

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In French (6FR01) Paper 1A
Spoken Expression (TE)

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Structure of the Test

Assessment Objectives

The unit is designed to test the candidate's ability first, to transfer meaning from a written stimulus via an oral response on a designated topic and then engage in discussion of 2 or 3 further subtopics.

The test may be conducted by a Visiting Examiner or by an appropriate member of staff, in which case it is sent to a Pearson nominated marker.

Candidates are assessed on their knowledge of one of the 4 General Topic Areas (GTA) offered by Edexcel/Pearson: - ***Youth Culture and Concerns – Lifestyle, Health and Fitness, The World Around Us and Education and Employment***. Some time prior to the test, candidates submit an oral form to a Pearson nominated examiner/marker, indicating which GTA they have chosen.

Format

The test is recorded and lasts between 8 – 10 minutes. There is a 15 minute preparation period. During this time, candidates study a 90 word passage supported by a visual stimulus. They are not allowed any resource material but they may make notes and can take these into the examination room.

The examiner will ask them 4 questions to test their understanding of the text and appraise their reactions to it. The first 2 questions are factual in nature but the 3rd and 4th ask for opinion and extrapolation.

A maximum of 4 minutes is allowed for the first part of the test. Once the question section has been completed, the examiner initiates discussion of 2 or 3 further sub-topics from the same GTA, avoiding the one dealt with in the written stimulus. The second part of the test must not finish before 8 minutes have passed and must not go beyond 10 minutes.

Advice on the conduct of the tests

Examiners should read the questions as they are written and make no amendments, re-phrasings or substitutions. The "vous" form may be changed for "tu" if desired. Questions may be repeated. Candidate responses dependant on any incorrect procedure will be disregarded.

Examiners should respect the time limits. Tests shorter than 8 minutes will incur penalties. Material produced after 10 minutes will not count.

Comment

Examiners report that the test is conducted correctly in the first part. However, they comment unfavourably on the high number of tests that do not comply with the direction

that the second part should be a discussion. Many centres treat this part of the test as an occasion to give candidates the opportunity to rehearse prepared statements on topics they know will be coming up.

This is not what the mark scheme rewards. Such an approach works to the disadvantage of the candidate as it produces a performance from which all spontaneity is absent. Since the mark for Response predicates that this is the major component of what is being assessed, candidates will only receive limited reward, even if they appear to be producing a large amount of material.

A discussion involves an exchange of information, views and opinions. This is termed "discourse". It implies that each participant listens to what the other has to say, understands what is being said as well as the implications thereof and replies accordingly. In an oral examination, it is the examiner's responsibility to ensure that candidates' responses are discussed and not just accepted without comment.

The Mark Scheme

A total of 50 marks is possible. The following 5 areas are assessed:

Response – out of 20

This judges the ability to engage spontaneously in coherent and extensive discourse with the examiner. As a general rule, the more a candidate seeks to take charge of the exchanges the better the mark.

Quality of Language (Accuracy) – out of 8

This assesses the degree to which inaccurate use of language impedes communication. As long as what is said can be understood, candidates will score 4 unless the incidence of basic error is intrusive.

Quality of Language (Range) – out of 8

This assesses the vocabulary and structures displayed by the candidate. A list of structures is to be found in the Specifications booklet.

Understanding the Stimulus – out of 4

The mark for answering the questions is attributed globally. It is, for example, possible to answer the first 2 questions inaccurately but still score 3 if the answers to questions 3 and 4 are full and comprehensive enough.

Understanding the GTA – out of 10

This assesses the candidates' knowledge of the topic area and also their understanding of it. The latter can only truly be demonstrated through discussion. Statements that are not subjected to critical examination cannot reveal what the depth of understanding may be. In general, the greater the number of subtopics covered, the less understanding of each will be demonstrated.

