

Examiners' Report January 2009

GCE

GCE French (6FR01)



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Unit 1 (6FR01_1A): Spoken Expression And Response

For the very first session of this new oral examination, some centres entered a few candidates in order to test the water and to experience the demands of the new test, treating the exercise as a mock exam, in preparation for the Summer session. Other centres entered a number of very able students, some of whom were obviously native or near-native speakers.

The test is divided into two sections.

SECTION A

This requires students to respond to four Edexcel-set questions on a stimulus related to the student's chosen general topic area. The teacher/examiner will first ask two questions about the general content of the stimulus and will then follow on with two other questions that invite students to express their opinions on, or give reactions to, the stimulus (Specification September 2007, p 9)

There was a fairly even spread of choice of general topic areas by the candidates, although the topic of Youth Culture and Concerns proved popular. Most centres ran their tests on one topic area only. Only two used more than one.

As a rule, the Edexcel-set questions were read verbatim (as is required) by the teacher examiners. Frequent allowed repetitions were made when requested by students. Only in a few cases were questions rephrased or extra questions asked. This is not permitted by the rules of conduct and markers are instructed to ignore answers that are produced after rephrased or extra questions in this Section.

The first two questions

These always relate to the direct content of the stimulus and normally require relatively short answers. A partial lift or lifts with a small amount of manipulation and/or paraphrasing are usually sufficient to provide acceptable answers. Many candidates produced accurate answers. Some simply read what they thought was a relevant section of the stimulus, hoping for a lucky score. A very small number read big chunks of the text, thus hoping that something would be relevant. These kinds of answers cannot be rewarded by the mark scheme. Some candidates had obviously been told that they should develop their answers and, often after having produced an adequate answer, chose to develop this with long and at times irrelevant additions, occasionally pre-empting the next one or two questions. Others lost sight of the fact that the answers to the first two questions are to be found in the stimulus and went into long speeches expressing personal opinions. This is only required when answering the next two questions

Questions 3 and 4

These two questions are open-ended as candidates are required to give reactions to and opinions about the general content and issues raised by the stimulus. Candidates are expected to give developed and detailed answers, demonstrating that they have done some research and some thinking about the issues stemming from the stimulus. Some students produced excellent answers which amounted to

mini-speeches or mini-debates with themselves, during which they considered different aspects of the issues, comparing and contrasting viewpoints, expressing a considered opinion and justifying their standpoint. This is a demanding part of the test and requires students to have been trained into giving this kind of answer and also to anticipate, during the 15 minute preparation time, what they will be asked to express. Short, undeveloped one-line answers are not sufficient.

Assessment: Understanding (Stimulus Specific)

Answers to all four questions are marked globally. There is no detailed mark scheme for each question. Indeed, there are many different acceptable ways to answer these questions, even the first two. There was a very wide spread of marks in this first session. Some obviously good candidates did not always obtain a high mark because they did not answer the specific questions or gave short, throw-away answers in questions 3 and 4.

SECTION B

The second part requires the teacher/examiner to engage the student in a discussion that, although still relating to the same general topic area and its linked subtopics, moves away from the main focus of the stimulus. (Specification September 2007, p 9)

As an illustration, let us consider Stimulus 1 of the topic area Youth Culture and Concerns. The topic of the stimulus is going out with friends and the contrasting importance of friends and parents in young people's lives. In Section B, therefore, these topics should not be revisited. The discussion led by the teacher/examiner should be about different sub-topics within the same general topic area (Youth Culture and Concerns) as listed on page 30 of the Specifications, i.e. Music and/or fashion, one or several aspects of technology etc... It is elegant and useful if the first question in this section can be a transitional one. It would be quite acceptable in this case, to introduce the topic of music or alcohol or drugs, via a linking question referring back to the topic of going out and parties considered in the stimulus. Some good teacher/examiners used this technique very effectively this session. The conversation does not have to cover every single listed sub-topic: one or two may be sufficient if there is depth in the discussion. A few teacher/examiner found it difficult to relinquish the topic of the stimulus and kept revisiting it. A small number introduced discussions about sub-topics from a different topic area. For example, Stimulus 2 of the topic area Lifestyle: Health and Fitness about hunting and shooting caused several conversations to stray into sub-topics listed under the World Around Us general topic area. Having a conversation that does not move on from the topic of the stimulus or that strays into the wrong areas means that the candidate is unable to express relevant ideas and opinions or to demonstrate good understanding of his or her chosen general topic area, and is therefore penalised. Some overlap between topic areas is possible and acceptable, as long as the main focus of the discussion remains firmly embedded in the relevant topic area. For example, several conversations about Lifestyle: Health and Fitness included references to the use of alcohol or drugs (which strictly speaking are sub-topics of the Youth Culture and Concerns topic area). This was not penalised as it seemed logical to consider these matters within a discussion on health. Similarly, candidates often referred to their experiences in school (topic area Education and Employment) when talking about food or sport or friends (topic areas Lifestyle: Health and Fitness and Youth Culture and Concerns). This made sense and again was accepted as completely relevant.

