



GCE French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Russian

Paper 3 (Speaking) FAQs

(Issue 6, March 2024)

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Timings

1. How strict are the timings?

Mandatory:

- Total assessment time: 16–18 minutes (plus 5 minutes' preparation time for Task 1).

Recommended:

- Task 1: 6–7 minutes
- Task 2: 10–11 minutes (including 2-minute presentation)

The separate task timings are recommended to provide sufficient time for candidates to access the full range of the assessment criteria. However, the total assessment time is set. If a candidate is allowed to speak for longer than 7 minutes in response to Task 1, then this will reduce the amount of time left for Task 2, as it follows immediately after Task 1 and there should be no break in the recording. Candidates will not be credited for any conversation which takes place beyond the maximum time allowed.

In **Task 1**, the Teacher-Examiner (TE) should politely interrupt candidates who are providing extremely long responses to the two set questions and the follow-up question(s) on the statement, as they need to ensure there is sufficient time for the second part of Task 1, which is the discussion of the broader theme. If more than four minutes have passed and the TE has not yet moved onto the broader theme discussion, they should do so as soon as possible to ensure the candidate has full opportunity to meet the assessment criteria.

For **Task 2**, candidates should prepare their presentation to last two minutes. Once they reach two minutes the TE should politely interrupt the candidate and begin asking questions about their IRP.

2. When should I begin timing?

Timing begins from the first words uttered by the candidate in response to the first set question in Task 1.

3. What should I do if the minimum assessment time of 16 minutes has not been met?

The TE should continue to ask a range of questions on the IRP to allow the candidate the best chance of accessing the full range of the assessment criteria. If the candidate is unable to respond, the assessment should be brought to an end. The candidate will be assessed on what they have produced.

Task 1

4. Can candidates write conjugated verbs and full sentences in their notes during the preparation time for Task 1?

Although this is not prohibited, it is important that students speak as spontaneously as possible and do not just read out prepared sentences in order to maximise their marks.

5. Can candidates ask questions during the first two set questions?

Candidates may ask the TE questions in their responses the first two set questions, but the TE will respond briefly, ensuring that they do not use up too much of the candidate's time with their own responses or that they do not stray into Question 2/follow-up question territory, before the set question has been asked.

6. How many follow-up questions should the TE ask after the two set questions?

The TE should ask **at least one** follow-up question on the aspect of the sub-theme considered in the chosen statement. They can ask more follow-up questions to allow the candidate to access the full mark criteria, but should be mindful of not spending too much time on this first part of Task 1 and should move on to the second part – the discussion of the broader theme – at an appropriate point.

7. Do all three sub-themes need to be covered in the discussion part of Task 1?

No. The TE must ensure that the discussion section moves on to **at least one other** sub-theme in the theme. For example, if a student of Spanish chose the sub-theme ‘changes in family structure’, this is part of ‘Theme 1: La evolución de la sociedad Española’. Therefore the TE should move the discussion on to an aspect/aspects of the other two sub-themes in Theme 1: ‘world of work’ or ‘impact of tourism in Spain’. It is an expectation of the A level that candidates will be prepared to discuss the wider theme.

8. Should the shift between sub-themes in the discussion part of Task 1 feel natural and seamless?

Especially for Theme 1, there might not be an obvious connection to be made between sub-themes in the discussion, so the TE should simply indicate that they are moving on to a different topic: ‘And now let’s discuss [topic]...’.

9. How many questions should a candidate ask?

Candidates are expected to ask questions that elicit opinions as part of the natural discourse and to confirm that their own points of view have been understood. There is no predetermined number of questions that they should ask, but it would need to be a minimum of two to meet the exam criteria: ‘elicits points of view/checks for understanding naturally and appropriately **at different points** in the conversation’.

Candidates are not expected to ask contrived questions that would make the interaction inauthentic or that would require the examiner to give a full answer, thus taking crucial assessment time away from the candidate to express themselves. For example, they would not be expected to ask such questions as ‘What role do you think the media plays in French society?’ (However, they would not be penalised for this.) If a candidate were to ask such a question, the TE’s responses during the discussion should be brief.

