

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCE
in French (6FR03/01) Paper 3

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6FR03/01 Examiner's report 2014

Description of the unit

The unit requires students to demonstrate the effectiveness of their French-language skills by presenting and taking a clear stance on any issue of their choice. They will be expected to interact effectively with the teacher/examiner, defend their views and sustain discussion as the teacher/examiner moves the conversation away from their chosen issue. They will be expected to use the language of debate and argument to discuss the issue and will also be assessed for understanding as well as communication and quality of spoken language.

Assessment

The assessment should run for 11-13 minutes.

"Students first outline their chosen issue for about 1 minute, adopting a definite stance towards the issue. They should then defend and justify their opinions for up to 4 minutes. The teacher/examiner will then initiate a spontaneous discussion in which a minimum of two further unpredictable areas of discussion will be covered"
(*Specification 2007 booklet page 6*)

"These issues may or may not be related to the chosen issue but will not require specialised factual knowledge or relate to French-language culture"
(*Specification booklet 2007 page 34*)

Advice to centres

Choice of issue

This is the most important element. Making the correct choice of issue for the Debate section will enable for suitable development in the ensuing Discussion.

Examiners are encouraged to select as the first further issue something that has been touched upon in the debate. This is to avoid possible consternation arising from the first further issue being totally unrelated to what has gone before, such as when a candidate might be asked for a view on the suggested re-introduction of "*maisons closes*" after having discussed "*giving prisoners the right to vote*".

Therefore, as an example, a debate about abortion will inevitably visit elements of the following: Women's rights/the right to life/the place of religion in society/equality of the sexes/sex education etc.

In preparing the arguments relative to abortion, candidates will have to work on these associated issues and they will thereby also be equipping themselves to respond in more detail to the first further issue.

For instance, when making the transition from the debate to the discussion, an examiner might well proceed along these lines:

"Donc, dans notre discussion sur l'avortement, vous avez dit que c'était le droit de la femme de disposer de son corps comme elle l'entendait, est-ce que vous pensez que les femmes ont obtenu tous les droits auxquels elles aspiraient?"

The discussion would then focus in more detail on aspects of this issue, about which the candidate would have something to say having previously thought about it while preparing for the debate.

Consequently, anxiety about what a candidate might encounter, once the debate is concluded, is alleviated to a large degree. In the example given above, it is improbable that a candidate would have thought to prepare for a question on "maisons closes", having done research on different types of institutions and inmates.

Similarly, issues such as *"contre les anti-dépresseurs"* and *"contre la chasse pour le plaisir,"* whilst they are perfectly valid issues in themselves, and produce vigorous debate, are less helpful in terms of the rest of the test because they generate fewer possible further issues. Thus, the remainder of the test becomes a little bit more unpredictable than necessary.

Candidates should therefore be encouraged to choose an issue which is productive in the context of the whole exam, as in preparing for it they will also be preparing for a certain amount of what will follow.

In the main, candidates chose well.

The following is a list of the most common issues:

L'avortement – la peine de mort – l'euthanasie – le mariage gay – l'adoption homosexuelle – la légalisation du cannabis/drogues douces – la réforme des prisons – le droit de vote aux prisonniers – le droit de vote à 16 ans – les quotas féminins - la société machiste – l'immigration – le voile – la place de la religion – les allocations sociales – la chirurgie esthétique – l'interdiction de fumer en public – les concours de beauté – la représentation de la femme - l'énergie nucléaire – l'expérimentation animale – la vivisection – le clonage – les mères porteuses - les écoles non-mixtes – les écoles sélectives – les écoles privées.

Note that the following were also selected, and are examples of issues that are either un-productive or impossible to argue against:

Pour la fermeture de Guantanamo – contre la pauvreté – contre la religion – pour le sport pour tous – pour les voyages scolaires à l'étranger – contre le racisme – contre les anti-dépresseurs

Caution

The quotation from the Specifications document makes mention of two very important elements of the test – spontaneity and unpredictability. Centres must take care not to prepare candidates to the extent that these two features are missing as this will reflect on a candidates' final mark.

Spontaneity

This is not an easy notion to circumscribe. It can perhaps best be understood if it is taken to mean the *language* that remains when recited material is removed.

Candidates, and centres, are naturally anxious to ensure that they enter the exam room with material that will enable them to initiate and sustain discussion. It is therefore perfectly proper for a candidate to respond to prompts using prepared sentences. However, it is not appropriate if the whole test is constructed along those lines. After the initial response, it is the examiner's responsibility to ensure that the candidate is helped to demonstrate an ability to create language spontaneously by isolating an element of what has been said and requiring the candidate to do something further with it – explain, exemplify, justify, speculate. In this way, the candidate is given an opportunity to manipulate the language resources they have, to comply with the examiner's demands.

