

## Notes and guidance: How to conduct A-level speaking tests (3T and 3V): Paper 3 Speaking

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These guidance notes provide advice on how tests should be conducted for A-level French, German and Spanish. Please read them in conjunction with the A-Level French, German and Spanish *Instructions for the conduct of exams*.

This guide supports:

A-level French: 7652/3T and 3V

A-level German: 7662/3T and 3V

A-level Spanish: 7692/3T and 3V.

## Instructions and guidance on how speaking tests are to be conducted

### The nature of oral communication

A speaking test is very different from a written test in that it involves communication and interaction between two people. A number of points need to be borne in mind about the nature of this type of test. First of all, a spoken utterance, once made, cannot be unmade, unlike written sentences which can be crossed out and rewritten. So whilst a particular utterance may be corrected, the original version still forms part of the communication as a whole. Secondly, a conversation is never totally under the control of one speaker and depends, to a large extent, on the interaction between participants, ie between examiner and student. There is always a certain amount of uncertainty surrounding what will happen next. Students need to adjust and readjust their responses frequently during the course of the examination, whereas in a written examination they can continue their own thought processes without being interrupted. Examiners, too, need to be attentive and responsive to the progress of the exchanges between themselves and students for the conversation to develop with a degree of spontaneity.

### Successful examining techniques

The examiner has a significant responsibility for the level of performance a student is able to demonstrate; the speaking test is the only one where the examiner selects the questions as the test is proceeding. The examiner's objective in doing this should be to encourage every student to reach his/her potential within the allotted time. To provide the conditions for this to occur, the examiner has to decide, as the test is progressing, which questions will elicit the best performance from the student.

Here are four areas of examining technique relating to successful oral exams.

#### Structuring the dialogue within the available time

The student should be able to use the time available to his/her advantage and be given the chance to talk and sustain the conversation as much as possible. The more the examiner talks, the less time will remain for the student to do so. However, few students are capable of reacting as immediately and accurately to questions in a foreign language as they would be capable of doing in their first language. Over the course of the test they may need time to collect their thoughts, think through replies and compose their response. The examiner therefore needs to be conscious of the time limits of all parts of the test and be prepared to allow a short time for reflection if necessary, but also stimulate the student into amplifying ideas as fully as possible.

#### Question sequencing

All students are different and therefore we do not expect one pre-determined question sequence to enable every student to perform to the best of their ability. As such we expect all examiners to adopt the practice of proceeding through the test on the basis of what the student says, rather than to use a pre-set list of questions. To follow such an arrangement would impose too rigid a structure upon the interchange and lead to an interrogation rather than a conversation. Question sequence should be determined by the responses given by the student, and the appropriateness of each question decided by the examiner as the test progresses.

#### Question types

There are essentially two different types of question: closed and open. The former will elicit short responses such as yes, no or a one-word or one-phrase answer (see

examples in column A below), while the latter will require longer answers (see examples in column B below).

| <b>A</b>                      | <b>B</b>                         |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| What programmes do you watch? | Why did she do that?             |
| When was 'X' born?            | What do you think of ....?       |
| Have you studied Spanish?     | How far is it true that ....?    |
| Who wrote the book?           | For what reason did he ....?     |
| Which plays have you seen?    | Explain that idea.               |
| Where did you go?             | What is it about?                |
| Is there a lot of 'Y' here?   | What are the advantages of ....? |
| What do you like doing?       | What does that mean?             |

Short, undeveloped responses may lead to insufficient communication from students and indicate too great a dominance over the test by the examiner. Another consequence could be that students become too reliant on the examiner and as a result miss out on opportunities to discuss their own opinions. Some questions of the type in column A might well be used to initiate a dialogue, but the examiner should aim to use as many open questions, as outlined in column B, as possible. This should allow examiners to avoid the 'tennis match' type of dialogue, consisting of a series of closed questions and short answers.