Furthermore, AO1 (Interaction) is not only assessed against a candidate’s use of appropriate questions. Interaction can be in the form of pause fillers to make the conversation more natural, such as ‘don’t you agree?’ or ‘isn’t that right?’. Candidates should aim to take a lead in the conversation at times, sense-check opinions, create a natural-sounding interaction and engage with the TE.

10. Can a teacher prompt a student to ask a question by asking ‘Do you have a question for me?’ or similar in the target language?

TEs should not prompt a student to ask questions. If the TE’s aim is to ensure the candidate is meeting the requirement to ask questions for AO1 (Interaction), then the act of inviting a question from the student would highlight that this was not part of the candidate’s natural conversation skills.

11. Can I prepare sub-theme questions for the discussion part of task 1? Could I share a bank of questions with my candidates?

The task cards are available from your exams officer from three working days before the start of the examination window, so a TE can familiarise themselves with the tasks in order to be fully prepared for the assessment. However, a TE **must not** share banks of possible questions with their candidates. This would be considered malpractice. It could lead to rote learning and limit the candidates' spontaneity.

Below is some guidance on good questioning that will help candidates meet the requirements of the mark criteria for interaction and spontaneity:

- listen to what the candidate says and base the next question on something they have said i.e. asking them to explain or develop their point(s);
- help facilitate spontaneity by asking unpredictable questions, based on listening and responding to what the candidate says;
- ask questions which ensure that candidates' responses are discussed, not just stated i.e. require them to justify, give examples and evidence.

12. When the candidates are quoting facts/figures, are they not expected to say where they found out these facts? Could they not make them up on the spot otherwise?

The TE has to take the facts and figures at face value. This query also relates to the third bullet in the advice on good question technique above. TEs could ask questions that require candidates to justify and give evidence to support their statements.

13. How much do candidates need to talk about the wider French/German/Spanish-speaking world in Task 1?

French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian

If candidates select a sub-theme of Themes 1, 3 or 4, they should only speak about France, Germany, Spain, Italy or Russia respectively. If candidates select a sub-theme from Theme 2, which focusses on target language-speaking countries and communities, they should show their knowledge of at least one country or community, through use of clear examples. The countries of France, Germany, Spain, Italy and Russia, for the respective subjects, are included in these target language-speaking countries or communities.

Chinese

Themes 1, 2 and 3 all focus on target language speaking countries and communities of the wider Chinese-speaking world. Therefore if candidates select a sub-theme which belongs in any of these three Themes, they should show their knowledge of at least one country or community where the language is an official language, through use of clear examples. The People's Republic of China is included in the target-language speaking countries or communities which can be covered. If candidates select a sub-theme which belongs in Theme 4, they should only speak about the People's Republic of China.

14. What happens if a candidate selects a sub-theme which is very similar to their IRP topic?

The Independent Research Project (IRP) may be based on any of the four themes or on a subject of interest of the student's choosing, but must relate to the target language-speaking cultural and social context. Should a student choose a subject relating to one of the specification themes, it is possible then that the same theme could come up in Task 1. This is unavoidable and the TE should ask the questions set on Task 1 statement chosen by the candidate. However, during the

presentation, candidates must refer to at least two written sources from which they have researched. They must list their sources on the [RP3 Form](#). Candidates who select an IRP from one of the four themes must therefore go beyond the specification sub-themes and must ensure they have conducted wider reading on their chosen subject.

15. (French and German only) Does the TE have to use ‘vous/Sie’, as written in the task questions?

TEs should read the questions exactly as they are printed on the task cards. How the TE phrases the follow-up questions is up to them. However, if the wording of the content of a question is changed, this will be raised with our regulatory team and flagged to the centre. Candidates would not be penalised if the teacher changes the form of the verbs from formal to informal.

