

# GCSE French, German and Spanish reform

## Summary of key changes for our accredited specifications

Our new [GCSE French, German and Spanish qualifications](#) are now available for first teaching from September 2024 and first assessment in summer 2026. Developed for learners of all abilities, we've focused on making our assessments clear and accessible with engaging and relevant content. Take a closer look at the key changes between the current specification and the new specification.

### Current specification

### New specification

<p><b>Four equally weighted components:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1 Listening: 25%</li> <li>• Paper 2 Speaking: 25%</li> <li>• Paper 3 Reading: 25%</li> <li>• Paper 4 Writing: 25%</li> </ul>	<p><b>Same equally weighted components despite assessment objectives having different weightings.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper 1 Listening: 25%</li> <li>• Paper 2 Speaking: 25%</li> <li>• Paper 3 Reading: 25%</li> <li>• Paper 4 Writing: 25%</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assessment objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AO1 Listening: 25%</li> <li>• AO2 Speaking: 25%</li> <li>• AO3 Reading: 25%</li> <li>• AO4 Writing: 25%</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AO1: understand and respond to spoken language in speaking and in writing – 35%</li> <li>• AO2: understand and respond to written language in speaking and in writing – 45%</li> <li>• AO3: demonstrate understanding and accurate application of the grammar and vocabulary prescribed in the specification – 20%</li> </ul>
<p>Max marks 240 (scaling in Foundation Paper 1 and Foundation Paper 4).</p>	<p>Max marks 200 (scaling in Foundation Paper 1 only).</p>
<p>Tiering – learners enter for either Foundation or Higher in all four papers at the same tier. No mixing of tiers between papers.</p>	<p>Same.</p>
<p>Grading 9-1: Grades 1-5 at Foundation tier and 4-9 at Higher tier with allowed grade 3 at Higher tier.</p>	<p>Same.</p>
<p>All papers set and marked by AQA but Paper 2 speaking test conducted by teachers during a five week window in April / May.</p>	<p>Same.</p>
<p>No dictionaries to be used in any paper including Speaking test preparation time.</p>	<p>Same.</p>

# Themes and topics

## Current specification

### Three prescribed themes:

#### Theme 1: Identity and culture

- Me, my family and friends
- Technology in everyday life
- Free-time activities
- Customs and festivals in French-speaking countries / communities

#### Theme 2: Local, national, international and global areas of interest

- Home, town, neighbourhood and region
- Social issues
- Global issues
- Travel and tourism

#### Theme 3: Current and future study and employment

- My studies
- Life at school / college
- Education post-16
- Jobs, career choices and ambitions

## New specification

### Three themes of our choice:

#### Theme 1: People and lifestyle

- Identity and relationships with others
- Healthy living and lifestyle
- Education and work

#### Theme 2: Popular culture

- Free time activities
- Customs, festivals and celebrations
- Celebrity culture

#### Theme 3: Communication and the world around us

- Travel and tourism, including places of interest
- Media and technology
- The environment and where people live

Learners are expected to use the vocabulary and grammar across a range of contexts and assessment tasks. It's not intended that the themes and topics will specifically be referenced in all assessment tasks. For example, a reading text could be based on 'Shopping habits' which could cover vocabulary from free time activities and where people live. It's the vocabulary and grammar being tested, not the themes and topics.

# Vocabulary and grammar

## Current specification

- AQA set our own vocabulary list.
- Cognates / near cognates not listed.
- Some prior knowledge from KS2 / KS3 assumed.

## New specification

- Vocabulary list of 1,200 words at Foundation plus an additional 500 words at Higher tier.
- List has to include at least 85% of words from top 2,000 most frequent words used according to a recognised corpus.
- No prior knowledge assumed.
- 30 multi-word phrases (MWP) and 20 cultural items allowed in addition to the 1,200/1,700 words.
- Cognates must be listed apart from in Paper 3 where up to 2% of words which have the same meaning and don't impede understanding in a text can be cognates from outside the vocabulary list, in overlap or Higher tier texts only.
- No testing outside of vocabulary list apart from in Paper 1 dictation task and Paper 3 inference task and easily understood cognates (as above).
- Glossing of words (listing of word plus English meaning) outside the vocabulary list permitted in Paper 3 (up to 2% of total text).
- Glossing of proper nouns not easily understood permitted in Paper 3.

Defined grammar list with some items for receptive knowledge only – indicated by R in grammar list.

- Changes to prescribed grammar, including focus on inflectional and derivational morphology.
- All grammar for productive and receptive knowledge.
- Inclusion of Sound Symbol Correspondences (SSCs) tested specifically in Paper 1 dictation and Paper 2 reading aloud task.

Communication strategies section in the specification

Not included in new specification as focus on testing prescribed vocabulary rather than how to access unknown vocabulary.