Candidate performance - Content

Part A – The Stimulus cards

Each GTA has 3 basic cards but each of these has a variant to obviate the possibility of candidates in larger centres becoming familiar with the question sets. So, whilst questions 1 and 2 will remain the same for a given stimulus, questions 3 and 4 will be different.

Youth Culture and Concerns and **Lifestyle, Health and Fitness** were preferred by the majority of centres. **Education and Employment** and **The World Around Us** were not chosen by many candidates.

Youth Culture and Concerns

1 – La nomophobie

This was generally well done but candidates often failed to make the distinction between **les jeunes** and **les gens** in questions 1 and 2.

The word “angoissés” caused fewer problems than expected although many answers failed to include the potential breakdown of mobile phones.

Nearly all candidates were able to say why they were addicted (or not) to their phones and there were many good answers to question 4 with the generation gap being referred to frequently.

Question 3B produced some good if predictable responses but few candidates actually mentioned face-to-face encounters.

2 – Look en ligne

There was a lot of information in this text and few candidates gave all of the application’s possibilities. The first question was answered well, as was the second one on the possible advantages. It was clear that many candidates are adept at this form of purchasing. There were imaginative answers to whether this was a good way to choose clothes but some strayed into comments on the risks of cyber-intimidation and loss of identity. Similarly comments on the positive and negative aspects of the fashion industry often veered into discussion of anorexia and boulimia. Also, the question as to whether the young are interested in fashion wandered into the area of peer group pressure, reflecting an understandable retreat into comfort zones but providing a less than complete answer.

3 – La cocaïne

Answers to question 1 were generally incomplete and some candidates found hard to understand “*a valu à la cocaine une hausse de consommation*”. Surprisingly, a not insignificant number thought that the drugs’ reputation hadn’t changed.

Many candidates found question 3 difficult and only the best candidates were able to give a comprehensive answer to question 4, relating drug taking to problems of personal health, family break-down, costs for the NHS and police. Candidates found question 3B, which they will have discussed in class presumably. The same is true of question 4 on whether drugs should be legalised.

Lifestyle, Health and Fitness

Spécialité: le hamburger frites

Most candidates picked out the message about hamburgers not being fine dining although hardly anyone used the word "emblème". A sizeable number concentrated on the fact that it was something that could be eaten fast with the fingers. Most of them picked up on the statement that the basic ingredients were acceptable to at least one chef. The phrase "fait maison" caused fewer problems, probably because it had been encountered in written form and answers showed that candidates had discussed the topic in class. Candidates were less sure about whether it was important to know how to cook. The more cost-conscious felt it would be a way of saving money. The question on fast food being the sole cause of obesity stretched some candidates but most were able to point to a lack of exercise and an obsession with computers as being other contributory factors.

Le triathlon

Question 3 asked for straightforward reasons and Question 4 was something most candidates had discussed in their classroom. Question 2 caught out more than a few who failed to pick up the dissenting voice of one of the doctors. It was obvious that question 3B was not something candidates had given much thought to beforehand. Question 4B was answered well; once again probably because they had other reasons for doing sport than fitness. The most frequent benefit being to "déstresser": although this was often a fall-back answer to many questions.

La beauté et la santé

This text seems to have been the most frequently used. The usual confusion between "magazine" and "magasin" appeared that challenged many candidates. Question 2 often did not refer to their being made up and expensively dressed. Question 3 surprised a large number of candidates but encouragingly many boys gave thoughtful answers about the undesirable effects that media coverage of models might produce. Answers to question 3B were good although the words "maigre" and "mince" proved slightly difficult for a number of candidates – "magre" and "minnsse" being preferred. Question 4 was done well by the majority as it must form the basis of any classroom discussion on this topic.

Because of the very small number of candidates who chose ***The World Around Us*** and ***Education and Employment***, meaningful comment is not really feasible. However, it is worth saying that in the main, candidates choosing these topics performed more creditably

than others. There may be several reasons for this. These 2 areas may well promote more and better discussion by their very nature which is more discursive and less didactic perhaps.

