

# GCSE

# CHINESE

Unit 3 Speaking  
Report on the Examination

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## General comments

This was the third year of the GCSE award in Chinese Speaking and, as in previous years, there was a positive response to this specification. Evidence indicated that the specification allows teachers the scope to engage their students with attainable goals and flexible content and it was very pleasing to see another big increase in the number of schools that entered students this year. Most schools administered and carried out the tests very well. In particular, some schools that had used this specification in the previous year administered and carried out the tasks to a much higher standard this year. On the whole students seem to have been well prepared for their tasks and well guided by their teachers. However, in a minority of cases, the detailed instructions for the submission and conduct of the test seem to have been misunderstood, misinterpreted or only partly implemented, and this sometimes seriously delayed the moderation work and occasionally disadvantaged the students. Fortunately, many schools responded promptly to requests for these issues to be put right. Teachers should be aware that there is a great deal of help available during the preparation, teaching and assessment of students through e-AQA, the AQA website: <http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/chinese-mandarin/gcse/chinese-mandarin-4670/controlled-assessment> and via the Assessment Adviser, who is available to give advice on all aspects of the specification. In order that the requirements of the specification be very clearly understood and the criteria applied correctly, the key messages are listed below, followed by specific comments on this year's work.

## Key messages

### Administrative matters: what to submit

- One recorded task per student, as a separate track on CD/memory stick
- The Task Sheet (with bullet points/questions) for the recorded task (The student's copy MUST be in English: the task title and bullet points; the teacher's copy may be in Chinese and an unpredictable question for each student MUST be included.)
- A copy of the unpredictable question(s) used for the recorded task (4-6 are recommended, depending on the number of students entered.)
- A Task Planning Form (TPF) for the recorded task – this is optional, but if used must contain a maximum of 40 words in English, in Chinese characters or Pinyin. Drawings, photos, icons or visuals of any kind, full sentences or long phrases are NOT allowed.
- A Candidate Record Form (CRF), one per student, fully completed and signed (No signature, no award!)
- Centre Declaration Sheet (CDS), one per centre – must be ticked and signed, as appropriate
- Two Centre Mark Forms (CMF), or Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) or Supplementary Centre Mark Forms (SCMF) - one for SR (recorded task) and one for SU (unrecorded task), the top copies going to AQA, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> copies to the moderator
- Schools are reminded that cassette recordings will no longer be accepted from 2014 (Please submit evidence for future series on CD or memory stick.)
- If any of the above items are missing, moderation cannot take place and the students could be disadvantaged.

### Examining technique

- It is recommended that, if possible, a quiet area is found for recording to avoid extraneous noises.

- If an external microphone is used for recording, the microphone should be positioned so that both teacher/examiner and students are clearly audible – please try out the recording equipment in situ before beginning any examinations.
- At the beginning of each recording, the component code, school name, number, student name, number and the task title MUST be announced by the teacher/examiner, not by the student.
- Tasks MUST be completed in the form of a dialogue, and MUST be conducted in Chinese (Teacher MUST ask the questions in Chinese, not in English, nor English – Chinese bilingual language)
- To score full marks for Communication, the teacher/examiner MUST ensure that the students are able to give information on all bullet points on the task sheet, including the unpredictable question. If one or more bullet points are not covered by the student, for any reason, this will affect the maximum mark available for Communication, which will inevitably affect the award of a mark for the other three aspects.
- The timing, between 4 and 6 minutes, MUST be kept to. This begins when the teacher/interlocutor asks the first bullet point in the task.
- To score high marks for Communication, students need to show their ability to speak with confidence and narrate events where appropriate. In order to do this, they will have to develop their answers well. They will have to offer ideas / opinions / points of view (minimum 2) and be able to explain them.
- To achieve marks of 9-10 for Range and Accuracy of Language, a variety of time frames must be used, which means two or more. A greater range of time frames will add to the complexity of the language used and most students getting marks in this band will probably use three time frames to refer to present, past and future events.
- To assist students aiming for higher marks, the teacher/examiner should ask questions which allow the student to show that s/he can narrate events or express ideas and opinions referring to the present, the past and the future.
- When asking the unpredictable question, it is recommended that this be clearly indicated as ‘the last question’ or ‘the last question which you have not prepared’; in Chinese it may be, for example, ‘最后一个问题’ or ‘请回答一个你没有提前准备的问题’.
- If the school has no Chinese teacher to carry out the marking, please apply to AQA for Prime Marking, but two recorded tasks must then be submitted per student and these must be accompanied by all the relevant paperwork.