Questions should be aimed at eliciting particular types of language. The following are useful language types to target at A-level:

- Description                      Tell me about...
- Definition                        What do you understand by...?
- Explanation                      What do you mean when you say...?
- Exemplification                Can you give an example of...?
- Comparison                      What differences do you see between...and...?
- Opinions                         What do you think about...?
- Merits/pitfalls                 What are the advantages of...?
- Reasons                         Why be concerned about...?
- Hypothesis                      How would you react if...?

Additionally, at A-level, examiners are required to give students opportunities to explain their views, develop their ideas or arguments further, justify an opinion or defend a point of view and to do this by bringing in knowledge from their studies and research. We should be seeking to use challenges that encourage students to develop their points, but not be so challenging as to intimidate them. Some examples are given below:

You said "x" – what exactly do you mean?

You said "x" – can you give me some examples from what you've studied?

You said “x” – as far as you are aware, is that always the case?

You said the government of the country has already taken action – what has it done? Is there more that it could do, do you think?

You seem to be suggesting “x” – can you justify that? Is it that simple?

Why do you think “x” – what about the view that...?

What would you say to those that claim that...?

Some people think differently. Can you understand their point of view? Do you agree with them?

Is it the case that the attitudes of adults towards “x” are the same as those of young people?

How have you come to these conclusions about “x” in the country you’ve studied?

### Further questioning techniques

Students have to demonstrate their full range of language expertise in order to gain the highest marks of which they are capable. The examiner therefore needs to be able to exploit some of the more difficult areas of oral examining in order to allow students to do this. This may include rephrasing a question already posed due to insufficient response, repeating a question, changing topic, using prompts and dealing with irrelevant answers.

#### Rephrasing

‘Rephrasing’ requires the examiner to alter the question in order to accommodate the student’s response or lack of response. The instances where this technique is most useful are when the question proves either too demanding or too easy for a particular student. For example, “What is the cultural importance of this city?” might not prompt much of a response whereas a rephrasing of the question as “Culturally speaking, what is there to do and see in this city?” gives the student a more concrete way into responding.

#### Repeating a question

A question should be repeated when it is evident that, for some reason or other, the student has not heard it or interpreted it correctly. However, if the question has not been understood it is usually unwise to repeat it more than once since this could waste test time. In this case another question on a different aspect is usually the best course of action. Pursuing questions not understood may well have a negative effect upon students. Where students do not manage to answer a question it is important that they are encouraged not to dwell on any sense of failure and moved on to the next question.

#### Short prompts

To encourage development of a student’s language there is not always a need to pose long questions when discussing a sub-theme. In accordance with a student’s replies, short prompts can be used to invite further explanation or a reason for what has just been said. For example, while discussing a topic a student may state ‘That depends’, the short prompt ‘on what?’ can be an economical way of stimulating further opinion. Other such prompts, depending on the situation, could be ‘Why?’, ‘Why not?’, ‘Explain that’ and ‘How do you know that?’

## Dealing with irrelevant answers

Examiners should be aware that answers that do not constitute a reply to the question asked, common amongst less able students who tend to say everything they know about a topic instead of addressing the question, cannot be credited. Care should therefore be taken to re-orientate the student along relevant lines as soon as irrelevant answers appear.

## Examining techniques that could disadvantage students

1. Supplying words not known or poorly remembered.
2. Correcting students' language.
3. Finishing utterances when students hesitate.
4. Overuse of interruption.
5. Asking closed questions requiring yes or no answers without follow-up.
6. Commenting on replies too frequently rather than allowing students to develop ideas independently.
7. Offering alternatives.
8. Recounting personal experience related to students' ideas.
9. Registering agreement too soon before students have had time to explain their opinions fully.
10. Flippancy or jokes that may not be understood by students.

As well as not advancing the marks of students in any way, employing these techniques can also entail other disadvantages:

- they can make students reluctant to talk by encouraging feelings of incompetence or inadequacy (1, 2, 3 and 10)
- the more the examiner talks, the less time there is left for the student to score marks (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10)
- they can prevent students from amplifying and developing their ideas in an independent fashion, as required by the assessment criteria (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)
- if the examiner talks too much in these ways the student may receive the impression that there is no need to make more than one or two statements to each question in order to score satisfactory or even high marks (4, 6 and 9).