# Paper 1: Listening

## Current specification

## New specification

<p>Audio recording controlled by the invigilator with built in repetitions and pauses.</p>	<p>Same. Each utterance for Section A Listening comprehension is heard twice with carefully adjusted pauses built in. Dictation sentences are heard three times.</p>
<p>35 minutes at Foundation and 45 minutes at Higher tier approximately, including five minutes' reading time.</p> <p>Recording has to be 'standard speech at near normal speed'.</p>	<p>Same length and five minutes' reading time but addition of two minutes at the end of the test for learners to check their work (all included in recording).</p> <p>Recording has to be no faster than moderate pace with no extraneous interruptions or distractions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 40 marks at Foundation tier</li> <li>• 50 marks at Higher tier</li> <li>• Scaling at Foundation tier 40 marks to 60 marks</li> <li>• Scaling at Higher tier 50 marks to 60 marks</li> </ul>	<p>Same totals.</p> <p>Scaling only at Foundation tier from 40 marks to 50 marks (only paper which is scaled).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehension tasks a mix of written and non-verbal/MCQ tasks.</li> <li>• Includes questions and answers in the target language.</li> <li>• True / False /Don't know task type may be used.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All comprehension questions in English, mix of written and non-verbal / MCQ tasks.</li> <li>• No target language questions and answers.</li> <li>• True/False/Don't know task type no longer used.</li> <li>• Marked for AO1.</li> </ul>
<p>No word limits but longer texts had to be included.</p>	<p>Number of words for listening comprehension (excluding dictation) must be between 450-550 words at Foundation tier and between 700-850 words at Higher tier.</p>
<p>Regulatory requirement to include words from outside the vocabulary list in comprehension tasks.</p>	<p>Can only use words from the prescribed vocabulary list in Section A comprehension tasks.</p>
<p>No dictation task included.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dictation task has to be included (regulatory requirement is minimum 20 words at Foundation and 30 words at Higher).</li> <li>• Presented as short sentences.</li> <li>• Two words from outside the vocabulary list are included at both tiers (regulatory requirement). Learners hear the sentences three times in total, once in full, once broken down into sections (as shown in the transcript) and once again in full.</li> <li>• Marked for AO1 and AO3. Dictation worth 8 marks out of 40 at Foundation tier and 10 marks out of 50 at Higher tier.</li> </ul>

# Paper 2: Speaking

## Current specification

## New specification

<p>Total test 7-9 minutes at Foundation tier. Total test 10-12 minutes at Higher tier. Preparation time 12 minutes at both tiers.</p>	<p>Test duration same length as current specification.  Preparation time 15 minutes at both tiers.</p>
<p>60 marks at Foundation tier. 60 marks at Higher tier.</p>	<p>50 marks at Foundation tier. 50 marks at Higher tier.</p>
<p>Format of test at each tier:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part 1 Role-play (two minutes).</li> <li>Part 2 photo card (two minutes Foundation tier / three minutes Higher tier).</li> <li>Part 3 general conversation (3-5 minutes Foundation tier and 5-7 Higher tier).</li> </ul>	<p>Format of test at each tier:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part 1 Role-play (between 1 and 1.5 minutes).</li> <li>Part 2 reading aloud task and unprepared short conversation recommended to last (between 2 and 2.5 minutes at Foundation tier and between 3 and 3.5 minutes at Higher tier).</li> <li>Part 3 photo card discussion – unprepared discussion of one card on a theme. Card contains two photos. First part of the task is a description of the photos. Second part is unprepared conversation on any or all of the topics within the theme of the card (Part 3 is recommended to last between 4-5 minutes at Foundation tier and between 6-7 minutes at Higher tier in total, ie description of the photos and the unprepared conversation).</li> </ul>
<p>Sequence chart published in the Teacher’s booklet to allocate cards to learners.</p>	<p>Same but sequence chart is much less complex because there is no learner nominated theme for the Photo card task.</p>
<p>Part 1 Role-play: Five tasks in target language with a question task and an unprepared task. Marked for Communication and Knowledge and use of language.</p> <p>Learners can write unlimited notes in any format (eg including conjugated verbs) and write a script if they wish and use the script in the test.</p>	<p>Part 1 Role-play: Five tasks in English with a question task but no unprepared task. Marked for AO1 only (communication not language). Worth 20% of marks for speaking test.</p> <p>Same as current specification.</p>
<p>No reading aloud in current specification.</p>	<p>Part 2 is a new task of reading aloud a short text and then answering four compulsory questions which relate to the topic of the text. Questions have to be asked as they appear in the Teacher’s booklet – no paraphrasing or changing. No supplementary questions must be asked by the teacher.</p> <p>Learners can use words or short phrases from the read aloud text to answer the questions if they wish / if appropriate. Learners should develop their answers to these questions (see assessment criteria in mark scheme). Marked for AO1 and AO3. Worth 30% of marks for speaking test.</p>

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# Paper 2: Speaking

## Current specification

Part 2 photo card: learners discuss one photo card and have three of the five questions on their card to prepare in their preparation time.

