

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

GCE French (6FR01) Paper 1A

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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)

The most popular topic areas chosen by candidates were again "Lifestyle: Health and Fitness" and "Youth Culture and Concerns". "The World Around Us" did attract more candidates this session but very few chose "Education and Employment".

Candidates should not have sight of the questions before the beginning of the test. As a rule, the Edexcel-set questions were read verbatim (as is required) by examiners.

Repetitions are allowed when obviously needed or requested by the candidate, but multiple unrequested repetitions after the candidate has provided an answer, rephrasing (apart from "vous" to "tu" forms), explaining, highlighting, splitting questions (apart from the "pourquoi ou pourquoi pas" element) 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. The majority of centres ran this part of the test very well.

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 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. In such cases, examiners should move on swiftly to the next question, perhaps even interrupting irrelevant developments, otherwise this part of the test can go on for too long.

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 raised. Many students produced excellent answers which

amounted to mini-speeches or mini-debates with themselves, during which they considered different aspects of the issues raised, 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. 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. Most candidates now realise what is required in this part of the test, although some this session restricted their answers to information contained in the stimulus. A small number recited pre-learnt speeches vaguely related to the question asked.

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. Brief but correct answers would normally be awarded a mark of 2/4. Many candidates were able to develop their answers sufficiently (particularly to questions 3 and 4) to be awarded 3/4 or 4/4.

Topic area: YOUTH CULTURE AND CONCERNS

Stimulus card 1

Q1 - This was not always well answered and the pronunciation of the word "*films*", often rendered as "*filles*", caused problems.

Q2 - Few candidates seemed able to pick out the term "*versions miniaturisées*" from the stimulus, which was the easiest way of answering the question.

Q3 - Many candidates restricted their answer to group or friend pressure. It was disappointing that all the other possible influences (parents, celebrities, fashion magazines, shops, the media, fashion houses etc) were rarely mentioned.

Q4 - "*Dans quelle mesure*" was not always understood. This was a chance to provide a personal answer but many candidates spurned the opportunity and talked about fashion in a general way.

Stimulus card 2

Q1 - Many rather garbled and partial, even contradictory answers. Few managed to express the fact that family arguments were frequent but short, even if they amounted to a total of 4 days a year.

Q2 - Often misunderstood: candidates tended to summarise causes of arguments or lifted the final sentence of the stimulus but could not pronounce it.

Q3 - This was often answered satisfactorily.

Q4 - A productive question in the main.

Stimulus card 3

Q1 - Most candidates managed an adequate answer, but there was also a tendency to read all five bullet points word for word.

Q2 - The word "*conseils*" was, once again, often not understood. Few candidates were able to change the verb "*suivre*" from the imperative to the infinitive.

Q3 - This produced many long answers about the dangers of technology, but many candidates did not understand the personal reference implied in "*est-ce que vous vous sentez concerné?*"

Q4 - Often, either the problems or the advantages were mentioned, with no attempt to balance the two.

Topic Area: LIFESTYLE: HEALTH AND FITNESS

Stimulus card 1

Q1 - Normally answered adequately.

Q2 - "*Jusqu'à quel point*" caused problems. Few managed to produce the required answer: a summary or a rephrasing of the last two lines of the stimulus.

Q3 - Many agreed that noise was a problem but too many restricted their answer to music, ignoring all the other causes of noise pollution (road traffic, neighbours, roadworks, etc.) Others mentioned other threats to health (drugs, alcohol etc.), which pre-empted the next question and caused confusion.

Q4 - This produced many long, well-rehearsed speeches about the dangers of drugs, alcohol and poor nutrition .

Stimulus card 2

Q1 - Mostly answered satisfactorily.

Q2 - Mostly answered satisfactorily, but some problems changing the verbs from the imperative to the infinitive (*couper, servir, offrir*).

Q3 - The "*entre amis*" element was often ignored.

Q4 - This produced many acceptable, developed answers.

Stimulus card 3

Q1 - Mostly answered satisfactorily

Q2 - This question did not present any specific difficulties, apart from the pronunciation of "*le mérite et l'esprit d'équipe*"

Q3 - The import of "*un chef d'état*" was often missed or not understood

Q4 - Only the better candidates grasped the point of "*l'image du sport*".

Topic Area: THE WORLD AROUND US

Stimulus card 1

Q1 - The expected answer: « *le nombre de migrants climatiques* » was rare.

Q2 - Normally answered adequately.

Q3 - The focus on the environmental impact of immigration caused problems.

Q4 - This produced some well prepared answers.

Stimulus card 2

Q1 - The candidates who were asked this question seemed to find it difficult to extract the relevant items from the stimulus: "*une réserve naturelle pour protéger les gorges de l'Ardèche*".

- Q2 - Normally answered satisfactorily.
Q3 - This question caused problems, particularly the focus on "*jusqu'à quel point est-ce qu'il est possible... ?*"
Q4 - Several good, well-developed answers were heard.

Stimulus card 3

- Q1 - Mostly good answers heard.
Q2 - The few candidates who had to answer this question did so competently.
Q3 - Candidates normally answered in the affirmative and missed a chance to develop by not mentioning the limitations touched upon in the previous question.
Q4 - A few well developed answers were heard, but also with some repetition of points made in previous answers.

Topic Area: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Stimulus card 1

- Q1 - The required change from "*augmenter*" to "*augmentation*" was rare.
Q2 - Answers were often marred by candidates' inability to read and pronounce numbers and figures.
Q3 - This question did not produce many inspired answers.
Q4 - Several adequate answers were heard.

