



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International A Level

In French (WFR03)

Unit 3: Understanding and spoken response

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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 the candidate's choice 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. These two areas must not be known by the candidate in advance. 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 2025 Series, the topics covered were broadly similar to those covered in previous Series. As no examination paper is set, the candidate has a free choice of topic which must state clearly their "stance" (i.e. in favour or against a particular issue).

Some Centres conduct the debate well, with the teacher-examiner robustly challenging the candidate's point of view. In a minority of Centres, however, Section A becomes a discussion rather than a debate, either because the choice of topic has not been set out as a stance or because the teacher-examiner asks general questions rather than questions which challenge the candidate's viewpoint. In this situation, the candidate's mark will be adversely affected as they are not given the opportunity to use the language of debate and argument.

The choice of debate topics has become a little more varied in some Centres and some of these debates seem to reflect more genuinely the candidates' own personal interests. Where candidates have been supported and helped in their choice of topic for the debate, there is a much higher chance of success. In some Centres, where candidates have been allowed to offer unsuitable topics that cannot be debated, this also has an adverse effect on the candidates' marks.

In this section of the test, 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 to persuade and disagree. In Centres where this is done well, the debates are lively and it is a pleasure to listen to them.

Centres should also be aware of the importance of spontaneity in both sections of this test. Each speaker should engage with the other and should react and respond to the other's remarks; this produces a genuine discourse. Candidates should not be given the opportunity to offer pre-learned material and teacher-examiners should not adopt a question-answer format.

In Section A, candidates should 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 refer to specific French language sources and use material found in their research to evidence their argument. As part of their role to oppose the stance, the teacher-examiner can challenge the candidate to offer evidence to back up their arguments, thus offering an opportunity for the candidate to cite their sources. It is clearly not appropriate for the candidate to offer their textbook as a source as this does not show any evidence of research (and is not a French source).

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.

In this section, a candidate needs to be given the opportunity to analyse and evaluate. It is therefore not appropriate for the teacher-examiner to ask questions which elicit factual information, such as, *La laïcité, qu'est-ce que c'est?* which often leads the candidate to produce a

pre-learned monologue. The teacher-examiner should instead be offering the candidate the opportunity to express their opinions, to evaluate and to analyse e.g. *À votre avis, jusqu'à quel point est-ce qu'on peut dire que...?*

The two further issues must be taken from the General Topic Areas and, 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.

Once again, 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. The candidate needs to develop their ideas in order to consider the issue in some depth and to avoid a superficial approach. It is also important that the teacher-examiner offers 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 personal questions at this level.

Once again in 2025, there were many candidates who offered a good level of spoken French. To reach the top bands for language, candidates should offer a range of lexis and complex structures such as the use of pronouns, subordination, *si* clauses, more complex tenses such as the future perfect and the conditional perfect and the subjunctive mood as well as idiomatic language. Candidates must ensure that they have the knowledge of an appropriate range of vocabulary to allow them to discuss their stance topic fully. A formal register must be maintained; for heritage learners in particular, it is important to be aware that familiar language, slang or ungrammatical constructions (e.g. *t'es pas allé*) are not appropriate in a formal examination.

It is important also to consider pronunciation and intonation; if the candidate's pronunciation is poor, it becomes difficult for the message to be communicated. This is an area which could be improved with some work on phonics. At present, poor pronunciation and intonation are sometimes affecting the candidate's overall performance and their ability to successfully convey the message.

There were fewer issues with the timings of the tests this year; however, teacher-examiners are reminded of the importance of allowing enough time for the candidate to explore two contrasting topics in some depth in Section B. The time available should be evenly split between the two topics.

To do well in this Unit, candidates should understand:

- the need to adopt a definite stance and to defend their position on that stance
- the importance of mentioning named sources in Section A and of using the results of their research to evidence their ideas
- 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.

In addition, the performance of the teacher-examiner is crucial to a successfully conducted test and they must be aware of the importance of:

- offering guidance to the candidate on their choice of stance
- accurate timing of the test
- maintaining a debate in Section A
- challenging the candidate both conceptually and linguistically
- keeping their own contribution to the discussion to a minimum.

It is clear that many Centres follow the requirements of the Specification, prepare their candidates thoroughly for this test and use teacher-examiners who sympathetically and skilfully examine the candidates. There are many good quality tests in which the candidates are given the opportunity to showcase their spoken language, their research and their ability to debate. This year, many candidates gave a high quality performance and showed an ability to express their opinions on a range of topics using an excellent level of French. Pearson is grateful to these Centres for their hard work and for the effort that they have put in to preparing their candidates for this Unit.

In 2025, online training for this Unit has been made available by Pearson. I would commend this training to all Centres moving forward.