Part 3 General conversation covering two themes, first theme nominated by the learner.

Learner notes handed to the teacher along with the stimulus cards after Part 2 before Part 3 of the general conversation. Retained securely until results day and then disposed of.

## New specification

Part 3 Discussion of Photo card – learners are given one card containing two related photos from a theme.

- Cards allocated according to the sequence chart (no learner choice) and learners prepare this card in their preparation time, making notes which they can use in their test.
- Any relevant content generated by the learner, even if it's outside the theme of the card is credited. For example, if the theme is Popular culture and the photos show sport which is part of free time activities, learners could say something about healthy living and lifestyle because people do sport to stay fit etc.
- The first question is compulsory and will be the same in each series 'Tell me about the photos'.

Learners need to look at the photos in the preparation time and make notes about the content and then deliver this in response to 'Tell me about the photos'. Approximately one minute at Foundation tier and one and a half minutes at Higher tier. Learners can choose to say more about one photo than the other - the only requirements is to say a minimum of one thing about each

Discussion then broadens out into any or all of the topics within the theme at the discretion of the teacher. Photo card task recommended to last between 4-5 minutes at FT and 6 and 7 minutes at HT in total and that includes the description of the photos and the unprepared conversation.

Marked for AO1 and AO3. Worth 50% of the marks for the speaking test.

No general conversation task in this speaking test.

Learner notes and the stimulus cards are collected in by the teacher at the end of the test and notes retained securely until results day and then disposed of.

# Paper 3: Reading

## Current specification

## New specification

45 minutes at Foundation and one hour at Higher tier.	Same length.
60 marks at Foundation and Higher tiers.	50 marks at each tier.
Comprehension tasks a mix of written and non-verbal / MCQ tasks.  Includes questions and answers in the target language.  True / False / Don't know task type may be used.	All comprehension questions in English, mix of written and non-verbal / MCQ tasks. No target language questions and answers.  True / False / Don't know task type no longer used.  Inference task included as required by the Subject Content.
Texts may include some words from outside the vocabulary list in comprehension tasks.	Can only use words from the prescribed vocabulary list unless they are glossed or easily understood cognates (up to 2% of any given text).  Any proper nouns not easily understood must be glossed, eg Lyon is easily understood but Ecosse (Scotland) would not be classed as 'easily understood'.
No word limits but longer texts had to be included.	Number of words for stimulus texts must be between 600-650 words at Foundation tier and between 850-900 words at Higher tier. Both totals are excluding the translation task.
Literary texts have to be included at both tiers.	No requirement for literary texts at either tier so will not be used.
Translation from the target language into English (regulatory requirement minimum 35 words at Foundation and 50 words at Higher tier).	Same number of words at each tier as current specification (minimum 35 and 50) but translation defined as 'an appropriate and sufficient rendering of the meaning of the original language'. In practice, this means that we require less precision in the way the text is translated (see mark schemes).
Translation at both tiers is a passage.	Sentences at both tiers.

# Paper 4: Writing

## Current specification

## New specification

One hour at Foundation and one hour 15 minutes at Higher tier.	One hour and 10 minutes at Foundation tier. Higher tier is same as current specification (one hour and 15 mins).
60 marks at Foundation and Higher tiers.	50 marks at each tier.
Four questions at Foundation tier and three questions at Higher tier.	Now five questions at Foundation tier which includes the new Question 3, is a short MCQ grammar task. Question 2 at Foundation tier is now five bullets instead of four.  At Higher tier, same number of questions but translation is now Question 1 instead of Question 3 to reflect AQA design principles where compulsory questions appear first in a paper.
Translation from English into the target language at both tiers is a minimum of 35 words at Foundation and 50 words at Higher (regulatory requirement).	Same number of words (minimum 35 and 50) but translation defined as 'an appropriate and sufficient rendering of the meaning of the original language'. In practice, this means that we require less precision in the way the text is translated (see mark schemes).
Optionality – choice of two questions for overlap and Higher tier longer response question (Question 2).	Same optionality maintained but now Question 3 at Higher tier.
Overlap question has four bullet points including a bullet targeting each of past, present, future and one opinion task.	Overlap question has three bullet points in English – there is no longer a requirement for opinion task, so number of bullet points reduced to reflect this. Each bullet will target a different time frame to test grammar requirements. Bullet points will always be in the same order of time frames, ie present, past, future. No specific opinion task in this specification.
Suggested word counts.	Exactly the same for overlap question and Higher tier Question 3 but Foundation tier Question 2 is now 50 words instead of 40 words approximately to reflect the inclusion of the additional bullet point.
Translation at Foundation tier is sentences and at Higher tier is a passage.	Sentences at both tiers.