

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in French(4FR0/03)
Pearson Edexcel Certificate
in French(KFR0/03)

Paper 3: Speaking in French

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International GCSE French
Unit 3 Speaking in French
Examiner Report

Section A

As per last series, the vast majority of presentations were delivered with a pleasing degree of confidence and clarity. This component allows candidates the opportunity to settle into the process of the speaking test and to acclimatise to this environment. Where the pace is reduced due to some natural hesitation on the part of the candidate, this does not reflect negatively upon performance and the mark awarded for Presentation/Communication/Fluency is not affected. A little natural hesitation is welcome, as it suggests that the candidate will be well prepared to take part in a spontaneous discussion.

In a large number of instances, the discussion was somewhat less developed than the presentation, but it did nevertheless allow the candidates ample opportunity to discuss issues of their own choice. The most effective transitions between presentation and discussion were in cases where the presentation had not been too rehearsed, thus allowing the interviewer to draw the candidate into a free flowing dialogue which was a natural progression from the presentation. There was more opportunity for the candidate and the interviewer to interact when some of the initial and subsequent questions were totally unexpected. There were a few instances where the candidate seemed to be meeting the interviewer for the very first time. Spontaneous dialogue seemed rather more difficult to sustain in these circumstances. In the majority of cases, the interviewer had a prior appreciation of each individual candidate's linguistic level and personality. It was therefore much easier to pitch the discussion at the appropriate level. In the previous series, candidates tended to score marginally higher marks here than during the two conversations in section B. This was less the case this year, where there was slightly more parity of performance across sections A and B.

Candidates had selected a significant range of images for use in section A. In most cases, these images reflected the requirements of this specification and therefore portrayed all three prescribed elements: people, objects and interaction. In almost all cases where the candidate selected a picture based on personal experience, both the initial presentation and even the ensuing discussion were fluent. There were nevertheless some instances where the candidate seemed to have been presented with a picture just prior to the examination, possibly for the purpose of meeting the requirements of the examination. These were rarely successful as a resource, as it was usually much more difficult to maximise and exploit the discussion. These pictures tended to contain details with which the candidate was much less familiar. The discussions they engendered would tend to lie beyond the linguistic reach of the candidate. These pictures were rarely suited to the three stages of questions contained within the discussion element.

Where pictures were both in colour and clear, it allowed the interviewer to exploit the image more comprehensively during the discussion, targeting specific detail

where appropriate. Pictures usually worked well if there were plenty of things happening within the scene. If the candidate was able to relate to people and events within the picture, responses tended to be much more spontaneous and precise, being based upon the candidate's personal experiences and views. Images containing lots of activity did however have a negative impact upon performance in cases where the candidate was totally unfamiliar with the people and events portrayed. In these instances, there seemed to be rather too much happening in the picture, with the potential for too many ensuing issues well beyond the candidate's grasp.

A significant number of cartoon based pictures were chosen by candidates this series. In many instances, these were developed in original and diverse ways. This style of picture did tend to work most effectively for more confident candidates. One of the most universally successful scenarios involved pictures where family members were depicted. This type of image allowed less confident candidates to settle into the ensuing discussion, after having presented key information regarding family members and events. These candidates were less likely to become confused, as they felt comfortable and familiar with the content. The candidate's mood was often assisted by such images, as they tended to portray joyful events, including family celebrations and birthdays. The issues arising from these images involved areas the candidate was keen and more importantly able to discuss, with a degree of elaboration. This allowed even less confident candidates to direct the discussion to their best advantage.

It was again pleasing to note that interviewers would only tend to draw candidates into more obscure and complex discussions if they were confident that the candidate would be able to contend with this level of interaction. There were only a few cases where candidates were faced with a level of linguistic and conceptual tasks beyond their reach.

During the discussion, it is a requirement that all three stages of questioning be included. This involves questions relating directly to the picture, questions which go further and questions on the wider topic area.

Excellent practice was usually evident in respect of the questioning techniques used in the discussion. There were however a small number of interviewers who had not registered what the candidate had offered during the presentation, as they then proceeded to elicit precisely the same information during the discussion. Most interviewers were mindful to minimise the use of closed questions. As most interviewers knew their candidates well, they were equally able to avoid asking questions aimed at assessing language well beyond each candidate's level of competency.