Task 2

16. How can I support my students whilst they prepare for their IRP?

As the Specification states, ‘teachers can give guidance on selecting a subject and question or statement for the student’s independent research project’. This first step is key, as then the teacher can ‘comment on the suitability of the area of research (availability of resources, time constraints)’. It is also important so that a TE can ensure all students in the cohort are researching different topics or different aspects of the same topic. Teachers can also direct students to possible resources and provide access to these.

Teachers can ‘give guidance and advice on completing the RP3 form’: they could ask students to complete the 6-10 key findings a few weeks before the submission deadline on a draft RP3 form, review these and then provide feedback to the student as to whether there is a sufficient range of detail to meet the assessment objectives.

17. Should candidates complete their RP3 form in the target language?

Candidates may use either English or the target language when they complete the research question/statement box. However, the **‘key findings’ must be written in English.**

18. Do all the sources need to be in the target language?

Research should be undertaken in the target language. The specification states that students ‘must include written sources for their research that are in the assessed language’ and that they need to refer to at least two of these in their presentation but the follow-on development of Task 2 (IRP) can refer to other authentic resources (in the original target language and directly linked to the relevant target language culture and society) they have used in their research. This can include film, TV, radio, online audio-visual material, interviews etc.

It is possible that some students may supplement their research with some other background material that is neither ‘authentic’ nor produced in the target language (e.g. accounts of the Spanish Civil War by a ‘non-Spanish’ historian). Any such supplementary research must not, however, feature in the formal assessment.

19. Can candidates choose a topic that is related to one of the four themes of study?

Yes, provided that their IRP shows evidence of independent research and has a clear focus on the target language culture and society.

20. Are candidates allowed to bring their sources into the examination?

No. Candidates will only be allowed the notes they make in preparation for Task 1 (one side of A4) – which the TE will take from them at the end of Task 1 – and their completed RP3 form.

21. What would happen if my student did not state their two written sources at the start of their IRP presentation?

The presentation must make reference to (at least) two named written sources, otherwise it cannot score against AO2. Responses that refer to just one single written source can be awarded a maximum of 3 marks only (out of the 12 available for the 2-minute presentation).

You should ensure that your students understand that they should structure their presentation in the following way:

- include a summary of at least **two** named written sources (in target language) used as part of their research
- outline the authors' main points/ideas
- give a personal response to what they have read

22. Can my student use articles that have no authors for the IRP?

Candidates should choose sources with named authors in order to fulfil the requirement of naming their sources.

23. Would a transcript of a speech by a named individual be acceptable as one of the two main sources?

No, since the two main sources have to be originally written sources. A transcript can be used as one of the additional sources (up to ten allowed).

24. How will the awarding organisation check candidates have correctly summarised their sources if we do not request for them to be submitted?

Examiners will take the students' summaries at face value, but may carry out random spot checks of written sources which they can access. To achieve in the top band for AO2 (Responding to Written Language in Speech), students must 'present a clear summary of named written sources, giving a clear outline of authors' main points/ideas.' It is the clarity of their summary and outline, as well as the candidate's 'response' or reaction to those sources, that will be assessed by the examiners and which differentiates the bands of achievement in the mark criteria.

25. Is there a minimum number of the candidate's 6-10 key findings, as per the RP3 form, that the TE must cover in the discussion part of the IRP?

No. There is no minimum number of the candidate's findings that the TE must cover, but the TE should ensure the candidate is given sufficient opportunity to access the full assessment criteria, and use the candidate's key findings to direct discussion.

26. How can I help my students prepare for Task 2 if I and my Language Assistant are not allowed to hear their presentation or discuss their topic with them?

In addition to the guidance in the Specifications, below we outline approaches teachers can and cannot take in order to best prepare their students for Task 2.

In order to practise the skills necessary for the task, teachers may conduct a mock assessment for the IRP task and provide feedback under the following circumstances:

Option 1

The student focuses on a topic that they **will not** be using for their live assessment. This could be:

- a whole class research topic OR
- individual mini-research projects on alternative topics.