### **Specific comments on this year’s work**

#### **Administration**

Most schools submitted their work in good time, some well in advance of the deadline, enclosing all the relevant paperwork, with clearly labelled audio CDs/memory sticks and excellent clerical work, all of which contributed to a more efficient moderation process. However, some schools sent Speaking materials to the Writing examiner by mistake, and included the wrong Task Sheets, or used a different specification from another exam board, or Centre Mark Forms which were for other European languages. This resulted in a lot of additional requests for missing materials via email, telephone and/or letter, causing unnecessary delays. As mentioned above, some schools seemed to confuse the task sheets with other forms eg Task Planning Form (optional) and Candidate Record Form. Occasionally there were errors when transferring the marks to the Centre Mark Form, too. All this prevented the moderation process from going as smoothly as it might otherwise have done.

Care should also be taken when sending the work in the post. CDs in particular need to be well packed, to avoid damage in transit. In schools where teacher/examiners are peripatetic, it is very important that they refer to the Specification and follow all instructions very closely. The moderator was very grateful to those schools where checklists were obviously used, ensuring that their submissions contained all the necessary materials.

### **Tasks and Task Sheets**

As in previous years, it was very pleasing to see the wide variety of tasks which were offered. Most schools used the AQA exemplar tasks provided in Appendix E of the specification, but some used an adapted version of these, whilst others produced their own tasks which reflected their students' individual learning needs and interests. In some schools, several unpredictable questions were prepared and appeared very accessible, enabling students of all abilities to respond successfully. The majority of the task sheets were produced in an excellent, professional way, which met the requirements of the specification very well. It should be emphasised that the Task Sheet is an essential requirement when completing the Speaking tasks and must be submitted with each student's recording.

Some schools did not follow the requirements of the specification at all, particularly where native speakers were concerned. All students should know the main bullet points in advance of the test, and have the opportunity to prepare for it, in order to ensure that there can be an unpredictable question asked as the final one. It is not intended that the entire conversation be unprepared. It should be noted that, when using the AQA exemplar tasks, the unpredictable question(s) must be changed, as these tasks are in the public domain and it is possible, therefore, that the students might have seen them. Where schools devise their own task, whilst it is acceptable for the main bullet points to be the same for all students, it is not acceptable for the unpredictable question to be the same, as students should not know what this question is going to be in advance of carrying out the task.

Furthermore, teachers are reminded that the unpredictable questions should only appear on the teacher/examiner's task sheet, and a copy of this must be included when submitting the materials for moderation. When devising their own tasks, for those students aiming to achieve higher grades, teachers must ensure that tasks offer the opportunity to express and explain ideas and points of view (minimum 2), to narrate events, producing extended sequences of speech, and to successfully use a variety of time references, which means that two or more time frames must be used.

### **Recordings**

As in previous years, the majority of schools provided excellent recordings, clearly audible, fully labelled and including track lists, as appropriate, all of which contributed to a more efficient moderation process. However, there were instances when a new track was not used for each separate student and the lack of an accompanying track list made it very difficult to locate specific candidates for moderation. The recording quality was variable, too; in some cases the sound quality was poor, or very low, and in others there was background noise, which resulted in the students not always being clearly audible. Schools are reminded to ensure reasonably quiet conditions for recording and, if an external microphone is used for recording, it should be positioned to favour the student rather than the examiner. It is also very important to check, before submitting CDs or memory sticks, that each student's task has recorded successfully.

