

An 'at a glance' guide to GCSE orals for Arabic, Greek, Japanese and Russian

Intro: Nick Page, a Principal Examiner for GCSE Russian Speaking has put together the following guidance to support you if you have students wanting to undertake a GCSE oral examination in the following languages: Arabic, Greek, Japanese and Russian. Designed to be a brief but comprehensive overview of the oral unit and linked administration, I hope that you find this useful.

Preparing for the oral exams – voiceover script

Before entering candidates – what centres need to know

- The window during which oral examinations must take place is set by Edexcel each year and is usually between mid-March and mid-May. If you're planning to enter candidates for the oral examination, you will first need to make sure that you will have an appropriately qualified teacher in place to carry out the oral exam during this window. This will usually be a teacher with a degree-level qualification in the language and experience of delivering the relevant specification. Family members or native speakers with no teaching experience are not appropriate people to conduct the oral exam.
- If there is no suitable teacher available at your centre, you must either locate a host centre or make your own arrangements for a teacher from another centre to visit and conduct the oral exam during the window.
- A further alternative is for candidates to arrange to take the exam as a private candidate at another centre. – Although we can't give out centre information due to data protection policies, a special 'find a centre' facility is available on our website for potential 'private candidates'
- It is centres' responsibility to provide an appropriate teacher to carry out the oral exams; Edexcel are not able to supply visiting examiners for GCSE exams
- You must be confident that a suitable venue will be available where the oral can be conducted – this should be free of background noise and, ideally, provide a quiet area where those waiting to take the exam can gather their thoughts just before the exam.
- If suitable arrangements cannot be made to conduct GCSE oral exams, centres may wish to consider entering students for the Short Course, which includes an option for assessment in Reading and Writing only.
- In all cases, centres must ensure that students know exactly what the oral examinations involve before deciding to register them

The format of the exam

- It is most important to understand that, unlike some GCSE qualifications, the oral element of the lesser-taught languages is a terminal examination and does not involve Controlled Assessment. Like all units in GCSE Arabic, Greek, Japanese and Russian GCSEs, it is 100% marked by Pearson/Edexcel.
- The exam involves two separate tasks, but these must be carried out consecutively as one exam, with the recording running unbroken from the start of task 1 through to the conclusion of task 2
- Each task relates to one of two broad themes prescribed by Edexcel and chosen in advance. The themes are *Media, Travel and Culture* or *Sport, Leisure and Work*. *The theme of each task will usually be chosen sufficiently far in advance for students to undertake preparatory work; it is not envisaged that students should be made aware of the theme of the tasks just before the examination. Typically, students will select their chosen theme or themes 4-6 weeks in advance of the examination and two weeks should be regarded as a minimum.* Each task may relate to a different theme, or both tasks may be based on the same broad theme, but it is important that the specific focus of each task is different. For example, a student might choose to undertake both tasks based on *Media, Travel and Culture*, but the Teacher would need to ensure that different topics were covered in each task. In this example, task 1 might focus on the candidate's views on holidays and travel, while in task 2 the Teacher might move the focus to music and television.
- There is a choice of first task. Students may choose to make a brief presentation linked to their chosen topic, followed by related questions from the teacher. Alternatively, candidates may choose to provide a picture relating to their chosen topic, which will form the basis of their discussion with the teacher. Pictures may be a single photograph or a simple drawing by the candidate
- The second task takes the form of a general conversation, with students engaging in 4-5 minutes of dialogue with the teacher on the chosen theme. It is important to note that there is **no presentation element** to the second task.
- No oral materials are sent out by Pearson/Edexcel. An 'Administrative Support Guide' is available on the language-specific GCSE homepage. There are some Sample Assessment Materials but teachers are expected to come up with their own questions appropriate to the level and topic choice of their students.

Preparing students for the exam

- It is vital that teachers preparing students for this exam should be fully familiar with the Specification and the Administrative Support Guide. Both of these appear on the

language-specific GCSE homepage and offer detailed guidance on the preparation for and conduct of all aspects of the oral exam

- The oral exam can be a stressful experience for students. However, students for whom speaking forms a regular part of their classroom experience are those most likely to be more at ease on the day
- Equally, regular practice in the classroom of exam-style tasks and questions will help the exam itself feel familiar to students and help them to relax and perform to the best of their ability
- Teachers and students have a free choice of whether to relate one task to each of the broad prescribed themes or to relate both tasks to just one theme. Neither route has any advantage over the other; what is essential is that the focus of the two tasks should be different. Please note that tasks that have significant overlap of focus are unlikely to provide enough opportunities for students to demonstrate a range of language and ideas
- Whatever decision is taken regarding the theme (or themes) used, a key decision for teachers is the selection of appropriate topics as the focus of each task. An inappropriate topic can have a considerable adverse effect on the mark a student is able to achieve for the task, as much of the material covered is likely to be considered irrelevant
- Students should be used to responding to a range of question types, from closed 'starter' questions requiring short, factual answers to open-ended questions that allow the student to offer longer, more developed responses. It is also important that students should be used to responding to questions that elicit a range of tenses
- Key to accessing the upper areas of the marks available for communication is the ability to offer opinions and back them up with justification. Students should be encouraged to make this a regular feature of their responses when appropriate.

