



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel International A Level

In French (WFR03)

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PE's Report to Centres - WFR03/01 Summer 2406

In this unit, candidates are tested on their ability to use the spoken word in French.

The test is comprised of two parts, Section A (5 minutes) and Section B (6-7 minutes).

The first part of the test takes the form of a debate. Candidates are required to take a clear stance on an issue of their choice which they present for one minute, and then defend when questioned by the teacher-examiner. The choice of subject is entirely up to the candidate and does not need to relate to the general topic areas studied. Candidates are required to conduct their own research when investigating the subject of their choice and need to refer to written Francophone sources during the discussion. They are expected to use the language of debate and argument to discuss the issue and to defend their point of view.

In the second part of the test (6-8 minutes), the areas chosen for discussion should be unpredictable elements of the test. It is up to the teacher-examiner to choose these two further topics for discussion; the focus should be on two different areas which must be taken from within the general topic areas. Candidates are expected to interact effectively with the examiner and to sustain a fluent discourse. They are assessed on their ability to respond to the spoken language and should have the opportunity to show the breadth and depth of their knowledge and linguistic competence; the questions should also challenge conceptually.

In the 2024 series, there were some excellent debates with the teacher-examiner robustly opposing the candidate's point of view thus giving the candidate the opportunity to offer a range of language used for argument and debate. The choice of debate topics in some Centres has become more varied and more debates seem to genuinely reflect candidates' own personal interests. However, there are still a large number of debates that focus on moral issues, such as euthanasia, abortion and the death penalty; however, these topics fail to produce a good performance from some candidates who appear to have little genuine interest in them. It was noticeable that the topic of euthanasia was especially popular this year, reflecting the wider debate within society.

While the Specification does not prevent more than one candidate in a Centre from offering the same topic, it is refreshing to see Centres where every candidate is focusing on a different subject and so doing their own in-depth research rather than relying too heavily on topics that have been taught during the course.

The most important aspect of Section A is that it must take the form of a debate, not a discussion. If the teacher-examiner simply asks the candidate questions about their topic then

this cannot be seen to be a debate and the candidate will be unable to access marks in the top bands for spontaneity and development and critical analysis. For this reason, it is the Centre's responsibility to ensure that the choice of topic for each candidate is an appropriate one that can be debated and on which the teacher-examiner can find counter-arguments. Centres should agree the candidate's topic and stance before the independent research takes place. In some Centres, it is clear that candidates are not receiving an appropriate level of guidance on the suitability of topics and so are choosing topics which make debate difficult, e.g. *Je suis pour Coco Chanel*.

The role of the teacher-examiner is a crucial one; the teacher-examiner should facilitate the debate by challenging the candidate's viewpoint and by offering opposing points of view. This year, unfortunately, there were again some tests in which the teacher-examiner incorrectly managed this section as a discussion, meaning that the candidate was not able to access the highest marks. The teacher-examiner should challenge the candidate in such a way as to give the candidate the opportunity to develop and extend their ideas and points of view while using the language of debate and argument. Some Centres do this really well and, as a result, their debates are lively and a delight to hear.

It is important that the debate, as well as the discussion in Section B, should be spontaneous, with each speaker reacting and responding to the other's remarks, in order to produce a genuine discourse; candidates should not produce pre-learnt material and teacher-examiners should not adopt a question-answer format. It is essential that each speaker engages with the other.

in Section A, candidates are required to provide evidenced research to support their arguments in order to reach the higher bands of the reading and research grid. These marks are awarded for AO2 (understanding and responding in speech to written language) and so candidates must research in the target language, using written sources in French. Candidates should cite their sources clearly as well as giving facts and figures as, without referring to specific sources, candidates cannot achieve more than a mark of 3 in this part of the mark scheme. It is not appropriate for candidates to mention sources that are not written in French, from the US or the UK, for example. There is still room for improvement in this area; too many Centres continue to ignore this requirement to the detriment of their candidates who are unable to access the highest marks for reading and research. As part of their role to oppose the stance, the teacher-examiner should challenge the candidate to offer evidence to back up their arguments, thus offering an opportunity for the candidate to cite their sources.

Section B requires teacher-examiner to introduce *at least two further issues for discussion*; these issues should be taken from the general topic areas and, within a Centre, the teacher-examiner should aim to cover a wide range of subjects; it is not appropriate to focus on the same subjects for all candidates. There should be no or minimal overlap between the topics offered to the candidates in a Centre. The general topic areas are wide-ranging and teacher-examiners should

be able to vary the choice of topics for each candidate. It is also recommended that teacher-examiners do not focus on one 'type' of topic throughout the entire test; for example, if the candidate's stance for Section A is a moral issue, good practice would be to choose a different focus for Section B. Candidates may have more to say on some topics than others and so it is fairer to vary the subject material. Too often, teacher-examiners do not move away from a selection of moral issues and this is not in the candidate's best interest. Centres are also reminded that candidates must not be aware of the topics to be discussed in Section B before the test begins.