Option 2

a) The student gives their presentation (Part 1) on two or more sources taken from their selected IRP topic, but which differ from the two or more sources the student is intending to focus on for their live assessment presentation.

b) The discussion (Part 2) is based upon an aspect/dimension of the IRP topic that differs from the one they will use in their live assessment. For example, the students' IRP will focus on Real Madrid and their 10th European Cup (taken from the [ALCAB illustrative examples of individual projects](#)) and the mock discussion will take a broad focus on football in Spain.

Option 3

The discussion (Part 2) is based on their chosen topic, but the teacher asks questions that differ from those that will be asked in the live assessment.

In order to make it fair to all students and to meet the requirements of the assessment, teachers **must not**:

- listen to and provide feedback on the actual IRP presentation the student is intending to give for their live assessment.
- rehearse/give feedback on the discussion element of the IRP topic intended for the live assessment.
- allow students to rehearse/practise their IRP presentation and discussion with language assistants.

If a centre wishes to listen to the actual presentation (Part 1) the student plans to give, they can do so. However, they **must not** provide any feedback in the form of marks or comments to the student. Therefore, we would strongly recommend that it would be much more beneficial to the student, in a mock examination, to practice the skill of summarising what they have read on a different topic or different written sources, so they can receive feedback.

Teachers should be aware that the above statements still apply when a centre intends to use a visiting examiner.

27. How can I check if my student's IRP topic is suitable?

The selection of an appropriate IRP topic is very important for ensuring a candidate has the best chance of accessing the full assessment criteria. Candidates must not choose a literary work they have studied in Paper 2 (and will be required to declare the chosen texts on their RP3 form).

Teachers should also ensure that the topic does not lead candidates to discuss general ethical issues (for example, euthanasia), without a clear focus on the target language culture and society. Another style of topic to avoid would be a comparison between target language culture/society and British culture/society e.g. comparison of Spanish and British political leaders, as this would lead to too much of the candidate's discussion focussing on content that could not be awarded against AO4 – knowledge and understanding of society and culture.

Detailed guidance on suitable topics can be found in the specification. If you have any concerns about the topics your students would like to research, please contact the Subject Advisor, Sheena Newland (teachinglanguages@pearson.com), who will forward your query to the appropriate subject expert.

28. Should I submit students' IRP topics/titles to Pearson for approval?

There is no requirement to submit IRP topics/titles to Pearson.

29. Should the shift between Task 1 and Task 2 feel natural and seamless?

It does not need to be a natural shift, the TE can just make a statement as 'We are now moving into Task 2, you can start presenting when you are ready'.

30. Should the shift between sub-themes during Task 1 feel natural and seamless?

For some themes, it may be possible to move naturally between sub-themes. Others have quite disparate sub-themes, so the transition may need to be marked by the target language equivalent of a phrase like 'Now let's talk about something different'.

31. Is it acceptable to focus exclusively on one aspect of a sub-theme in Task 1?

Focusing on one aspect of a sub-theme is fine, as long as you broaden the conversation to at least one other sub-theme. Depending on the length of the responses, you may need to move onto a third sub-theme.

32. Should students ask questions after the TE questions of Task 1?

Students are not prohibited from asking questions during Task 1, to elicit opinions as part of the natural discourse and to confirm that their own points of view have been understood.

33. Should students ask questions during both parts of Task 2?

Students are not prohibited from asking questions during Part 1 of Task 2, to elicit opinions as part of the natural discourse and to confirm that their own points of view have been understood. However, they may wish to save most of their questioning for Part 2, in order to allow time for the TE to ask the necessary questions to the student as a response to the presentation in Part 1.

General administration

34. When is the window for speaking exams?

Assessments will be conducted by TEs in centres in one session within a prescribed five-week assessment period. This will take place in April and May in any single year. Dates for the assessment period will be confirmed in our UK Information Manual at the start of each academic year. The assessment period will not always be continuous or be the same period each year, for example it will need to accommodate the Easter break, which changes each year.

35. When can Teacher-Examiners access the stimulus cards?

TEs can access the cards three working days before the start of the five-week assessment window.

36. Can two Teacher-Examiners conduct the speaking exam?

In some centres it is normal practice for A level classes to be split between two teachers, and each teacher might have different areas of expertise in terms of the Themes or the candidate's IRP topic.