Stimulus card 2

- Q1 - The complete answer (job + training) was rarely heard.
Q2 - Answers were often only partial (one element rather than two).
Q3 - The import of "*étudier en même temps*" was often missed.
Q4 - Several good answers were heard.

Stimulus card 3

- Q1 - Answers were usually correct, but not the "*il s'agit de*" construction .
Q2 - The temptation to answer this question by simply reading the whole of the second paragraph was occasionally yielded to.
Q3 - This question seemed to cause very little controversy and developed answers were rare.
Q4 - The quality of answers to this obvious question was disappointing in the main.

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. 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. There were several tests where Section B was entirely devoted to further questions on the sub-topic of the stimulus. Such tests did not score highly.

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/à la deuxième partie de l'examen"*. 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.

Very few teacher/examiners this session 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. 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.

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. Issues should be considered from a more general point of view and involve a degree of analysis. Depth rather than breadth is what is required in order to access the higher marks in the grid.

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 was variable and at times disappointing. Conjugation remains a big challenge for many.

Here are some of the most common errors in terms of pronunciation and intonation:

- *Alcou* instead of *alcool*.
- *Tabaque* instead of *tabac* and *tabaguisme* for *tabagisme*.
- *Dangeur* or *dangère* instead of *danger*.

- Diphthongisation of single vowel sounds (oo for *ou*, ow for *au/o*, ey for *é/ai* etc.)
- *Ait* or *aient* as *aille*, or *ayente*.
- *Nachional*, *alimentachion*, *sosailleté* instead of, *national*, *alimentation*, *société*.
- Confusion between French *ou* and *u* sounds.
- Confusion between *la mort* and *l'amour*.
- Inability to differentiate between nasals (*an*, *in*, *un*, *on*.)
- Incorrect French pronunciation of *Rs*, particularly internal ones as in *droit*, *arrêter*, etc.)
- Confusion between *jeunes* and *gens*, *ville* and *vie*, *fil* and *fille*.
- Sounding of *ent* at the end of verbs in the third person plural (*ils mangeante*.)
- Sounding final consonants (*beaucoupe*, *les garçonz*, *les déchettes*, *le corpse*.)
- Rising intonation at the end of statements.
- Recitative intonation when regurgitating pre-learnt material.

Other very common errors, "en vrac":

- *Ce texte s'agit de* instead of *dans ce texte il s'agit de*.
- Frequent use of the un-idiomatic expression *il y a beaucoup de problèmes avec*, instead of *X cause beaucoup de problèmes* or, *il y a beaucoup de problèmes en ce qui concerne...*
- The gender of *problème* (*une/cette problème* !). Other basic gender errors (*la père*, *mon mère*, *ma frère*, *un sœur*).
- *Ça dépend sur* instead of *ça dépend de*.
- *Possiblement* instead of *peut-être*.
- *Les célèbres* instead of *célébrités*.
- *Le fumer*, *le fumage* or *le fumier* instead of *fumer*.
- *A France*, *à l'Angleterre* instead of *en France*, *en Angleterre*.
- *Les langues étranges*, instead of *étrangères*.
- Increased confusion between *très* and *trop* (possibly because of modern common usage); *trop beaucoup*.
- *Si je serais* instead of *si j'étais*.
- *Beaucoup de les/de le*.
- Confusion between *bon* and *bien*, *mauvais* and *mal*.
- Confusion between *magasin* and *magazine*, *numéro* and *nombre*.

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. Overall, the standard this session was extremely variable. Many candidates had learned some topic-specific lexis and were able to use a good range of structures. Others seemed to have very little lexis at their disposal and were unable to function even at a very basic level. There were frequent appropriate (and inappropriate) uses of the subjunctive, and many attempts to use the conditional mood. 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.

Assessment: Response

This relates to the whole test.

There are four elements in this section of the assessment that come into play: comprehension, fluency, spontaneity and development. Some performances were spontaneous, but not very fluent. Others 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, once again, too many centres had obviously prepared a list of questions and, in some cases, 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 to exclusively 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 development. In the case of totally recited answers, the maximum mark available under Response was 8 out of 20 and was often less. Fortunately, there were also many 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) . These were appreciated and suitably rewarded.

CONDUCT OF TESTS BY TEACHER EXAMINERS

Many tests were conducted correctly and in the right spirit. There were many tests where a genuine conversation took place, sometimes at a very high level, close to Unit 3 style debates. In most cases, timings (8-10 minutes) were adhered to. There were however, a few tests that went on much beyond 10 minutes (markers are asked to stop listening, much after 10 minutes). Fortunately this session, few were significantly short. The latter do not score highly 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: prompting, correcting, 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. The main problem in Section B was working through a list of prepared questions and thus 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. Many teacher examiners did this effectively.

ADMINISTRATION

Conduct: Do not allow candidates to see the questions on the stimulus before the test.

Recording: most recordings are now on CDs or memory sticks and the increased sound quality is very much appreciated by examiners, although a few recordings on CDs seemed to cut out before the end of tests. Centres are requested to check that transfers from digital recorders or hard drives are complete and of good quality before despatch. Some centres still used cassette tapes whose quality is increasingly poor.

Paperwork: the oral forms and attendance lists must always be included with the recordings. There is a new version of the oral form available on the website. It is helpful if CDs and memory sticks can be sent along with a written list of candidates' names and numbers in the order of testing.

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.
- Make sure they understand and are able to express dates, figures and percentages.
- Be aware of the different kinds of questions in Section A.
- Read the questions in Section A exactly as they are printed.
- 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.
- Do not mark the tests.

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