Assessment: Understanding (General Topic Area)

This relates exclusively to Section B

Ideas and opinions are rewarded. A long list of facts embedded in a francophone context is not required, although some facts, figures and dates display understanding of the topic area and help to formulate and justify opinions. Personal questions and answers are acceptable, but it helps if issues are also considered from a more general point of view and involve a degree of analysis. In order to achieve the higher marks in this part of the assessment, one needed to hear more than basic statements of opinion such as "Je pense que c'est bon/mauvais... ". Unfortunately, some centres kept the discussion (when it was a discussion) at a level which was more appropriate for GCSE than for AS.

Assessment: Quality of language (Accuracy)

This relates to the whole test.

Both pronunciation and accuracy are rewarded in this part of the assessment. The standard in both this session varied from utterances barely recognisable as French, up to beautifully accurate and authentic language. Many candidates achieved at least the 4-5 box in the grid. In terms of accuracy, the main problems concerned gender, agreements and conjugation. The weakest candidates seemed to use the infinitive form of the verb for all persons in all tenses. Better candidates displayed reasonable control of regular and irregular verbs in several tenses. A maximum mark of 8 was often awarded for performances which were not faultless, but showed good control of complex language. When the language used was very accurate but remained very simple in structure, the top two boxes which refer to complex language were not available.

Assessment: Quality of Language (Range of Lexis)

This relates to the whole test.

The quality and variety of vocabulary is considered, as well as the range of structures used. Again, the standard in this part of the assessment varied enormously. The adjective "bon" was probably the most over-used item of lexis. On the other hand, some candidates had learned an enormous amount of topic-specific lexis. As for structures, there is no definitive list of structures that need to be heard in order for candidates to have access to the higher boxes of the grid. The structures used need to be appropriate to the kind of discourse taking place between candidate and examiner. The level of complexity which involves a range of sentence structures, tenses and moods, and enables functions such as describing, agreeing, disagreeing, contrasting, conceding, questioning, explaining, exemplifying, justifying, surmising etc... was what determined the quality of the mark awarded.

Assessment: Response

This relates to the whole test.

There are five elements in this section of the assessment that come into play: comprehension, fluency, spontaneity, development and initiative. Some performances were spontaneous, but not very fluent. Many were very fluent but totally lacking in spontaneity. Comprehension was much less of a problem in Section B (well rehearsed questions) than in Section A (totally unrehearsed questions). Development of discourse only took place in largely unrehearsed exchanges. Unfortunately, too many centres had obviously prepared a list of questions and asked their students to learn answers by heart. Whilst it is understandable that areas of discussions will have been prepared, it goes totally against the spirit of the examination exclusively to recite pre-learnt answers in what is supposed to be a discussion and not a dry question and answer exercise. There is no opportunity in this case for displaying initiative. When this happened, the maximum mark available was 8 out of 20. Tests where a genuine discussion took place (often starting with a measure of learnt material, but going beyond) and which were reasonably fluent (but included all the hesitations and false starts that normal conversation entails) were rewarded.

CONDUCT OF TESTS BY TEACHER EXAMINERS

A good number of tests were conducted accurately and in the right spirit. In most cases, timings (8-10 minutes) were adhered to. There were few tests that went on much beyond 10 minutes (markers are asked to stop listening much after 10 minutes) and hardly any that were significantly short. The latter are penalised by a downgrading of marks for Quality of Language (Accuracy and Range), as well as Response. The average time taken to deal with Section A was around 3 minutes. There were a few instances of incorrect examining technique used by teacher - examiners: prompting, correcting, repeating questions in Section A when the candidate had not requested it, repeating the same question until the candidate gave the right answer, not making clear when Section A ended and Section B started, asking the candidate what they wanted to talk about, and jumping from sub-topic to sub-topic without any obvious link.

ADMINISTRATION

Most centres recorded their tests on audio cassettes. A few used audio and data CDs. Audio CDs which can be played on an ordinary CD player are preferred. The quality of recording on the whole was fair. A very few problems were experienced: blank tapes, missing oral forms and attendance lists.

CONCLUSION

Although the overall sample was small, it was felt that it would probably be a fair representation of the variety of standards expected next session.

Statistics

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw Boundary Mark	50	38	33	28	23	18
Uniform Boundary Mark	60	48	42	36	30	24

Centres are reminded that this is the first examination for this new specification and that oral boundaries may change in the following series.

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