Most interviewers were careful not to continually interrupt candidates in mid response. This usually limits candidate performance, such as in cases where they are not allowed adequate time to expand responses via the use of a subordinate clause. However, in those instances where an interviewer's question was misinterpreted by a candidate, it was excellent practice to guide the candidate

towards the desired theme. This was typically done in a most sensitive and unobtrusive manner, indicative of interviewing at its best.

Section B

For those interviewers who are unfamiliar with the specification, the Sample Assessment Materials offer types of questions interviewers may wish to ask candidates. These examples are nevertheless intended to serve merely as a guide. Where the SAMS materials are adhered to very rigidly, they do not usually elicit optimal outcomes. There were thankfully only a tiny minority of interviewers who simply asked questions from the published list. As a guidance tool, these sample questions support centres whose staff are not familiar with this speaking test. They may be very helpful for interviewers who do not know the candidates. Most recordings showed a significant range of suitable question types, allowing candidates to access their optimal range of structures and vocabulary. Interviewers were indeed very skilled in drawing out excellent performances, thanks to cleverly targeted questions designed for the individual rather than the entire group.

Candidates need to be provided with several opportunities to expand responses, express and justify opinions and to show a degree of initiative. In terms of technique, some candidates did however seem unaware of how important it was to develop their answers, even when they had the skill to do so with ease.

The most confident candidates were expected to respond to a broad range of questions across the two conversations. In virtually all instances, interviewers were mindful of the need to elicit optimal performances from less confident candidates. In such cases, the interviewer only escalated the level towards more developmental areas if candidates were clearly ready to proceed. Most importantly, it was pleasing to note that the rephrasing and repeating of questions was handled in a sensitive way, in order to keep candidates at their ease.

Conduct of Examination

On the whole, centres are to be applauded for adhering to the requirements on timings, allowing candidates to access the whole time window available for each element.

In section A, there were some centres where most presentations lasted between ten and thirty seconds, as opposed to the maximum one minute. Equally, discussions were often limited to about two minutes, as opposed to the maximum of three minutes. For the presentation, there were occasional instances where the maximum time limit was exceeded by a significant margin.

In Section B, each conversation should last about three minutes. In a number of cases, conversation 1 was brief, meaning that candidates were not able to access the full range of marks. Where the interviewer realises that Conversation 1 is too

short, this must never be compensated by making the second conversation too long.

Utterances which take place beyond the prescribed limits during any element of the speaking test cannot be rewarded, as each element is timed independently.

The required transition between two conversations was made clear by the interviewer in the majority of cases. Candidate responses were nearly always better in cases where interviewers showed a genuine interest and empathy. Candidates were generally enthusiastic to share their experiences with interviewers who were clearly not reading questions from a script. In such instances, candidates were much more likely to expand and develop responses.

Most centres adhered to the procedures concerning topics. However there were a number of instances where more than one conversation/discussion (in either section A or B) related to the same topic area. **Each topic area can only be covered once in any of the three parts of conversation – intentionally or unintentionally.**

Administrative Matters

Most centres continued to offer an excellent standard of administration during this second series of the new specification. This approach was greatly appreciated and facilitated the assessment process.

In the vast majority of cases, CDs/USBs were correctly labelled. Accompanying documentation was usually presented with excellent attention to detail. In some cases, centre documentation was incomplete or taken from the previous specification. Pictures/Photographs relating to Section A were missing from some parcels or not attached to the Candidate cover forms. There were instances where signatures were missing from both Candidate cover sheets and registers. Sub-topic areas should be noted on the Candidate cover sheet. The current Specification includes the appropriate guidelines on pages 44-45. This section is helpful for all centres, as this is a relatively new specification.

Centres are kindly asked to check recordings and to verify that CDs/USBs are not faulty. It was pleasing to note that most interviewers were mindful to ensure that recordings were clearly audible. Checking the first recording of the session immediately after the test is strongly recommended as this facilitates any necessary changes to recording procedures. Some recordings were too “quiet” or rendered almost inaudible due to obtrusive background noise. In some instances this series, the interviewer could be heard very clearly, but candidate utterances were sometimes very faint. The microphone should always be placed in such a position that it favours the candidate rather than the interviewer.

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