Thus, the requirements of spontaneity and unpredictability are met. The candidate is engaged in creating language afresh and the nature of the examiner's prompts ensures there is no prior knowledge of what is coming.

Centres are reminded of the importance of this in order to allow candidates to access the full range of marks available. Examiners should avoid providing a series of cues that trigger a section of rehearsed material. This results in a test during which the candidate is asked to express opinions on a number of subjects without these ever being subject to scrutiny. It is also not appropriate to use the same questions/cues for all candidates.

On the surface, this will appear to be a fluent, informed performance but in terms of what is required by the specifications, it does not allow candidates to fully demonstrate their ability.

Assessment

A maximum of 50 marks is possible.

The candidate is assessed via 4 grids: Response – Quality of language – Reading and Research – Comprehension and Development.

Response

This attracts a maximum 20 marks.

Within it sit 4 features: spontaneity, discourse, lexis and structures, the ability to handle the language of ideas.

Spontaneity has been dealt with above.

Discourse is the ability to initiate and sustain debate or discussion on an issue. It means addressing the issue raised and exploring it through a series of exchanges.

For **Lexis and Structures**, a list of structures is available in the Specification booklet on pages 79 -82.

The “language of abstract ideas” assesses whether the candidate is able to converse at a level commensurate with a pre-university entrance examination.

Quality of language

This attracts a maximum of 7 marks.

It assesses the degree to which what the candidate is trying to say is distorted by the control of language. Communicative effectiveness is more important than grammatical precision.

Reading and Research

This attracts a maximum of 7 marks.

It assesses the degree of detailed research manifest in the Debate section and the level of general awareness evident in the Discussion.

Comprehension and Development

This attracts a maximum of 16 marks.

It assesses the ability to understand spoken French and maintain discussion on an issue by offering new avenues for exploration.

Caution

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that candidates are assessed on their ability to understand French. It follows that those who encounter questions such as "quelle est ton opinion sur ...", "qu'est-ce que tu penses de ...", are not having their comprehension tested to a truly meaningful degree. This will inevitably be reflected in the mark rewarded.

Centres should bear this in mind and ensure that some instances of *more testing* language are present.

Candidate performance

This is a difficult unit but the fact that some 99% of candidates achieve Grades A- E, with over half in A* or A is testimony to the quality of the teaching and learning that has gone on.

Almost without exception candidates are well prepared for this examination. Virtually all candidates are able to express their thoughts. For the large majority, it is pleasing to report that the level of effective communication is very high and, where given the proper opportunity, candidates are able to engage in lively debate and thoughtful discussion, developing their ideas and justifying their positions, spontaneously in response to unpredictable prompts or questions. On the whole, candidates show a clear understanding of the spoken language and very few requests for repeats or obvious misunderstandings are heard. They rarely fail to understand the main points of a statement and most can retain sufficient detail to respond appropriately.

The nature of an oral examination is such that an ability to infer meaning may not be tested. Any limiting factors there might be are more attributable to candidates' reluctance to "take over" the exchanges than any lack of intellectual or linguistic ability. It is worth reminding centres that to be access the higher marks for Response, candidates need to dominate the exchanges. It is not enough to give the "correct" answer and then await the next question. Candidates are encouraged to take the initiative.

Pronunciation and to a lesser degree, intonation are generally good and do not constitute a problem in terms of impeding communication.

Because they have been so well prepared, **lexis** is not generally a problem for candidates, especially in the Debate section.

Structures are in the main adequate, in that they allow the candidates to express their thoughts even if this is in simple language.

Main clause verbs are usually in the appropriate tense. The Present and the Conditional dominate, often associated with a dependent infinitive or a relative pronoun. This is not surprising because the nature of debate is about what someone thinks and what they would like to do to change things. The other tenses commonly used are the Imperfect (mostly in "si" clauses), the Passé Composé and the Future but it is not rare for a candidate to complete a test without using any of these.

The Subjunctive is frequently heard, pleasingly, but it is mostly confined to "globally acquired" phrases such as "je ne pense pas que ce soit une bonne idée" or "il faut qu'il fasse ..." and it is still only the more able candidates who show mastery of it. However, it is pleasing to report that there are more and more of those.

The Passive causes problems. Phrases like *L'argent est donné aux pays pauvres* are generally attempted satisfactorily but the frequently encountered English "false" passive is rarely mastered – e.g. *les pays pauvres sont donnés de l'argent*

Subordination is not always well mastered. "Qui" and "que" are interchangeable for many candidates. Verbs in the subordinate clause are too often in a non-finite state and are frequently omitted. While "ce qui" and "ce que" are not rare, this is mostly attempted by more able candidates, and almost none of the other relatives – *auquel, duquel,* and especially *dont* etc - are used. "*La raison pour laquelle j'ai choisi ...*" is quite frequently encountered, and never appears out of context. This is not necessarily a problem, except when candidates want to use verbs that take *à* or *de* – resulting in phrases such as "*ce que j'ai besoin*", which though commonly heard in native speech nowadays, is not possible.

