



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

French

FRE2T

(Specification 2650)

Unit 2: Speaking Test

Report on the Examination

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General

Although they continue to become fewer year on year, there are still centres where teacher-examiners do not keep to the correct timings of the different parts of the test. These mis-timings can have a negative impact on the student's marks. Students who are allowed to speak for four minutes in response to the printed questions in Part 1, for example, and who are then limited to one minute in the general discussion of the sub-topic will not match a descriptor in that one minute above a mark of 2 out of 5. If they are allowed to go on for longer with the general discussion in Part 1, then the extra time there will potentially mean lost marks for Interaction because the third topic in Part 2 will have been dealt with inadequately. All teacher-examiners are therefore urged to allocate the correct amount of time to each part of the test and to encourage their students to use their time efficiently when responding to the printed questions.

Topic conversations that last for fewer than two minutes are considered to be an inadequate treatment of the topic and the penalty of a reduction of one band for Interaction is applied (see Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations for further guidance on this).

Part 1 Discussion of the Stimulus Card

5 minutes (approximate split 2½ for printed questions and 2½ minutes for discussion)

Part 2 Conversation

- Discussion of student's nominated topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of second topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds
- Discussion of third topic: 3 minutes 20 seconds.

Examiners using timing devices are generally very accurate at allocating time across the different parts but there should be no need to set and reset the device at the beginning and end of each topic under discussion. Again this is very distracting for students particularly when there are repeated "beeps" as different attempts to get the device to work properly are made.

Centres are asked to pay particular attention to the following matters:

- Clear recordings with no background hissing and with students well-positioned in relation to the microphone so that their responses are audible – examiners cannot mark what they cannot hear
- Accurate time-keeping and the correct allocation of time to the relevant sections of tests as set out in the *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations* booklet (MFL/TN) available on e-AQA in the Secure Key Materials section
- Accurate completion of AQA documentation with all information provided
- Consistency throughout the tests in the use of either *tu* or *vous* and attention paid to maintaining this consistency with possessive adjectives and all pronouns (it should be noted that it is permissible to change *vous* to *tu* for the printed questions in Part 1)
- Responsive questioning that ensures natural interaction and engages the students in some degree of spontaneous exchanges rather than questions picked off from a set list with little or no follow-up on what a student actually says
- Differentiated questioning according to levels of ability so that less able students are not left struggling to respond to questions that are clearly beyond their level of proficiency

- Discouraging students from giving detailed descriptions of what is on a stimulus card.

Audibility

In too many cases, even where technology more advanced than cassettes is used, examiners marking tests are having to make a real effort to hear and interpret what a student is saying. The importance of checking that the level of audibility is set correctly prior to conducting and recording the tests cannot be over-emphasised.

Part 1: Discussion of the Stimulus Card

There are still cases where teacher-examiners move beyond the sub-topic in the general discussion on the stimulus card. It is not acceptable for the discussion in the second part of Part 1 to move beyond the sub-topic stated on the card. This is happening across all topics and teacher-examiners are urged to familiarise themselves fully with the sub-topic divisions. There is an argument that ‘drifting’ from, for example, advertising *per se* to advertising on television is a logical direction for a discussion to take, but the risk is that in the quite pressured situation of the test the switch back to advertising does not happen and a discussion about television ensues. The advice is therefore not to venture beyond the sub-topic in the first place, however tempting it might be so to do.

A very small number of centres failed to treat this first part of the test as a discussion and allowed students to talk uninterrupted for five minutes about the stimulus card, using the printed questions as prompts for the aspects to be covered. The correct way to conduct Part 1 is set out very clearly in the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations available in Secure Key Materials section of e-AQA and is exemplified in the Teacher Support materials available in the Teacher Resource Bank for GCE French on AQA’s website.

There were many instances of what appeared to be a lack of awareness on the part of students of the need **to develop** a wide range of points in response to the questions printed on the stimulus card. Effective use of preparation time is something that can be practised through group brainstorming of the potential scope of questions as a spring-board for developing a range of points. Factual information plus reasons plus examples is a useful “formula” for students to use as a template for responses to the printed questions and they should, of course, then, in the second part of Part 1 be trying to express as wide a range of views and opinions as possible with the template of opinions plus reasons plus examples.

There were a disconcerting number of cases where examiners seemed either to ignore or not to have heard what students had said. This occurs particularly in the sub-topic general discussion in Part 1 of the test. Questions forcing the student to repeat material used in response to the printed questions are again wasted opportunities in that the repetition cannot be credited and this practice is virtually placing a ceiling of 3/5 on the mark for the second part of Part 1.

