



General Certificate of Education

French 1651

Specification

FRE2T Speaking

Report on the Examination

2011 examination - January series

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Administration

Many centres used the January 2011 tests to try out recording media other than cassettes and the results were very good indeed. The best quality recordings were produced on USB memory sticks with both examiner questions and candidate responses delivered and recorded with clarity. 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.

One or two issues remain with the completion of paperwork: it is much appreciated when all of the information sought on the STMS is provided including centre number and the FRE2T code for the test. Teacher-examiners are reminded that there should now be only one candidate per STMS. The overall timing of the tests was very good: few lasted in excess of 15 minutes. Indeed the issue of overall timing when it occurred was that the tests were too short, in some cases by as much as three minutes. That said, there remain issues to do with the timings of individual parts of the test that centres are advised to address in the interests of their candidates.

Part 1: Discussion of stimulus card

The five minutes allocated to this first part of the test should ideally be divided into two equal parts of two and a half minutes each: this recommendation is made in order to encourage candidates to gain maximum marks for each of the two parts. Very many candidates are dealing with the printed questions in less than two minutes – sometimes in a lot less than two minutes – and this means that there is not sufficient material in the responses to warrant anything higher than 3/5. Candidates should be advised to spend their preparation time as effectively as possible, looking for opportunities in the printed questions to bring in a wide range of relevant points. Where they are asked if they agree or disagree with an opinion, more can be said if they both agree and disagree and give reasons why; they should also be prepared to take a more general view of questions. Often where a general question is asked, candidates answer only from a rather narrow, personal perspective. The content in this section must be to do with views and opinions and so there is little or no point in giving detailed descriptions of images on the card or of giving a lot of factual information.

In the discussion, the majority of examiners remained within the sub-topic stated on the card and there were some very good exchanges of views and opinions. Questions designed to elicit information (what sports do you do? when? where? how often? with whom?) are the wrong questions to be asking at this level as they simply do not provide the opportunities for views and opinions to be expressed, let alone developed. Some comments are offered below on individual stimulus cards from the January 2011 series:

Card A: Performances were rather mixed with some excellent answers to the printed questions, though on occasion this was to the detriment of the discussion as candidates spent too long developing their points. Other candidates repeated themselves in their answers to Questions 2, 3 and 5. In a few cases, candidates did not give the gist of the card when answering the first question but tried to summarise all they knew about the cinema in England and France. Question 4 was often not well answered. Almost all candidates were able to develop a range of ideas and opinions in the more general discussion.

Card B: All candidates were in favour of the initiative, though their reasons were not always detailed enough. Question 3 did not always provide sufficient development of the dangers of failing to exercise with a number of candidates concentrating on the advantages of sport, without making the required link. A large number of candidates appeared to ignore *trop* in the final question or to read it as *très* and this sometimes led to some very long, rambling answers where teacher-examiners should have intervened and begun the discussion sooner. There were some interesting opinions on the 2012 Olympics, on the Wii and on sport in schools, though ideas on how to encourage participation in sport were often far from convincing.

Card C: Question 2 sometimes led to candidates explaining how friends are important and then going on to repeat virtually the same points in Question 4. Less able candidates struggled with the final question, which was often brief and unconvincing. Some questions in the discussion led to further repetition of points already made, with questions such as *Un bon ami, ça veut dire quoi?* There were several factual questions such as *Qu'est-ce que tu fais le week-end avec tes amis?* which rarely led to an expression of views and opinions. Questions were too narrow at times, such as when the teacher-examiner concentrated solely on asking for more and more details of the qualities of a best friend and of the reasons for arguments.

Card D: Some candidates just considered the positive points of the internet and failed to highlight a single negative aspect, while many wasted valuable opportunities to develop a range of points by just mentioning one or two risks or dangers. Life without the internet and Facebook in particular would seem to be inconceivable for the majority of candidates. Answers to Question 5 gave more able candidates the opportunity to develop some very well-considered points.

Card E: Question 2 was not answered particularly well and Question 5 lacked the development expected at this level. Some questions in the discussion, such as *La mode est importante pour toi?* led to a repetition of points already made.