The different task types (i)

- A popular choice for the first task is the student presentation with linked follow-up questions from the teacher
 - As long as it falls within one of the broad prescribed themes, the choice of topic for the presentation is free. The topics that work best are those of genuine interest to the student
 - The student should make a presentation of between 1 and 2 minutes on his or her chosen topic. It is expected that students will have prepared this presentation in the period since electing their theme for the first part of the exam.
 - The presentation should be followed by 3-4 minutes of questioning by the teacher, which should follow on logically from the topic of the presentation. If the presentation runs beyond 2 minutes, teachers should interrupt at an appropriate moment and begin the follow-up questions

- Students may take into the exam an A5 sheet of notes. These should be in the target language, bullet points and should not total more than 30 words. Access to a dictionary or a separate task sheet is not permitted
- The follow-up questions should link to the topic of the presentation and should remain within the broad theme of the task, although they may take in other topics within the broad theme, as the conversation develops
- Questioning should be designed to support the student but also to allow them to demonstrate the highest level of their ability. Often, it can be helpful to begin a discussion with closed, straightforward questions and then gradually to move into more open-ended questioning
- Students should have the opportunity to prepare and practise for the exam, but must not know **exactly** what will be covered on the day. Rehearsing in advance precisely what will be asked on the day is not good practice. Exams that have been rehearsed in this way are usually obvious to the Pearson/Edexcel examiner and are likely to restrict the mark a student is able to achieve.

The different task types (ii)

- An increasing number of students choose the picture-based discussion for their first task
 - For this option, students select a picture that relates to their chosen topic. The picture is chosen once the theme has been selected and is taken into the exam.
 - Students may again take into the exam an A5 sheet of notes. These should be in the target language, bullet points and should not total more than 30 words. Access to a dictionary or a separate task sheet is not permitted
 - There is no presentation element for this task. Instead, 4-5 minutes of conversation are undertaken, based upon the chosen picture and linked follow-up questions from the prescribed theme.
 - It is expected that the discussion will focus closely on the picture initially, before broadening to consider other aspects of the chosen topic. For example, a student might describe a holiday he or she was on in the picture, before going on to discuss holidays and travel more generally
 - As with the presentation and discussion option, questioning should be designed to support the student but also to allow them to demonstrate the highest level of their ability.

Centres should note that, with this choice of task, a copy of the picture used in the assessment should be sent to the examiner along with the candidate's Mark Record Sheet. However *personal photographs* (e.g. picture of candidate receiving sports trophy) must not be submitted. Instead, a short description of the photograph referred to must be provided. It is recognised that the use

of photographs of young candidates can be sensitive. Teachers must refer to their school's own policy on the use of candidate photographs and related requirements for parental consent prior to instructing candidates to bring in *photographs for use in formal assessment*.

- It is not a task requirement for candidates to refer to a personal photograph; indeed, it is perfectly acceptable for candidates to refer to an appropriate photograph or picture cut out of a magazine or newspaper.
- This task type allows students to have some ownership of the assessment content but some may be unable to locate or provide an appropriate picture. Teachers may wish to build up a stock of appropriate pictures to cater for such candidates. The candidates could then choose from a range of pictures made available to them. However, where possible, candidates should be encouraged to source their own picture. They are more likely to speak with conviction and enthusiasm if the picture they are using has been selected by them and has some personal significance.

The different task types (iii)

- For the second task, there is **no choice** of task-type; all candidates must undertake a general conversation based upon a chosen broad theme (Media, Travel and Culture or Sport, Leisure and Work)
- The conversation should last 4-5 minutes and must be a dialogue throughout; there is **no presentation element** to this task
- The questions all relate to one of the chosen broad **themes**, although more than one **topic** area from within the chosen theme may be covered during the conversation
- It is again important for teachers to use a range of question types during the assessment; in order to access the higher areas of the mark scheme, students must show an ability to take the initiative by offering longer, more developed answers in response to open-ended questions
- Students must also show an ability to respond to unpredictable questions. You must not, therefore, rehearse **task-specific** lists of questions with students in advance, although they should, of course, be familiar with the topic areas featured and the types of question that might be asked
- The role of the teacher is that of facilitator – questions should help the candidate and any interjections or comments by the teacher should be brief

Conducting the Test (i)

- Centres must ensure that assessments are carried out in a suitable location. Exam rooms must have the appropriate JCQ signs displayed and any posters relevant to the language being assessed should be removed. Background noise can be a major distraction to candidates, so if possible a location should be selected where large numbers of students will not be moving past or bells ringing, or where people might walk in accidentally. Ideally, a quiet area will also be available where those waiting to take the exam can gather their thoughts and prepare for the exam.
- All tests must be recorded and submitted to Edexcel. Recording should be in an approved digital format, details of which are given later in this presentation.
- It is very important to test the recording equipment in advance of the exam and to ensure that the recording favours the candidate rather than the teacher. Teachers must also check after each assessment that the exam has recorded successfully. In the event of a failed recording, the exam must be carried out again as soon as possible.