There were, as usual, many examples of tests that were extremely well-conducted. Examiners were genuinely appreciative of some excellent performances.

The following points refer to specific stimulus cards used in the January 2012 series of tests.

Card A Not all students got to grips with the *garçons/filles* element of the text and so answers to Question 2 were not always as pertinent as they might have been. Several students did not understand the last question at all. The more able students looked at all aspects of how easy or difficult it might prove to keep friends over the years, while all students were able to give reasonable answers to Question 4.

Card B A number of students failed to grasp the full import of the text and so answers to the second question were sometimes limited to talking about *la télé-réalité* with several points then being repeated in response to Question 4.

Card C Performances were rather mixed with some excellent answers to the set questions, though, surprisingly, several students misunderstood Question 3 and either talked about why they liked going to the cinema or else listed the different types of films that could be seen. Almost all were able to develop a range of ideas and opinions in the more general discussion.

Card D Not all students got to grips with the full significance of the text as demonstrated in answers to the first two questions. There were some well-developed answers to Questions 3 and 4, though a minority just looked at one danger to health, usually alcohol, rather than considering a wider range of issues. In a few cases the personal focus of Questions 5 was missed and students just talked about *une vie saine* in general.

Card E The set questions elicited some well-thought out and often highly personal responses, although in one case the student insisted he had no experience of divorce and so he could not possibly comment for Question 2! Question 5 was not always understood and many struggled to give a coherent response.

Card F It had plenty to say about Facebook and all questions were generally handled quite well. Question 5 was occasionally not understood and a number of students missed the personal focus of the question and just talked about the importance of the internet for society in general.

Part 2 General Conversation

Teacher-examiners are encouraged to have some quick-reference system of noting that each topic has been covered in the course of the test. A first stage in getting this right is to ensure 100% familiarity with which sub-topics belong with which topics so that errors do not occur inadvertently. Failure to cover each of the four topic areas across the test results in the Interaction mark being reduced by 2. A topic coverage grid is provided in the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations which teacher-examiners may find useful.

In general terms the discussion of the nominated topic tended to follow a rather predictable pattern of *alors parle-moi de...* to introduce a mini-presentation around each bullet-point. When there is little or no follow-up to points made by the student, this will not attract a high mark for Interaction. Sometimes such an approach characterised the discussion of the remaining topics, but there did seem to be an increased willingness by teacher-examiners to probe a little bit further some of the responses students made.

With each of the three topics for discussion it is important that teacher-examiners consider their questions in the context of the assessment criteria if students are to be given every opportunity to do their best. Too much time, in some cases, is being spent on question types that elicit factual information: in the context of a film, *De quoi s'agit-il?* is not the most effective question as it will invite and encourage a narrative summary of the film and the time taken to deliver that is so much better spent – in terms of the marks the performance will attract – on questions that elicit views and opinions. Likewise *Parle(z)-moi de...* in the context of family, friends, favourite television programmes, advertisements etc is also something of a 'high risk' (rather than a high mark) type of question. *Que fais-tu / faites-vous...?* in the context of sport and healthy living are again question types that do not readily lend themselves to being dealt with to elicit opinions.

In terms of preparing students for the test and linked closely to this would be the advice for them to avoid excessive use of *je* statements. Many students fail to hear in a question the more

general perspective that is being sought: *que devrait-on faire...?* will be converted by the student to *que fais-tu / faites-vous?* It is challenging but very useful to encourage students to operate in *je* mode only when it has been introduced by *par exemple, moi*. Such a constraint encourages the discipline of concentrating on a more general perspective, on opinions and views, and also on developing such opinions and views through examples relevant to the student himself or herself. Factual information is useful as a source of development and exemplification of an answer: at this level it will not attract many marks for Interaction if it is all or most of what the student offers.

Question-types

As a general rule questions that elicit factual responses or personal information and offer little or no scope for opinions and views to be expressed should be avoided. Similarly, questions that lead students to clear the “hoops and hurdles” of past, present and future time-frames have no place in the AS speaking test. Thus, within the sub-topic of friendship, a question such as *Qu’as-tu fait le week-end dernier avec tes ami(e)s?* is a wasted question because it is asking only for factual information rather than giving the student the opportunity to express views and opinions. The test for the suitability of a question is very simply the extent to which it will enable the student to express views and opinions and this applies consistently across both parts of the test. It has serious implications particularly for the bullet-points the student presents to support the discussion of the nominated topic.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Convert raw or scaled marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion.