

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2010

GCE

GCE French (6FR01) Paper 1

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Contents

Unit 1 (6FR01): Spoken Expression and Response	01
Statistics	08

Unit 1 (6FR01): Spoken Expression and Response in French

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, p 9).

The most popular topic area chosen by candidates was "Lifestyle: Health and Fitness", closely followed by "Youth Culture and Concerns". Then, a long way behind came "The World Around Us" "and Education and Employment".

As a rule, the Edexcel-set questions were read verbatim (as is required) by examiners. Repetitions are allowed when requested by the candidate, but multiple unrequested repetitions, rephrasing (apart from "*vous*" to "*tu*" forms), explaining, highlighting, splitting questions or asking supplementary questions are not permitted in this section of the test. Answers which are given by the candidates as a result of any of these infringements to the rules are discounted for assessment purposes.

Questions 1 and 2

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. Many 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 during which examiners must remain silent, and it requires students to have been trained in giving this kind of answer and also to anticipate, during the 15 minute preparation time, what they might 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 of answering these questions, even the first two. 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 Q3 and Q4.

Three cards were provided for each topic area. One card (and one card only) relevant to the candidate's choice of general topic area is allocated to each candidate. In order to avoid duplication and to increase security, the cards must be allocated to candidates according to the sequence specified on page 3 of the teacher/examiner version of the papers. This order was not always followed by centres.

Great care was taken to produce stimulus cards which would be easily understood by most candidates at this level and to devise questions which would allow candidates to display their command of the language as well as their knowledge of the topic of their choice.

Topic area: Youth Culture And Concerns

Stimulus 1: usually well understood as a whole, except for the expression "*reine de la pop*", which seemed to cause some difficulty. Q3 did not produce many good answers. Candidates often explained why they liked or did not like Madonna or her music and did not distinguish between "*admirer*" and "*aimer*". Hardly any extended their answers to include other stars of the music world. Answers to Q4 were often disappointingly short and superficial. Some candidates restricted their answers to Madonna's music.

Stimulus 2: this was normally very well understood. Q1 and Q2 required some manipulation and many candidates answered competently. Q3 was not always understood. When it was, candidates often explained what it meant, but did not include a personal reaction. Q4 produced many very well developed answers.

Stimulus 3: candidates seemed very much at home with the content on this stimulus and the associated vocabulary. Very few answered Q1 succinctly (« *le prix et l'usage qu'on veut en faire* ») and therefore pre-empted Q2. Q4 produced many lengthy answers (often repeating many points made before) about the usefulness of computers. Only the very best candidates addressed the possibility that they might not be as useful as everyone claims or that they may have their limitations.

Topic Area: Lifestyle: Health And Fitness

Stimulus 1: normally well understood by most candidates, in spite of some technical vocabulary. It is disappointing how few candidates are able to give a correctly framed answer to the often used question "*de quoi s'agit-il dans ce texte?*". Many candidates forgot that the answer to Q2 was to be found in the text. Q3 produced many good answers. Q4 was normally answered in the negative and involved a fair amount of repetition of points made before. Hardly any candidates considered a possible rationale for legalisation. Those who did were able to produce a balanced and fully developed answer.

Stimulus 2 : The answer to Q1 was in the first two lines of the text and the answer to Q2 was in the subsequent bullet points. There was a lot of confusion and overlap in answers to the first two questions. Both questions produced much straight lifting from the text. Only the better candidates seemed to be able to effect the necessary manipulations. Q3 did not produce many good answers. Very few candidates expressed any surprise about any of the points made in the text, which led them to a certain amount of repetition, or very short answers. Q4 was often not understood, presumably because the word “*hygiène*” was not part of candidates’ vocabulary. Many answers went back to hand-washing only.

Stimulus 3 : no particular difficulty in understanding this stimulus, but many candidates seemed to be defeated by the fact that the answer to Q1 was half way down the text and that the one to Q2 was at the end of the first paragraph. Q3 was often answered in the negative and allowed for many long pre-learnt speeches about how to keep fit. Q4 was quite challenging and required some thought about the importance of image in modern society. Some good answers were given when candidates went beyond agreeing how important it was and were able to offer some explanations, usually involving media or peer pressure.

Topic Area: The World Around Us

Stimulus 1: very well understood by the few candidates who chose this topic area. Once again, however, some candidates forgot that the answers to Q1 and Q2 are to be found in the text. Q3 and Q4 were well understood and produced some good, developed answers.

Stimulus 2: the very few candidates who had to deal with this stimulus coped well with the text and the associated questions.