Conducting the Test (ii)

- Each test should last a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 10 minutes in total. This time should be equally split between the 2 tasks, with each task lasting no more than 5 and at least 4 minutes
- The end of task 1 and the beginning of task 2 should be clearly announced by the teacher; this announcement should be in English
- Each task is separately assessed out of 25, under 3 headings of Content & Response, Range of Language and Accuracy. This means that candidates must fulfil the requirements of the mark scheme in **each** task. For example, a candidate offering a full range of tenses, accurately used, in task but who then offers just one tense throughout task 2 would not score full marks for Range of Language on task 2.
- Teachers should ensure that their questioning is designed to put the candidate at ease and to allow opportunities to access the full range of the mark scheme. For example, questions in each task should allow for a full range of tenses and give regular opportunities for students to express and justify opinions
- At the same time, Teachers must ensure that the focus of their questioning remains within the chosen theme
- The dialogue should be as natural as possible and teachers are encouraged to offer interjections and brief comments, but these should be kept brief. It is important that students are not simply exposed to a battery of questions from a predetermined list.

Getting the administration right

- An Administrative Support Guide is available via the Edexcel website and should be read in full well before conducting the examinations. As soon as all examinations have been completed and certainly within 48 hours, all materials should be despatched to Edexcel's appointed external examiner. An address label will be provided at the bottom of the attendance register, which is sent to centres in advance of the examinations taking place. The top 2 copies of the completed attendance register should be sent to the examiner, along with the recordings of all candidates and a completed mark record sheet for each candidate and a copy of the picture used in any picture-based discussions. You should **only** complete Section A of the Mark Record Sheet – the exam is marked by an Edexcel / Pearson examiner, not by the teacher conducting the exam. You must ensure that you retain the bottom copy of the attendance register in your centre. Recordings should be sent on a correctly labelled CD or USB memory stick and recordings must be in .mp3, .wma or .wav format. You are discouraged from using cassettes.

Common Pitfalls (i)

The oral element for lesser-taught languages is a terminal exam and is not Controlled Assessment. Centres must be very careful to ensure that all oral examinations carried out for these lesser-taught languages conform to the instructions laid out in this presentation, in the Specification and in the Administrative Support Guide. The arrangements for Pearson/Edexcel Controlled Assessment tasks for GCSE French, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese and Urdu differ significantly. If teachers submit tasks for GCSE Arabic, Greek, Japanese or Russian that have been carried out as Controlled Assessments, they could seriously disadvantage their students. The exam must consist of 2 separate tasks, but these should be conducted one after another without stopping the recording. Each task must be 4-5 minutes in length and will be separately assessed out of 25. Centres should note that tasks shorter than 4 minutes will be unable to gain the full marks available, while tasks in excess of 5 minutes will not benefit the student, as examiners will stop listening after the maximum 5 minutes allowed for the task. Teachers must announce the beginning and end of each task but must not stop the recording until the whole assessment is complete.

Common Pitfalls (ii)

- While a broad choice of topics is available, centres must nevertheless ensure that the focus of each task remains within one of the two prescribed broad themes - *Media, Travel and Culture* or *Sport, Leisure and Work*.
- An inappropriately selected topic can have a serious adverse effect on the mark a candidate can achieve. For example, 'school' featured on previous specifications as an oral topic but is not a feature of the current specification. At worst, a candidate who speaks solely about school for the entire 4-5 minute assessment could score 0 for that task. Centres should also note that a mark of 0 under Content and Response

also means 0 in the remaining 2 categories. Possible topics linked to the two broad themes are listed in the specification.

- Teachers must not prepare exam-specific lists of questions with candidates or rehearse specific exams. Such cases are usually obvious to examiners and are likely to limit candidate performance. At worst, this could be considered collusion with the candidate and could be referred to Edexcel's Standards and Compliance Department.
- It is vital to check after each exam that the exam has been recorded. If a student's exam has not been recorded and this is discovered only after the assessment window has closed, it will not be possible for another exam to be carried out. It is also good practice for centres to keep copies of submitted recordings. This would be useful in the event of broken CDs, corrupted USBs or if they become lost in the post.

Sources of Feedback and Guidance

- The Specification and Administrative Support Guide are both invaluable sources of detailed guidance on the preparation, conduct and administration of all aspects of the oral assessments.
- You can access reports on previous exam series that feature examiners' tips and advice via the language-specific GCSE qualifications page. These appear under the 'Examiner reports' category.
- Access to all of these materials is via Edexcel's website www.edexcel.com