Candidate performance – language

Prononciation

It is clear that even at this level, candidates have a long way to go before mastery of the phonetics of French can be claimed.

Whilst some candidates are very good, too many are still mystified by the basics.

final consonants that should be silent too often are not –

que ce este cool – ilz ne pensant pas – cela pout menaire à – le mode este une forme d'arte – on pout faire vos achattes en ligne – tous ces païsses - il comprende - on n'est pas contente avec sa corpse – le premier plate (au menu) and so on

nasal vowels are erratically used with the “n” or “m” more likely to be pronounced than not (unlike of course for “personnes” when the consonant is virtually never heard).

Confusion exists over how to pronounce certain nasal vowels “mince” becomes “mance” or “minsse”.

This **lack of vowel discrimination** persists with words like “jeunes” “jaunes” and “gens” and when added to the above nasal confusion leads to a situation where it is not always easy to tell what the candidate is referring to.

Grammar

Again, many candidates show reasonable control of the mechanics of French in terms of conjugation and syntax but the incidence of very basic error is disappointing, even in some of the better candidates.

The verb group

Even at this stage, the idea that a verb has to be in a tense of some description when used with a subject noun or pronoun, tests the powers of many. Utterances such as

- les athlètes aller au Paris en settembre - ils avoir beaucoup des vêtements – beaucoup de jaunes n'aller pas à la selle de sports, ils jouer à leurs ordinateurs

Even when the need to conjugate is recognised, the results are often less than hoped for

- Je va au gymnase – nous ont trop de devoirs – tout le monde sont – les adultes peut

betray a lack of awareness that there is such a thing as subject/verb agreement both in tense and number. This is not appropriate at this level.

The preferred tenses are **Present** and the **Conditional**. These are the ones most requested by examiners whose questioning follows the line of “What is a healthy diet?” and

“What should be done to stop people becoming obese?” Many candidates are uncomfortable outside the Present tense. The **Passé Composé** is known and used – sparingly; but often because examiners do not create opportunities for candidates to use it. Nevertheless, there are more examples such:

- *mon prof dit moi que dans le passé on peut fumer en public*

It is generally understood that it has to have 2 parts. Only the more able candidates manage to choose the right auxiliary with any consistency.

The **Imperfect** and the **Future** occur from time to time but mostly with the more able students.

The **Dependent Infinitive** remains an obstacle for many. It is often used in a « finite » form:

-ils commencent utilise les machines – il peut mène une crisse cardiaque – le sport est bon pour réduit le stress

When it is used as required, there is confusion over which preposition, if any, to use.

However, this is a minor misdemeanour and something that defeats good practitioners and some native speakers.

Voice and Mood

The Passive remains inaccessible to many candidates:

- *Le cannabis devrait légalisé – les cigarettes pourraient interdire*

is typical of what one encounters very frequently.

The Subjunctive appears frequently. It is generally used correctly in phrases such as –

- *Je ne crois pas que ce soit – je ne pense pas que ce soit*

but only a few of the more able candidates know that there are times besides these set phrases when it is also required.

The Negative

Pleasingly, it is generally recognised that there are 2 parts and that one should precede the verb and the other follow. All varieties of negative are encountered from the demure “je ne sais pas” to the more popular “chez pas” via the more literary “je ne sais si ...” although the latter is more usually not employed with the correct verbs as in

- *je ne pense c'est vrai ...”*

Object pronouns

These are not favoured by many candidates. They mostly manage without and repeat the noun or use “cela” instead. Confusion accompanies these items. Candidates are not sure which ones to use.

Statements such as

- *on devrait les enseigner comment de manger – il l'a donné une leçon* -

are frequently encountered. When 2 are used together, order becomes a problem. Usage with the Passé Composé is frequently a step too far and should a negative also be required a studied silence often ensues. But this is not an easy area for English speakers as the underlying word order is antipathetic. Nevertheless, it is one that would benefit from attention.