Card F: Performances seemed to be quite polarised on this card. There were some excellent points made in response to the printed questions at the top end of the entry and the lower end produced some very poor responses. Holidays again became the general discussion, very factual with an abundance of personal information questions and GCSE-type time-frame hoops to be jumped through. This is not what speaking is about at AS.

Overall, candidates were not always offered sufficient opportunities to offer views, opinions and clearly developed ideas in the discussion, with several teacher-examiners obviously working from a pre-set list of questions and not listening attentively enough to follow up on points made by the candidates or to avoid eliciting points already expressed in the first section. However, it was pleasing to note that most of the discussions were quite well-conducted and the majority of candidates had plenty to say on all sub-topics.

Part 2: Conversation

Some centres used to the Unit 3 test of the legacy specification still believe this new Unit 2 is a three-part test – which it is not. The nominated topic is the first conversation topic in Part 2 and the element of **conversation** is to be emphasised as some candidates were left to deliver a presentation on their "chosen" topic, which is not permitted.

Most nominated topics had been wisely supported by bullet-points which focussed on views and opinions and there were fewer instances of candidates choosing to talk from the personal information perspective. That said, there does seem to be something of a worrying trend when it comes to boys talking about sport in that they nearly all simply provide information and facts, including the match scores in the local or school league for the past two or three seasons!

There were few cases where all topics were not covered in the second part of the test and few cases where mis-timings resulted in a reduction in the mark for Interaction.

While pronunciation was generally good and sometimes very good indeed, a number of performances continue to be marred by errors with some fairly common words such as:- *famille parents femme semaine beaucoup intéressant ennuyeux seulement dangereux essentiel meilleur trop temps écran alcool*

AO3 Knowledge of Grammar

Comments in this section are not specifically related to Knowledge of Grammar but it is appropriate that they are made: there is an increasing number of candidates who rely not so much on pre-learnt responses in the sense of "chunks" of language but on those elements of pre-learnt language that textbooks refer to as "useful phrases". Teachers preparing candidates should discourage them from using at all costs the set phrases they have learnt or they should emphasise that candidates really consider very carefully if the learnt expression is appropriate. The *revers de la médaille* is produced even though the other side of said *médaille* has had no mention; *nul ne saurait douter que* is thrown into an answer where neither the meaning of the phrase nor the register is appropriate; one candidate illustrated very clearly this point when in response to the question *Comment est votre meilleur ami?* replied: *Les avis sont partagés sur cette question dans la société de nos jours.*

More specifically on Knowledge of Grammar, areas causing concern are as follows:

- Failure to conjugate common verbs correctly – *ils va elle peuve ils finit ils fait la famille sont nous devons je sortis* - or else misusing the subjunctive – *si elle ne le fasse pas je pense qu'il soit...*
- *Avoir* and *être* were frequently muddled - *ils ont stressés je suis trente quand j'ai plus âgé.*
- Adjectives and adverbs often confused – *une manière mal une bien partenaire les seulement gens la mieux qualité* - and comparatives were particularly poor – *plus bon elle est plus mieux.*
- Errors with all types of pronouns– *je peux se détendre il a influencé moi ils peuvent on transporter chez leur avec ils.*
- Considerable confusion over the use of participles – *fatigant/fatigué excitant/excité* – with plural nouns used in the singular – *une vacance un gen* - as well as with *avant/devant qui/que très/trop/plus parce que/à cause de raconter/rencontrer temps/fois jouer à/de*
- There was the usual Anglicisms/inventions, usually delivered in the candidate's best French accent, including *fashionable convenient enjoyable impressive rélevant especialement résoudre expérierer promoter*

Annual Teacher Support Meetings

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2011 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 Events page of the AQA website (www.aqa.org.uk) in due course.

Centres are reminded that a wealth of support documents can be found on our web pages http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/languages/french_materials.php These include the latest version of the specification, past papers, reports on the examination, Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations and the Teacher Resource Bank (TRB). For FRE2, the TRB includes advice to teachers conducting your own tests and the materials from the most recent set of Teacher

Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests; this is an invaluable resource for preparing candidates for future examinations.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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