Incidentally, "*avoir besoin*", is a tricky "verb" to use, and candidates may be advised to focus on only "*il me faut*" to avoid phrases such as "*j'ai besoin un A pour devenir médecin*". Another commonly encountered problem arising from use of this category of verb is the anglicised construction – *le livre que je voudrais parler de ...* or *l'université que je vais aller à-* which is frequently encountered.

Similarly, lack of clarity over subordination leads to misuse of "qu'est-ce que" and "quoi", resulting in utterances such as "*Je ne comprenais pas qu'est-ce qu'il voulait*" ..." and more graphically "*je comprends quoi vous dites*". Whereas the first may be regarded as authentic if incorrect usage, the same is not true of the second and points to an area of language learning that would benefit from some closer attention.

Quality of language

Gender and agreement are the commonest weaknesses, with candidates often ascribing both genders to the same noun. It is worth ensuring attention is paid to this, to avoid phrases such as *"Les femmes devraient avoir le choix de terminer une grossesse parcequ'ils ont le droit de disposer de leur (often "son") corps ..."*

Noun adjective agreement is equally worth paying attention to. Adjectives ending in *-al* rarely have the correct ending in the masculine plural. Adjectives frequently take the place in the utterance they would occupy in English *"Le reel problème est que ... / c'est une épineuse question"*.

It is worth noting that comparison of adjectives is generally well done.

Adverbs are not often used, candidates preferring to use prepositional phrases such as *"En particulier/en general..."*. On the other hand, *seulement* is often encountered as an adjective – e.g. *"La seulement personne..."*.

Subject/verb agreement is fairly accurate in main clauses but, as mentioned above, is liable to suffer in subordinate clauses – e.g. *"Les étudiants disent qu'ils trouver les frais d'université trop élevés"*.

Negatives are often used erratically. While it is perfectly acceptable in spoken language for the first part of the negative to be omitted, the second part has to be included. However on many occasions this year, it was the opposite that could be heard – e.g. *"Je ne pense il est vrai"*.

The most common examples of negatives encountered this year were *"ne ... pas"*, *"ne ... rien"*, *"ne ... jamais"*. Note that *"ne que"* is often wrongly used – *"Je n'ai que dit que..."*.

Negatives used with the infinitive are generally incorrect.

Pronouns appear to cause issue for many candidates. Direct object pronouns are reasonably well understood but indirect and disjunctive are only well handled by the more able candidates.

The most common occurrence of a direct object pronoun is in the stock phrase *"Comme je l'ai déjà dit"*. Otherwise it is generally avoided, with repetition of the noun being the preferred solution – *"le portable est utile pour contacter les parents, j'utilise mon portable pour contacter mes parents"*.

For a significant number of candidates indirect pronouns seem to be confusing, and are instead generally replaced by direct ones – e.g. *“Les parents doivent les enseigner qu’il faut...”*. It was also not uncommon to hear utterances such as *“Il faut les donner le choix...”*.

It is worth paying attention to disjunctive pronouns, as these were often inaccurate – e.g. *“Je suis allé au cinéma avec il ... / ... avec leur ...”*, *“tu peux faire ton travail chez soi”*.

Demonstrative pronouns rarely appear, except in a stock phrase such as *“Il y a ceux qui pensent que...”*. This is worth paying attention to.

Verb construction and usage is generally quite good, when used in main clauses. Candidates understand that verbs have to have subjects and usually provide the right elements. Construction of the main tenses is generally good, though the more complex tenses are rarely used – i.e. the Pluperfect, the Past Conditional and, not surprisingly, the Future Anterior.

Candidates understand that the Passé Composé is made up of 2 parts and in the main the right auxiliary is used. However, it is worth noting that there is a tendency to omit the auxiliary with certain verbs – *“Quand il mort ... quand elle née”* - but this is usually limited to these two verbs.

Past participles are usually correct, though special attention should be paid to the verbs *“lire” “recevoir”* and *“choisir”*, as these rarely appear in their correct form.

The agreement of the preceding direct object is rarely observed – however, it is something that is disappearing in native spoken French, so perhaps not too much should be made of this.

Modality can cause difficulties. *“Should”* is generally conveyed correctly through the Conditional of *devoir* but frequently there is confusion with the Imperfect of the same verb and the conditional of *“être”* is often substituted – e.g. *“Le gouvernement serait donner des subsides...”*.

