

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In French (6FR03) Paper 1A
Spoken Expression (TE)

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Purpose of the unit

The test rewards the ability to engage in meaningful discourse spontaneously and accurately on moral and ethical matters of a contentious nature. Candidates must show evidence of detailed research and a rounded understanding of issues.

They must demonstrate the ability to:

- conduct independent research on an issue of their own choice
- adopt a position "For" or "Against" an issue and defend this stance in the face of a critically robust challenge
- discuss in some depth 2 or 3 further issues

The challenge will be of an unpredictable nature. Candidates will therefore have to adapt knowledge and opinions gained from their research, to counter the arguments raised by the examiner.

The discussion will test their awareness of issues of general interest currently occupying peoples' minds.

Structure of the test

All tests are recorded whether conducted by a Visiting Examiner or a member of staff. It is recommended that centres use USB sticks as some CD's cannot be played on a computer or a CD player. Centres are asked to ensure that sessions are finalised.

Centres are also requested to check the sound quality before proceeding with the recording. Common problems:

- candidates being too far away and inaudible
- examiners being too close and too audible
- "echoey" conditions
- machine hum
- automatic microphones "correcting" for external noise
- telephones/school bells
- passing colleagues
- playground noise

The test lasts between 11- 13 minutes. Short tests are penalised and material produced after 13.30 is disregarded.

It is divided into 3 Sections:

- a 1 minute presentation to allow candidates to present their stance
- a 4 minute debate during which candidates defend their position from attack by the examiner, who will take the opposite position
- a 7-8 minute discussion of 2 or 3 further issues of a similar nature during which the examiner will no longer be confrontational but still critical in order to probe for knowledge and understanding

Advice to centres

Choice of issue

This is a crucial decision. Centres should advise candidates to choose issues that:

- are weighty enough to provide material for argument from both sides
- that are arguable
- that are not matters of faith
- that open pathways for the ensuing discussion

During the course of the initial debate, a variety of associated issues may be touched upon, any one of which could constitute the first of the further issues. Similarly, in discussing this, further questions will present themselves for development and so the discussion progresses organically.

For example, candidates choosing to debate "la légalisation de la prostitution" will, in the course of their research, have had to consider the right of the woman or man to dispose of

their body as they see fit and whether the state has a role in the matter. Follow-up questions could choose to investigate further what the relationship between citizen and state should be or, alternatively, whether women have achieved equality with men; thereby ensuring that at least for the first of the further issues, candidates will not be confronted with completely unimagined matters.

Issues such as “je suis pour le Tour de France dans le Yorkshire”, whilst worthwhile in itself in terms of how contentious it may be, do not present the same number of obvious “follow-on” issues as does “je suis pour le retrait du R-U de l’Union Européenne” The second and third issues should be taken from what arises in the course of further discussion.

Centres are advised that the second section of the test should not become a pretext for cueing the candidate to rehearse the issues dealt with in class during the course of the year. This defeats the purpose of the test, which is not to display knowledge but to show an ability to engage in an informed exchange of ideas.

This year again, candidates chose wisely in the main. The usual issues featured strongly:

- l’avortement – la peine de mort – l’euthanasie – le mariage gay – l’adoption homosexuelle – la légalisation du cannabis/des drogues douces – le droit de vote aux prisonniers – la chirurgie esthétique – les droits des femmes – l’immigration – les concours de beauté – l’énergie nucléaire – l’énergie renouvelable – l’interdiction de fumer en public – l’expérimentation animale – Les mères porteuses – l’éducation privées – la liberté d’expression

There were hardly any examples of poorly chosen issues. It is interesting that in an election year, the elections did not feature prominently. The Scottish result was not mentioned and the Charlie Hebdo incident was largely absent too.

Caution

The second major failing over the issue, after how productive it might be, is the phrasing. Centres should impress upon candidates the need to ensure that what they intend to argue for or against is actually what they have written on their Oral Forms. It is often the case that examiners prepare for a line of argument designed to attack a declared position only to discover that the candidate had prepared to debate something different. For example, having prepared to speak in favour of beauty contests in response to the stance “je suis contre les concours de beauté”, it is disconcerting to discover that the candidate qualifies the position by declaring that she is against these events for the under 8’s.