For this reason, they may find it more effective to have both teachers conducting the speaking exam. In these circumstances, we would suggest that each teacher should take complete responsibility for one of the tasks, rather than both teachers contributing to the Task 1 discussion, for example. This would avoid the added pressure of conducting a three-way conversation.

37. Can the Teacher-Examiner conducting the exam also supervise the 5 minutes' preparation time, or is a separate invigilator required?

Centres must ensure that a teacher who teaches the subject being examined, or a senior member of teaching staff who has had overall responsibility for the subject department and/or preparing the candidates for the examination, is **not** an invigilator during the speaking examination.

38. Should candidates be assessed in a particular order, e.g. by candidate number?

There is no prescribed order in which candidates should be assessed; the centre can schedule this in the most suitable way for the TE and candidates. However, it is important that centres randomly allocate the cards, using the structure prescribed by Pearson, and that the TE does not choose the order of the cards. If more than one TE is conducting orals in a centre they should each follow the sequencing grid for the candidates they assess.

39. Should I submit the student running order in advance?

You do not need to submit the running order to Pearson in advance.

40. How far in advance do candidates' completed RP3 forms need to be made available to the TE or visiting examiner?

Students must complete and sign the independent research project (RP3) form and send it to the TE or visiting examiner who will be conducting their speaking assessment, no later than **three weeks** in advance of the date of the assessment. This enables the teacher-examiner or visiting examiner to prepare suitable questions. If a visiting examiner is used, the RP3 form should then be uploaded to LWT with the CS4 form and the speaking recording after the assessment has taken place. For more information on LWT, see Q43.

41. Should I submit candidates' RP3 forms to Pearson?

RP3 forms **only** need to be submitted to Pearson if the centre is using a visiting examiner. They should be submitted no later than three weeks before the date of the assessment.

42. How can I find a visiting examiner?

Candidates can approach local centres to check whether they can carry out their speaking exams. Alternatively, there is the option of it being run by a Pearson examiner. Please see our [London Centre Orals information document](#).

43. What should I say at the beginning of the assessment?

The name of the Teacher-Examiner (TE) should be announced at the beginning of the recording. The name and number of each candidate should be announced before each test along with the name of the test, e.g. A Level French. Please ensure that you do **not** use the pause button during the test as this will impact on the integrity of the assessment. Once the name and number of the candidate has been clearly stated, the TE should ask the candidate which statement they have chosen: 'A' or 'B'.

44. If a candidate is severely distressed and unable to continue, what action should be taken?

If the candidate becomes distressed during the recording of the speaking assessment, they must be encouraged to continue unless they are physically unable to. In such an instance, the recording must be stopped and all assessment material collected in from the candidate at this time. The candidate may be allowed suitable time to recover, with supervision, if the assessment is due to restart after a suitable period of time, on the same day of the scheduled assessment.

It is at the centre's discretion as to how to proceed in these circumstances:

- a) If the majority of the assessment (minimum of 14 minutes) had been completed prior to the candidate's distress, the centre may consider submitting the recording for marking. In addition, the centre may want to apply for special consideration for the candidate if it is clear that the candidate had a justifiable reason or condition for the distress;
- b) If only a partial recording of the assessment had been undertaken at the time of the candidate's distress, (*maximum of 13 minutes), the candidate must be encouraged to re-sit the assessment and must be provided with a different stimulus card for Task 1.

*NB: only in cases where the distress occurred at the very start of the assessment (or within 2 minutes of the start of the recording) would we allow for the candidate to continue with the same stimulus cards.

If you have any further questions, please contact our Subject Advisor, Sheena Newland, at teachinglanguages@pearson.com.

45. How do I submit speaking recordings to Pearson?

Speaking recordings, along with CS4 forms (and RP3 forms if a visiting examiner is used), should be submitted to Pearson online using our Learner Work Transfer (LWT) portal. Guidance on the process for MFL, including file naming conventions and accepted recording formats, can be found [here](#).

For further support with using the LWT portal, please visit [this webpage](#).