A number of candidates think that the dependent infinitive should also be in the Conditional and use phrases like – *“Le gouvernement devrait donnerait des subventions...”*.

Concordance of tenses is also worth paying attention to. Phrases such as *“Quand j’étais jeune, je joue au tennis...”* occur regularly and are related to the wider problem of subordination referred to above.

Reading and Research

This area is well done. Candidates are well prepared in the Debate section, showing that they have covered all the arguments, both for and against their stance, and provide good detail in the form of statistics or reference to authoritative sources.

Where the test is conducted in the spirit of the Specification, some highly entertaining and informative debates have been heard.

The same is true of the Discussion. The level of awareness of issues is very high, in the main.

Comprehension and Development

It is rare for candidates not to understand what the examiner's question requires of them. They show very good understanding of both the language and meaning. As this element attracts a sizeable amount of marks, it is perhaps worth reminding teacher/examiners that the language used should at times be more demanding so that it can be seen as a challenge for the candidate rather than an invitation to move on to the next section.

Development is an area that needs explanation. A candidate is assessed on his or her ability to go deeper into the issue under discussion, by offering avenues for further investigation.

For examiners, this means probing for more information or opinion. For candidates, it means volunteering this information, thereby being seen to develop the issue and taking the initiative which will be rewarded in the Response section of the Mark Scheme.

Given that this is an oral examination, rather than written, it should be pointed out that giving the correct answer is only part of the exercise. Demonstrating one's range and command of the language is arguably the more important aspect. As such, candidates should demonstrate a proactive approach to the examination – in order to access the full range of marks available.

Recommendations

Centres are producing candidates who are very able communicators, as shown by the large numbers being awarded the highest grades. They are to be congratulated on this achievement.

This report has attempted to identify areas where improvements could be made.

Candidates' understanding of the spoken word, their research skills and their pronunciation of French are good.

Their range of lexis and structures is satisfactory.

As a final point, it is worth reminding centres some of the principal areas requiring particular attention are:

- subordination
- use of pronouns.

NB: Please note that following notification on the qualification page of the Pearson/Edexcel website, and via the updates from the Subject Advisor, Mr Alistair Drewery, we will no longer be accepting audio cassettes for assessment from September 2014 onwards.

Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response

Marking guidance for oral examiners

Tests that are too short

The timing of the test begins the moment the candidate starts the presentation.

A test is too short if it is less than 10 minutes 30 seconds (including a 30 second tolerance).

Drop down one mark band to the corresponding mark across the following assessment grids:

'Response'

'Comprehension and Development'

e.g.

5–8	Limited incidence of spontaneous discourse; limited range of lexis and structures; very little evidence of abstract language.
9–12	Satisfactory incidence of spontaneous discourse; range of lexis and structures adequate with some ability to handle language of abstract concepts.
13–16	Frequent examples of spontaneous discourse; good range of lexis and structures; good use of abstract concepts.

If a candidate would have scored 12 for Response, they should be given 8, if they would have scored 9, they should be given 5. A similar adjustment would be made to the mark for Comprehension and Development. This adjustment should not be applied to marks for Quality of language or Reading and Research.

Tests that are too long

Once the 13 minute mark has passed, the examiner stops listening at the end of the next sentence/sense group.

Tests that do not have a debatable or defensible issue

e.g. *where the candidate does not present or defend a definite stance, or the teacher-examiner fails to give the candidate an opportunity to justify their opinions.*

Candidates will be limited to scoring a maximum of 4 for 'Reading and Research'.

This may affect the marks given for 'Comprehension and Development'.

Tests that do not move away from initial issue/topic

e.g. *further unpredictable areas of discussion are not covered and/or a monologue.*

Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score. Please see the grids.

Response	
Only one unpredictable area discussed	No more than 12 marks
No unpredictable areas discussed	No more than 8 marks

Reading and research	
Only one unpredictable area discussed	No more than 4 marks
No unpredictable areas discussed	No more than 3 marks

Comprehension and development	
Only one unpredictable area discussed	No more than 10 marks
No unpredictable areas discussed	No more than 7 marks

Spontaneity/Response

A performance which is, in the marker's view, *largely* recited, and demonstrates *very little* spontaneity as well as impaired intonation may suggest pre-learning. If the examiner believes that a test has been pre-learnt then the mark for **Response** will be limited to 8, irrespective of use of lexis/structure/abstract language.

A pre-learnt test may also affect the mark given for **Comprehension and Development** if it does not permit a natural and logical interaction.

It is important that the PE and team leaders can see clearly the justification for marks awarded and examiners should note briefly on the OR3 form the reason for any caps which are applied in marking an oral test.

If a score of '0' is awarded for any of the assessment grids, the recording should be referred to your Team Leader.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