The Oral Form

The choice of issue is indicated on the Oral Form. Candidates should declare their position ***in the target language*** and not in English as a number of centres did this year. They should also sign to show their willingness to allow their test to be used for possible training purposes. All tests used to this end are anonymised. Teacher examiners are asked to complete this too. A number of centres failed to complete the forms correctly. Centres using a Visiting Examiner should ensure that the Oral Forms arrive 3 weeks before the examination date.

Assessment Objectives

Features of the Mark Scheme

Centres are advised to study this document carefully. Proper understanding of it will inform the way the test is conducted and thereby the outcome for candidates.

There are 50 marks available.

By far the largest portion of these reward performance features - 36 out of 50. Centres regularly find that candidates who have produced a lot of language and information have been poorly rewarded. On investigation, it is invariably the case that this is a result of poor conduct of the test, probably arising from incomplete understanding of the Mark Scheme. There are 4 areas to be assessed:

Response
Accuracy
Reading & Research
Comprehension and Development

Accuracy is marked out of 7 and as long as what a candidate says is comprehensible both linguistically and logically, a mark of 4 at least will be gained. If the incidence of basic error becomes intrusive this will go down to 3.

Reading & Research is likewise marked out of 7. It rewards the amount of detailed knowledge shown, largely in the debate and the level of general awareness and understanding of current issues. Candidates generally score well on this element.

Comprehension and Development is the first of the “performance features” and is marked out of 16. The first part of this objective substitutes for the absence of a distinct listening test in this specification. Candidates receive a mark for how well they understand the questions put to them. This covers how accurately they decode the language as well as how well they are able to infer meaning and deal with the implications of what is being said. It is important that examiners ensure through their questions that there is a sufficient level of difficulty both in form and content. “Qu’est-ce que tu penses de ...” is fine as an opening gambit but if the remainder of the questions do not go beyond this level of difficulty, candidates are not being tested. Similarly, if the topics being discussed are more appropriate to AS level than A2, this will be reflected in the mark.

An unfortunate feature emerged this session. Several examiners asked candidates what they would like to talk about – “quels sont les problèmes qui te préoccupent” – “quels sont tes soucis?” This is to be avoided. It gives some candidates an unfair advantage over those for whom the test is completely unpredictable. Similarly, asking questions of a personal nature about family life or future plans is not appropriate.

The mark for Comprehension is generally high. It is adjusted as a function of how well candidates develop the issue under discussion. The intent is to reward those who seek to take the lead in discussions by introducing appropriately related sub-issues that further illustrate their knowledge and understanding.

Candidates who have not been encouraged to do this, who are content to give the correct answer and wait for the next question have not been well advised. The more they are able to sustain discussion on the issue being explored the greater their reward. Examiners who have a list of issues to be covered regardless, fail to offer their candidates the opportunity to demonstrate depth of knowledge and range of opinion and limit their reward.

Response is marked out of 20. It assesses the candidate’s ability to engage in meaningful debate or discussion spontaneously, called “spontaneous discourse”.

Spontaneity is not an easy notion to explicate. It refers to the ability to respond to a situation by recalling learnt material and selecting from it appropriately to provide a coherent answer. It does not imply that candidates must produce entirely novel utterances but it does preclude them from rehearsing learnt material that makes only passing reference to the point raised.

This is a situation that arises too often and is largely the result of wrong examining technique, possibly arising from a misunderstanding of the term “discourse”. This refers to what goes on when 2 people talk about the same thing. They listen to what the other has to say and react by making appropriate comment in the desire to move the conversation on. Too many examiners do not listen to what their candidates say. They move on to their next discussion point and cue for more rehearsed material. This defeats the point of the test and accordingly does not get the reward people feel it should. Examiners should encourage candidates to do more than just state a position. They should pick up on specific points, encouraging them to justify, exemplify, hypothesise and speculate.

Candidates who engage in properly conducted discussions and may appear to be less than fluent will generally outperform those for whom the test is little more than a form of recitation.

Candidate performance

Candidates were well prepared. They were able to present ideas and opinions. The ability to discuss these varied widely with some of them producing debate and discussion of the highest level both linguistically and intellectually. Even less able candidates were able to demonstrate some sort of defence.

