marks of 4 or 5 for this section even if candidates proved themselves to be quite eloquent in the ensuing discussion.

Teachers preparing candidates should therefore be aware of the importance of the development of points in response to the printed questions and candidates should be encouraged to look for every opportunity to develop such points in their preparation time. It is anticipated that the first question will still prompt a fairly brief answer but thereafter each question should be seen as an opportunity for candidates to develop as many relevant points as possible. There is a significant difference between making a point and developing a point and a candidate will only access the highest mark in this first part if he/she uses the questions to sustain a discussion for approximately two and a half minutes. The candidate who gives only the briefest of responses to the printed questions will achieve only a low score. It is essential,

therefore, that candidates are well practised in maximising their use of preparation time so that they can respond as necessary. There is no opportunity for the examiner to “draw out” more from the candidate in this section as the mark awarded is based on the response to the printed questions.

The second part of Part 1 requires the teacher-examiner to develop the discussion but within the confines of the **sub-topic** specified on the stimulus card. This is an important aspect of the correct conduct of Part 1. If the stated sub-topic is, for example, Music, there should be no drifting into the sub-topics of Cinema and Fashion/Trends within the Popular Culture topic. Generally, teacher-examiners were very good at following this requirement but there were instances where “topic-drift” occurred. There may well be instances where this is the candidate’s doing rather than the teacher-examiners and in such cases the teacher-examiner should tactfully steer the candidate back to the **sub-topic** under discussion.

Teachers conducting their own tests have to be very familiar indeed with the full range of topics and sub-topics in the specification and particularly with which sub-topic belongs under which topic heading. Confusion over this will result in a lack of coverage of all of the topic areas and will reduce a candidate’s overall mark in the speaking test. If a teacher-examiner mistakenly treats Holidays as an aspect of Popular Culture, for example, then the Healthy Living topic is likely to be covered twice and the Popular Culture topic not at all. If by the end of the test the four AS topic areas have not all been covered, then whatever score the candidate has been allocated for Interaction is placed at the corresponding mark one band lower: thus a score of 9 would become 7, a score of 8 would become 6. In effect, therefore, the candidate is losing two marks. This may occur if the teacher-examiner covers a topic in Part 2 which has already been covered in Part 1.

Part 2 Conversation

It must be emphasised that the nominated topic with which Part 2 begins is a topic for discussion through an exchange of questions and answers between teacher-examiner and candidate. The candidate-delivered presentation is a thing of the past and therefore any introduction such as *Tu vas me parler d’un film, n’est-ce pas? Alors- vas-y, je t’écoute* with the candidate then holding forth for two minutes or more is inappropriate. Most centres fulfilled the requirement of covering the remaining two topics of the specification in the remainder of the conversation. Timing was an issue in some cases and centres are reminded that the aim in this second part of the test must be for a fairly even allocation of time to each of the three topics, approximately three minutes per topic (see below for further guidance). During the discussion of a topic area, the discussion may cover any or all three of the sub-topics. It is important that candidates are given the opportunity to develop ideas and this can best be done if teacher-examiners follow up on candidates’ responses and pursue a few points in more depth rather than covering many aspects superficially. Candidates should also be steered away from delivering chunks of pre-learnt material as this will have an adverse effect on the mark awarded for Interaction.

Although some sample questions are provided by AQA, these should be used as guidance as to the type of question which should be asked. Starter questions should be asked but then further questions should be based on what the candidate has said in response. An examiner who uses a set list of questions without reference to what the candidate is saying will prevent the candidate from achieving high marks for Interaction.

Timings

The test itself should last a total of 15 minutes and examiners stop marking at the end of 15 minutes. Within this time the “very best practice” test will have kept to the following timings:

Part 1 Discussion of the Stimulus Card

5 minutes (approximate split 2½ for printed questions and 2½ minutes for discussion)

Part 2 Conversation

- Discussion of candidate’s nominated topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of second topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of third topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Obviously it is difficult to achieve exactly this allocation of time and so, for example, a Part 2 that was divided 4 minutes, 3 minutes and 3 minutes across the 3 topics would be perfectly acceptable. However, if any of the Part 2 topics is discussed for less than two minutes, the same ruling is applied with the Interaction mark as is set out above, ie the mark is reduced by one band. This is why it is important to keep the Part 1 discussion to only 5 minutes since any over-run at this stage can have an adverse effect on the time spent on the last topic before the total 15 minutes are over and marking stops.

Section 2: Aspects of candidate performance

Part 1 Discussion of the stimulus card

Candidates must think around the printed questions as much as possible during the preparation time and develop as many ideas as they can in response to each question. They should avoid detailed descriptions of what is on a stimulus card. There was evidence of many candidates responding to questions by giving an opinion with a reason to support this and thinking this was, if not a wide range of relevant points, at least a number of relevant points. In fact, that kind of answer would be characteristic of 3/5 performance – some relevant points made but with little development. Candidates must practise seeing and using *pourquoi, comment, quels, quelles* questions as opportunities to give full and detailed answers. Many candidates suggest initially that their answers are going to be full and detailed, eg *il y a beaucoup de raisons* but then fail to give more than one reason.

In the case of most candidates, there was a clear correlation between the time spent answering the printed questions and the mark achieved and this is why a fairly even allocation of two and a half minutes to the printed questions and the same time for the discussion should be adhered to.

The discussions following the printed questions generally scored a higher mark than the first part of Part 1. Candidates had a wide range of views and opinions to express on all the stimulus cards and they all seemed to have been equally popular and effective in providing a framework for discussion. It was gratifying to see how candidates had engaged with the new specification topics and sub-topics and particularly the “newer” ones of Fashion and Trends and Communication Technology.

Part 2 General Conversation

Centres should also be reminded that there is no requirement for all of a candidate's bullet-points to be covered in this part of the test: it is particularly important that centres having a Visiting Examiner are aware of this and that with more able candidates the entire discussion may focus on two bullet-points or maybe even one single bullet-point.

The nominated topic seems to have been welcomed by many candidates as an opportunity to discuss something that really was of interest to them. Cinema, music and fashion were probably the most popular choices and the very best discussions quickly moved beyond the realm of what candidates liked watching, listening to, and wearing to some really very probing and fascinating discussions and exchanges of views.

This was sustained in large part into the discussion of the remaining topic areas. Unfortunately, there remains a disparity regarding spontaneous interaction between teacher-conducted tests and those conducted by Visiting Examiners. While the occurrence of over-rehearsed tests was rarer than in previous years, there is still a tendency for teacher-examiners to keep to familiar territory. This is not in the interests of candidates and will have an adverse affect on the marks awarded.

AO3 Knowledge of Language

Few candidates score in the lowest band or have great difficulty constructing basic sentences. Most performances are judged to be at least generally comprehensible to a native speaker or better. The vast majority of candidates can get their point across effectively but what distinguishes the good and very good from the mediocre is the range of structures and vocabulary that enable concise and succinct self-expression rather than somewhat clumsy circumlocution. Teachers should ensure that they are familiar with the performance bands and descriptors used in the assessment process.

Teacher Support Meetings

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2009 covering both Unit 2 and Unit 4. These meetings will be full day meetings and free of charge. Further details can be obtained from the AQA website in due course.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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