

A-level

FRENCH

Unit 4 Speaking
Report on the Examination

FRE4T/V
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Administration of FRE4T

The recording of tests was of a high quality in most cases and the vast majority of schools and colleges are submitting tests on either CDs or memory sticks. It should be noted that cassettes are now no longer an acceptable medium for the recorded storage of tests. In a small number of cases the positioning of the microphone or recording device meant that students' responses were less clear than examiners' questions and there was also a significant number of tests conducted in areas where background noise and general disruption were a major distraction. Timings for Unit 4 seem to present fewer problems than for Unit 2: students were generally very well prepared to present their one minute outline succinctly and the 5 minutes allocated to Part 1 was well respected. The remaining time for the conversation was allocated evenly across the two cultural topics in most cases.

Part 1: stimulus cards

The question *De quoi s'agit-il?* is neither an appropriate nor the required way of beginning the test. Having established in French which opinion the student is going to defend, the examiner should make the statement *Vous avez une minute pour présenter votre point de vue: allez-y* or something similar. Many students were rather too liberal in the way they allowed themselves to interpret the content of the stimulus card and thus organise the content of their one minute outline, opting in some cases to look no further than the sub-topic and prepare a very general introduction which had little direct bearing on the specific focus of the card. This invariably leads to echoes of a card from a previous series. It is unlikely that such an outline will gain the highest mark and it is very clearly the case that such an outline cannot then be allowed to set the agenda for the remaining four minutes of discussion. The role of the examiner within that general discussion is to steer the student – back, if necessary – to a discussion of the particular thrust of the stimulus card. Students preparing for the test with a visiting examiner need to be especially aware of this: they cannot expect the examiner to refer to points made in the one-minute outline if such points are “off-target” in terms of the focus of the stimulus card. Otherwise, why have a stimulus card?

Card A

Virtually all students chose Opinion 2, although there were some staunch supporters of nuclear energy who had a convincing answer to every challenge offered. Some students repeated the text verbatim, failing to appreciate that no credit is given for lifting material from the stimulus card, while others presented six or seven points that were all relevant but lacked the necessary development or else extolled the virtues of renewable energy in general terms. Better students considered the suitability and implications of nuclear energy for different countries around the world, with suggestions for viable alternative forms of energy where appropriate. Some students seemed to repeat the same points made in the initial outline when challenged by the examiner, without the requisite development and exemplification of their ideas.

Card B

The overwhelming majority of students opted for Opinion 2. Unfortunately, at times summaries just seemed to present a general list of points in favour of multiculturalism, without the necessary focus on integration. More pertinent arguments examined a variety of reasons why integration can and does succeed, with students being prepared to justify their points with practical illustrations drawn from their own experiences in schools and the local environment. However, students do need to be clear about what opinion they are meant to be defending, as statements that contradict the chosen viewpoint will not be credited.

Card C

Opinion 2 was the more popular choice. Those opting for Opinion 1 often managed to present a reasonable summary, but frequently failed to illustrate and justify their points satisfactorily in the

face of challenges and often agreed with several points made by the examiner. Those taking the opposite stance generally considered key factors to be poverty, poor neighbourhoods, peer pressure, gang culture, unsatisfactory education, boredom and the general *malaise* pervading society. Some students from one-parent families were quick to point out they had no criminal tendencies and to praise their upbringing, saying that individuals should be held responsible for their own actions and punished accordingly, rather than blaming parents.

Card D

Opinion 1 was the slightly more popular option. However, in many cases no reference was made to Europe at all, with summaries talking generally about global issues of pollution. It was not always immediately clear which viewpoint was being defended due to the lack of focus and points seemingly made in support of both sides of the argument. More relevant summaries looked at specific areas where Europe could and should improve, considering the role of governments, education and the individual. Those opting for Opinion 2 were not always able to present a convincing defence of their stance and did not score highly through basically repeating the same point, such as recycling or renewable energy being the solution, without additional development, in response to a number of challenges.

Card E

Opinion 2 was virtually the unanimous choice here. Occasionally the range of points was not sufficiently wide to justify the top mark being awarded, either through too long being spent elaborating one particular point or else on somewhat simplistic generalisations about racism. However, many students were able to look at the causes and effects of racist behaviour, often giving practical and personal examples drawn from families, schools, social groups and the workplace and to justify their opinions convincingly in the face of challenges from the examiner.

Card F

Opinion 2 was by far the more popular choice. Summaries sometimes just considered the causes of poverty in rather general terms, but better arguments focused on the importance of and practical ways of interpreting individual responsibility, the mutual benefits to be gained from helping the desperately poor and destitute and the need for global solidarity, if poverty is not to present a real threat to the world's future.

Part 2: discussion of cultural topics

There were some really outstanding discussions on the Cultural Topics, which showed that students had appreciated studying a host of different subjects, with film directors and literary texts being particularly popular. Where students had had some personal choice for one of their topics, examiners' questions were suitably varied and led to some genuinely spontaneous development of ideas and opinions in meaningful discussions, which were a pleasure to listen to. On the other hand, there were still a considerable number of schools and colleges where teacher-examiners used a limited number of questions for all students, with few if any attempts to pick up on points and challenge speakers to justify, exemplify or defend their opinions. Some teacher-examiners are still wasting time asking students to state exactly what Cultural Topics they have studied. Questions such as "*Qui est Camus? Nommez quelques œuvres de Camus. Parlez-moi de son œuvre l'Etranger*" should be avoided as they do not allow for any meaningful interaction. There are still cases of too many factual questions being asked on history and region topics, but conduct here has greatly improved and most examiners are seeking the students' views and opinions with the development and justification necessary to score highly on Interaction.

Knowledge of Grammar (AO3)

While performances were generally good to excellent, even within this range there are some recurrent errors which at this level could and should be avoided. Some of the more common are:

Personal pronouns

No distinction between direct and indirect object pronouns

eg, ils les donnent beaucoup de problèmes

Quand je lui vois.

Eux is very rarely used (avec ils, pour ils, avec les)

Je ne suis pas d'accord avec les

Negatives

Poor use of negatives leading to complete nonsense at times

eg, personne ne fait pas rien pour aider

Le gouvernement n'a fait pas aucun effort.

Les pauvres n'ont pas aucun d'argent.

Adjectives and adverbs

The tendency is to use adverbs in place of adjectives

eg, le seulement moyen pour combattre le mal comportement

le nucléaire est mal pour

La mieux solution

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

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.