For a candidate to access the higher mark bands in the critical analysis part of the mark scheme, they need to be given the opportunity to analyse and evaluate. For this reason, it is recommended that two (or possibly three) topics are adequate as a candidate needs time to develop their ideas on a topic in order to offer a full evaluation of the issues. If the teacher-examiner covers too many topics, this will put the candidate at a disadvantage as their evaluation of the issue is likely to be superficial.

In addition, the two further issues must be taken from the General Topic Areas. If the theme is taken from one of the three A2 topic areas, the discussion must be firmly rooted in the context of the French-speaking world by the candidate. It is not enough for the teacher-examiner to introduce the context; if the candidate does not discuss the issue within the context of the French-speaking world, marks will be lost. This is frequently the case when moral issues are discussed in Section B. In this Series, there were still Centres where candidates seemed unaware of this requirement.

It is important to also remember that there is no requirement for the candidate to defend a point of view in Section B. Too often examiners hear tests where the candidate is still being challenged to defend an opinion in Section B and this is not appropriate.

As in Section A, the discussion should be spontaneous with both the teacher-examiner and the candidate addressing the points made by the other in order to create a genuine discourse. It is not appropriate for candidates to answer with pre-learnt material; it is the teacher-examiner's responsibility to prevent the candidate from delivering pre-rehearsed language by interrupting the flow. The teacher-examiner should respond to what the candidate says so that the interaction remains genuine, with an element of unpredictability. It is also important that there is an appropriate level of challenge, both conceptually and linguistically, so that the candidate has the chance to show their true potential. It is not appropriate for the teacher/examiner to ask questions about the candidate's future plans; there is no place for personal questions at this level.

Once again this year, many candidates offered a good level of spoken French and this was very pleasing. Many candidates were able to offer a range of lexis and complex structures such as the use of pronouns, subordination, more complex tenses such as the future perfect and the conditional perfect and the subjunctive mood as well as idiomatic language. Occasionally, inaccurate language or pronunciation made it difficult for the message to be successfully communicated but these tests were in the minority. It is important that candidates ensure that they have the knowledge of an appropriate range of vocabulary to allow them to discuss their stance topic fully.

Timings were an issue in some Centres this year; it is important to follow the timings given in the Specification. The maximum length for a test is thirteen minutes and examiners will not consider material after this length of time.

Once again, Centres are reminded of the importance of clear, audible recordings; a suitable venue for the tests should be chosen (away from areas which are likely to be busy or noisy) and a sound check should be run to ensure that the candidate is clearly audible. This year, there were some tests where the teacher-examiner was clear but the candidate less so. Examiners can only mark what they hear and so it is in the candidates' interest for the tests to be as clear as possible. In addition, audio tests must be submitted by the deadline given by Pearson in order for them to be marked in good time. There were again this year Centres which did not adhere to the specified deadlines and this put unnecessary pressure on the marking team. Finally, Centres should ensure that they understand clearly the requirements of the test given in the Specification and that they comply with the requirements in order to give their candidates the best chance of a good mark.

There is still a minority of Centres which are still not communicating some fundamentally important information to candidates: the need to mention sources and the results of research in Section A; the requirement to base the discussion within the context of the French-speaking world when talking about issues taken from the A Level topics in Section B; the need for a genuinely spontaneous discussion. The role of the teacher-examiner remains a crucial one and some candidates continue to be disadvantaged in situations where the test is poorly conducted; problems can include poor timing of sections, initiating a discussion rather than a debate in Section A, questioning that does not challenge the candidate linguistically or conceptually and teacher-examiners who spend too much time giving their own personal viewpoint.

However, the majority of Centres follow the requirements of the Specification carefully and produce good quality tests in which the candidates are given the opportunity to showcase their spoken language. There are many candidates who give a high quality performance and who are able to express their ideas on a range of topics using an excellent level of French.

In 2024, there were many candidates who fulfilled all the requirements of this test and were therefore able to access marks at the top of each one of the mark bands. These candidates had been well-prepared by their Centre and sympathetically examined by their teacher-examiner, who gave them the opportunity to use the language of argument and debate and to engage in a genuinely spontaneous discussion. We are grateful to these Centres for their hard work and for the effort that they have put in to preparing their candidates for this Unit.