### **Timings**

Most schools demonstrated excellent timings, between 4 and 6 minutes, as specified; however, some tests were less than 4 minutes, or more than 6, which really affected the students' marks, particularly for Communication. Where the tests were too short, the students were not able to fully

demonstrate their ability and could not achieve full marks for Communication. On the other hand, any information given after the maximum permitted time of 6 minutes, e.g. a response to the unpredictable question, could not be credited. Teachers are reminded, therefore, of the importance of the timing during the test.

### **Performance**

There was strong evidence from the recordings that the majority of teachers had done an excellent job, in a very professional way, to encourage the students to perform very well. Generally, they were provided with sufficient opportunities to give of their best in responding to all the questions, including the unpredictable ones. It was a pleasure to hear such good, able students! Obviously the teachers had worked very hard and the students had clearly been well prepared for their tests, which were well conducted and encouraged/allowed them to demonstrate their abilities. The topics were appropriately chosen and well presented, the range of tasks enabling students of all abilities to respond successfully. Information, often demonstrating the use of 2 or 3 time references, flowed naturally and coherently and included opinions/points of view, using accurately learnt vocabulary and grammar structures that included 4-character expressions. In particular, examining was sympathetic and the examiners put students at their ease, working very hard to get the best out of the less able students.

There was no significant problem with the coverage of bullet points in the tests. However, there were one or two issues which need to be addressed before next year. At times the teacher/examiner asked questions which were different from those on the Task Sheet, and at others the students ignored the teacher's questions, just responding to the prepared questions on their task sheets.

The exam must be conducted entirely in the target language – Mandarin Chinese; some teachers used English–Chinese bilingual language to ask questions, which is not allowed and should be avoided. Occasionally, teachers needed to be a little more patient in allowing the students some thinking time and letting them complete their answer before moving on to another question. The students' language should not be corrected during the test, nor should they be given items of vocabulary etc. The questions need to be carefully prepared, particularly so as to avoid repetition, which might confuse the students and lead to lower marks for Communication and/or Range and Accuracy of Language. The unpredictable question(s) should be practised and used as part of the Stage 1 teaching, even if there is only one student at the centre.

### **Assessment**

Evidence indicated that almost all the marking was broadly in line with the AQA standard. Obviously teachers clearly understood the assessment criteria. However, sometimes the marks awarded appeared slightly severe this year, particularly in the categories of Communication and Range and Accuracy of Language. Students can be awarded marks in the higher band of 9-10 for Communication if they can speak with confidence and narrate events, where appropriate, including a minimum of 2 opinions. When students produce a wide range of vocabulary, using complex structures and two or more time references to describe present, past and/or future events and actions, with only some minor errors appearing in the more complex structures, they should be awarded a mark in the higher band of 9-10 for Range and Accuracy of Language.

At times the marking appeared too lenient, where insufficient information was communicated and limited structures/vocabulary were used.

Teachers should be aware that the mark scheme does not allow for any half marks, e.g. the highest mark band for Pronunciation and Intonation is '5'; '4.5' is not available.

### **Task Planning Form (TPF)**

As the Task Planning Form is optional, many students did not use it. Most of those who did, made very good use of it; the 40 word or Pinyin maximum was almost always adhered to and caused no significant problems. The moderator was very pleased to see that no drawings, photos, icons or visuals of any kind, or long phrases were used this year. However, in one or two cases, a couple of full sentences were included. This is not allowed and should be avoided next year.

### **Conclusion**

It is hoped that these comments will assist teachers in their on-going preparation of students for future GCSE Speaking tests, and that the highlighting of strengths and weaknesses will help to make that preparation even more effective. However, the majority of schools must be commended for the efficient submission and organisation of students' work, which is greatly appreciated.

### **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](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)