Pronunciation and Intonation are generally good but do interfere with understanding on occasion. Final consonants, nasal vowels, "silent" verb endings, vowel discrimination – *jeune/gens/jaunes/jeun: but/bout* - being the most obvious. It is somewhat inappropriate that candidates still pronounce "ilz este sonte" at this level.

Tenses are generally limited to the Present and the Conditional because candidates are asked to say what they think about something and what needs to be done. The Imperfect and Passé Composé are frequently encountered but the more complex tenses are largely ignored. Correct selection of the auxiliary depends on which of the "être" verbs is being used. So, ***nous sommes allés / il est venu*** are usually correctly chosen, although ***il né*** is equally likely, but it is pretty much a lottery for the rest and ***il a devenu*** is more likely to be preferred than the correct form. Use of the Future Perfect is virtually unknown, as is the Past Conditional.

The **Subjunctive mood** appears in stock phrases and its use is widespread but only the more able candidates know that it is required in many more situations.

Puzzlingly the **Passive Voice** defeats all but the most able. English language interference and lack of grammatical awareness explain sentences such – ***les immigrés sont donnés trop de bénéfices.***

Modality continues to cause problems. The conditional of *devoir* is correctly used to convey the notion "should" in the main although it is also confused with the Imperfect. There are frequent examples of candidates putting both verbs in the conditional as in – ***le gouvernement devrait donnerait des subventions*** – or using the conditional of *être* as a direct substitute for "should" and producing phrases such as - ***les frais d'université serait être réduits***

Subordination continues to bedevil many performances. "Qui" and "que" are interchangeable for too many candidates or often omitted. At this level, it is fundamental for a candidate to master the difference between English and French. Lack of syntactical awareness leads to incorrect constructions such ***le film que je parlais de or la chose qu'ils ont besoin de or la carrière je suis intéressé dans. Lequel etc/ dont*** are rare.

Ce qui and **ce que** are encountered but candidates are more likely to use ***qu'est-ce que*** as in « ***Je ne comprenais pas qu'est-ce qu'il voulait*** » or ***"quoi"*** as in ***je ne sais pas quoi il s'agit de***.

Verbs in subordinate clauses are generally in a finite form but not always, especially if the subject is remote from the verb. Unfortunately, the **Dependent Infinitive** too is also more than likely to be in a finite form – ***les parents devraient interdire leurs enfants de utilise les ordinateurs trop.***

Gender and agreement continue to confuse many candidates. Even if gender is difficult to ascribe correctly on occasions, it is odd that once ascribed it should change from encounter to encounter as in ***les femmes devraient avoir le choix de terminer une grossesse parce qu'ils ont le droit de disposer de sa corpse***

This would seem to indicate a lack of grammatical awareness.

Negatives continue to be used erratically. It is generally understood that there should be two parts but using them both at the same time and in the right place is often a step too far.

Object pronouns are avoided if possible in favour of *cela* or repeating the noun.
Disjunctive pronouns are not widely known and mostly replaced by Personal Subject pronouns – *c’était une surprise pour ils* or even with the adjective *pour leurs*.
Demonstrative pronouns rarely appear.

Response

As mentioned above, candidates respond in 2 ways usually. When the test is conducted correctly, candidates are able to produce spontaneous, coherent and informed responses. When the test is treated like a “question and answer” session, they produce more or less appropriate information in an unspontaneous manner.

Accuracy

Despite a notable incidence of basic error, very few candidates make themselves incomprehensible.

Reading and Research

Only a few candidates provide facts or opinion attributable to a recognised authority, preferring to stay in the realm of assertion of personal beliefs. Detail is often lacking.

Comprehension and Development

Very few candidates have trouble understanding the examiner. Only few are sufficiently pro-active, as described above, to register a score in the upper reaches of the range for this box.

Conclusion

Overall the majority of candidates are able to hold intelligent conversations on a wide range of testing issues. Many are excellent and perform in a truly authentic manner. Communicatively, their receptive and active skills are good.

The knowledge of the workings of French is an area that needs improvement. In particular, a lack of grammatical analysis is a continuing source of loss of marks.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>