Stimulus 3 : there seemed to be some confusion as to who the two people mentioned were (drivers or journalists). Q3 brought about a fair amount of repetition of elements of answers to Q2. Q4 produced many good, often indignant answers in the negative.

Topic Area: Education And Employment

Stimulus 1: Only very few candidates answered questions on this stimulus. Those who did, acquitted themselves reasonably well in the main. “*la possibilité d’assister gratuitement à tous les concerts*” was obviously misunderstood by some because of the “faux ami” problem

Stimulus 2: no specific problems experienced by candidates, except that Q2 tended to elicit a lengthy lift.

Stimulus 3 : hardly any candidates had to deal with this one.

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).

It is elegant and useful if the first question in this section can be a transitional one, using something the candidate has said in Section A in order to introduce a different sub-topic to kick start the discussion in Section B. For example, if a candidate had answered questions on Stimulus 1 of the topic area "Youth Culture", it would be quite easy to introduce the topic of fashion by asking *"vous venez de dire que les jeunes admirent les vedettes de la musique pop. Est-ce qu'ils ont tendance à copier leurs vêtements ?"* Alternatively, the topic of technology could be introduced by a question such as *"vous avez dit que la musique vous passionne. Quel support utilisez-vous pour l'écouter ? Un CD ou un iphone ?"* Many 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/examiners found it difficult to relinquish the topic of the stimulus and kept revisiting it .This was often the case after Stimulus 3 of "Youth Culture and Concerns -"BIEN CHOISIR SON ORDINATEUR PORTABLE" where the discussion often got bogged down into various aspects of technology, often rehashing the same material. It was safer to leave that topic completely and to go on to discuss music, fashion or relationships, for example.

It was not always obvious when Section A ended and Section B started. It is very useful if this can be made clear on the recording by saying something like: *"bon, alors maintenant on va passer à autre chose"*. If not, markers are not sure whether the examiner has asked an extra question in Section A (which is not allowed) or has actually started the Section B discussion.

A small number introduced discussions about sub-topics from a different 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 to a certain extent but should be used very sparingly in order to avoid possible embarrassment and to make sure that the conversation goes beyond a GCSE style of discourse. It helps if issues are 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 more complex language.

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. There was often a marked contrast between the range of language used in Sections A and B.

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. This was particularly evident in large centres where all candidates prepared the same topic and when the teacher/examiner asked every single candidate the very same questions which produced a series of pre-learnt recitations. When this happened, the maximum mark available was 8 out of 20 and was often less. 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. There were many tests where a genuine conversation took place, sometimes at a very high level reminiscent of the best A2 (old Unit 4) debates. In most cases, timings (8-10 minutes) were adhered to. There were however, quite a few tests that went on much beyond 10 minutes (markers are asked to stop listening, much after 10 minutes) and too many 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 some instances of incorrect examining technique used by teacher/examiners: using more than one card per candidate, 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, splitting questions, asking extra questions and offering comments in Section A, 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. The key to good examining is to listen to what the candidate says and to base the next question on something they have said, by asking them to explain, justify or expand their point(s). Only in this way can a degree of spontaneity be achieved

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, but examiners are asked to make sure that the candidates' voices can be heard clearly. A few problems were experienced: blank tapes, unmarked tapes, failing to state at the beginning of the recording the topic area and the stimulus about to be used. There were many missing oral forms (some centres were obviously still under the impression that these are no longer needed) and attendance lists. Centres are reminded that the correct version of oral forms (OR1) can be downloaded from the Edexcel website and that the completed oral forms (which are used for marking and feedback by examiners) together with two copies of the attendance registers should be sent to the examiner along with the recordings.

ADVICE TO TEACHER/EXAMINERS

- Encourage your students to choose the full range of topic areas.
- Train them to give full and developed answers.
- Teach them how to express and justify opinions.
- Do not allow your candidates to see the questions on the stimulus before the test.
- Be aware of the different kinds of questions in Section A.
- Read the questions in Section A exactly as they are.
- Do not ask extra questions in Section A or offer comments.
- Make it clear when you are moving from Section A to Section B.
- Do not prepare and rehearse a list of questions.
- Do not allow your candidates to recite pre-learnt material for very long.
- Make sure Section B is a discussion, not a series of recitations.
- Do not revisit the stimulus topic in Section B.
- Make sure the sub-topics you raise in Section B are relevant.
- Listen to what candidates say and pick up on it for the next question.
- Keep to the specified timings.
- Do not correct or prompt your candidates during the test.

Statistics

Unit 1 (6FR01) Spoken Expression and Response in French

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	50	38	33	29	25	21
Uniform boundary mark	60	48	42	36	30	24

Please note that although the modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across MFL specifications are comparable at specification level.

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