There is confusion also with **Disjunctive pronouns**. Candidates appear not to know the existence of this class of pronoun and consequently substitute others, such as

- *Les parents font cela pour ils (leurs enfants) - j'ai parlé à il*

Celui / auquel / dont very rarely occur.

Reflexive pronouns appear rarely and generally in globally acquired phrases like « je m'appelle - je m'entends bien avec mes parents »

Syntax

One of the hardest things for English learners of French is the need for clauses to be linked and ordered.

I think they want the one in the shop may seem a simple sentence until one attempts to put it into French when invariably with candidates at this level it will emerge as ***je pense ils veulent l'un dans le magasin***

Examiners are no doubt well aware of this. Nevertheless, for the sake of comprehensiveness, it should be noted that this is the area where there is the most room for improvement.

When candidates recognise that in certain conditions relative pronouns are required, they often fail to choose the correct one:

- *Les maladies que peut être causées par le tabac – les choses qui vous pouvez manger –*

pointing again to a need for a greater awareness of the underlying relationships between parts of a sentence and how different languages approach their organisation.

Gender and Agreement

At this level these two features continue to confuse some candidates. Gender is perhaps a matter of memory and method. It is not surprising therefore that candidates make mistakes. What is less easy to understand is how, once they have made their choice of gender (and number) they contrive to ascribe the wrong gender (or number) to related items:

la chose le plus important – les femmes, ils doit savoir comment cuisiner – une sérieux addiction

This shows that some candidates do not understand how language operates below the surface of meaning and ties in with remarks made about subordination. More analysis of grammatical relationships is required perhaps.

Candidate performance – Knowledge and Understanding

The 4 questions

These are generally well done with candidates showing good understanding of the text and grasp of the wider issues.

They should be encouraged not just to answer the question but to seek to introduce related material and views, especially in Questions 3 and 4.

The General Topic area

Average marks for this section are quite high. Candidates are well prepared and have learnt their lessons well. Consequently, their responses are predictable and unimaginative. As mentioned above, the conduct of the test can detract from the mark for this section. Those candidates who attained the upper reaches the mark spread did so because they showed not only better knowledge but also more original, personal reactions.

Administration

Apart from a few international centres, markers received their material as required. Some centres had to be chased as they failed to meet the deadline for submitting tests. This is an unnecessary complication and it would be appreciated if it could be avoided.

Centres are reminded that they should provide separate recordings for each unit and parcel them up separately too. CD's and USB sticks should be labelled clearly. Material goes through several stages of handling and is vulnerable if not well protected and identified.

CD's are fragile, so it is good practice to make sure they are protected in some way – a case or bubble wrap. USB's are the best format.

Some centres failed to close their sessions which meant their recordings were not accessible. It is helpful if CD's are recorded so that they are playable on computers as well as on CD players. This way, examples of good tests for training purposes can be "grabbed" and stored for future use.

Centres should submit all material as soon as possible after the recordings have been made. OR forms should be signed. Some were not signed, rendering them ineligible for public use.

Examiners should announce the centre's name and number, candidate's name and number, the GTA and the stimulus card number for each recording. This stipulation was not always adhered to. It is required so that material may be isolated for use at training or awarding sessions.

Centres are urged to check the quality of their recording before they embark on the tests.

Tests are often spoilt by:

- echoey conditions
- examiners being too close to the microphone
- candidates being too far away
- the overall volume being too low
- automatic levelling microphones causing fade
- machine hum
- outside noise
- visiting colleagues
- telephones

Conclusion

This test presents candidates with two challenges:

- to communicate understanding of and opinion on a written test
- to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of an area of study through unscripted discussion of aspects of it

An examination of candidate performance has pointed up aspects of pronunciation, syntax and grammar that are proving difficult for students to grasp.

However, the fact remains that the great majority of candidates acquit themselves well of this task, demonstrating that whilst being challenging the test is also a fair assessment of their capabilities.

Grade Boundaries

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