

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

International GCSE

French (4FR0) Paper 3

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Section A

Overall, candidates had prepared their short presentation extremely well, displaying a degree of confidence whilst conveying information at their own level of language. In most cases, hesitation was minimal. Having successfully embarked upon this initial stage of the speaking test, most candidates were at their ease. Equally, interviewers were then able to ask questions on the picture which formed a natural progression from the presentation they had just heard. Where this takes place, candidates tend to score more highly, as the transition from presentation to discussion is a smooth one.

Choice of image nearly always has a significant impact on how well the candidate performs and preparatory guidance from teachers was much in evidence across the vast majority of centres. Photographs of family members, friends or holidays tend to serve the best interests of candidates from across the ability range, as most are able to deal with issues arising from the picture.

When a picture represents a snapshot of the candidate's life, the outcomes are generally enhanced, as the candidate is operating within an individual comfort zone. More complex or abstract images required levels of knowledge that were too demanding for some candidates, although more able candidates still performed extremely well with these, accurately deploying a vast range of linguistic structures. In respect of less confident candidates, pictures where there were lots of people involved in different activities tended to prove rather challenging because there was too much action in all parts of the picture.

There were thankfully very few instances where interviewers elicited information which had already been offered by the candidate during the presentation. Equally, there were only occasional instances of interviewers asking closed questions of very strong candidates. It is pleasing to report that Interviewers tended to avoid asking complex questions of candidates who would be unable to offer an adequate response.

The practice of interrupting candidates in mid response is most rare. Where this does occur, it tends to limit performance. For example, in terms of accessing subordinate clauses, a candidate is sometimes interrupted before being able to say why a particular school subject is favoured over others. However, where a candidate has clearly misinterpreted a question, it is quite legitimate and even good practice for an interviewer to interrupt the response at a very early stage, with a view to facilitating a return to a more targeted response.

Section B

In the vast majority of instances, the specimen questions contained in the Specification were used in such a way as to promote the best interests of

candidates. It was only where interviewers adhered rather too closely to the specimens that the level of candidate response was somewhat limited. The specimen questions are merely suggested ways of initiating and developing discussion. In order to allow candidates to display their full wealth of language during the brief time available, a range of question styles is much more desirable

Overall, the range of question type deployed should enable candidates to develop their answers, give and justify opinions and to show initiative. Virtually all interviewers amended the specimen questions to allow candidates to reach their own optimum individual level of response. Interviewers additionally made every effort to ensure that the questions suited the linguistic level and the needs of candidates from across the ability spectrum.

Less confident candidates will have appreciated the skilled manner in which interviewers gradually drew them into the conversation, by beginning with very familiar questions. Once the candidate's confidence level had increased, interviewers proceeded to invite responses which would require a certain level of development.

Most Interviewers clearly knew candidates very well and offered them further opportunities to impress, especially where the candidate had experienced difficulties at the beginning of the conversation. For example, where a candidate seemed to falter in respect of tenses, interviewers were inclined to offer further opportunities, possibly within an alternative context. As in previous series, the rephrasing of questions was also commonplace and very effective. Clusters of questions were skilfully used as a way of drawing the candidate into a more discursive exchange.

Conduct of Examination

It is most pleasing to report that virtually all centres adhered to the prescribed time limits. Such excellent practice works to the advantage of all candidates, as utterances which take place beyond the maximum limits cannot be awarded. Candidates were unable to realise their full potential on those occasions where conversations were far too short. Where the first conversation is too long, this cannot be compensated by making the others too brief, as each conversation is timed and assessed independently. In the case of the presentation, there were a number of instances where the maximum time limit was exceeded by a significant margin.

In order to be unobtrusive, interviewers discreetly timed the three conversations, as opposed to using loud bleeps. Most interviewers made it clear when the transition was being made between two conversations. Where there is no clear transition, this can have a negative impact upon a candidate's mark.

Overall, interviewers showed a clear interest in what candidates had to say. Such technique is excellent, as the candidates discern a sense of purpose in what they are discussing and are pleased to share their experiences. The

confident and relaxed mood of candidates was due in no small part to the way in which interviewers performed their role.

Administrative Matters

As in previous series, centres are to be commended for the overall excellent standard of administration during this series.

The vast majority of CDs/USBs/cassettes were correctly labelled. Other essential documentation was equally presented with a high degree of care. On a few occasions, documentation was incomplete. Interviewers who are new to this specification are advised to follow the guidelines included on pages 39-42 of the current International GCSE French Specification.

The vast majority of recordings were clearly audible. However, a number of recordings were rather "quiet" or subject to obtrusive background noise. Interviewers should check the quality of each recording, particularly the first they conduct. This precaution allows necessary changes to be implemented for the subsequent recordings. Careful placing of the microphone tends to be much more important than the choice of recording equipment.

The microphone should always be placed in such a position that it favours the candidate rather than the interviewer.

Grade Boundaries

The modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, but the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across these specifications are comparable at specification level.

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