As a consequence of the time limit for each part of the test and of the importance attached to the amount spoken by the student, both the frequency of examiner questioning and prompting, and the type and sequence of question posed assume particular significance. The degree to which a student is prompted will, of course, vary with his/her degree of response. Less able students will require more frequent prompting, while stronger students will need very little. There is a need to ensure, however, that the frequency with which questions are put does not intrude upon the student's thinking time, nor stifle any fullness of reply.

Further discussion of examining techniques is elaborated under the two parts of the test. For detailed information about the conduct of the tests please refer to the *Instructions for the conduct of exams*, which is issued for each assessment session.

## A level Paper 3

### Guidance points on each part

#### Part 1 – Discussion of the sub-theme

The examiner should ask the first question on the chosen stimulus and keep to the printed questions in the order they appear. Supplementary questions prompted by what students say in their responses should be asked as necessary between the printed questions. Once the examiner feels the content of the stimulus card has been explored sufficiently the discussion should move away from the stimulus material itself to consider the wider **sub-theme** area. It is here that the examiner must realise that each individual student's responses will provide points for supplementary questioning. It is not in the student's interests for the examiner to be working from a set of pre-prepared questions as this can easily give the impression of an over-rehearsed discussion. It should be noted that students must not be permitted to give lengthy pre-learnt responses to questions in the discussion. In the course of the discussion, the student must ask two questions of the examiner. If this does not happen the examiner must prompt the student to attempt to phrase their two questions.

#### Part 2 – Individual Research Project

The student will have completed a Candidate Record Form ahead of the speaking test and the examiner will give this to the student at the start of the preparation time. It should be noted, however, that the preparation time is not to be used to review the Candidate Record Form but must be spent on preparing the questions to the stimulus card. The examiner must not allow the student's presentation to go beyond two minutes and should interrupt the student to say that the discussion must now begin.

The examiner's questions in the discussion must provide opportunities for the student to explain, develop further, justify and defend opinions and views using evidence from the topic that has been researched so that a critical evaluation of the chosen topic can be demonstrated.

### How to decide what kind of questions to ask

Successful examining relies on the examiner's ability to assess what a particular student is capable of achieving and then ensuring that the student is taken beyond this so that the student genuinely fulfils their potential.

In Part 1, discussion of a sub-theme based on a stimulus card, follow-up questions to the first printed question will allow the examiner to push the student. If a student copes with a fairly basic question with no difficulty then more taxing questions are called for. If, on the other hand, a basic question proves challenging, the examiner knows to adjust the level of questioning to something the student can respond to. So, if the student has difficulty even with easy open-ended questions, they should then be asked more GCSE level questions, once the examiner is sure that this is all they can manage. As a general principle, it seems desirable to work gradually from easy questions to more searching ones, provided the student can sustain this progression.

In either part of the test there is little point in persisting with a level of questioning or a subject area that produces minimal response or a collapse in performance. This does not, of course, preclude later use of more difficult questions, to see what the student's limits are. It merely implies a return to an easier level if the student begins to flounder.

Students will, no doubt, have learnt a number of answers to questions, eg on a favourite topic. These prepared answers can be useful up to a point, but students

should be led away from them as soon as possible to avoid regurgitation of large amounts of pre-rehearsed material.

The test should be ended in a sympathetic way, perhaps with a couple of very straightforward questions, to ensure that the final moments of the test are a positive experience for the student, as this is what they will remember.

The total speaking test must not exceed 18 minutes. Marking will be strictly in line with the timings.

- Part 1 discussion: marking will stop at 6 minutes
- Part 2 presentation: marking will stop at 2 minutes
- Part 2 discussion: marking will stop at 10 minutes

## Further points of guidance

The points mentioned below are issues of conduct raised by the senior examiners for Speaking for French, German and Spanish. Teachers are advised to consider the points raised in advance of future examination sessions.

### Part 1: Discussion of sub-theme

Teachers preparing students should be aware of the importance of the development of points in response to the printed questions and students should be encouraged to look for every opportunity to develop such points in their preparation time. Each question should be seen as an opportunity for students to develop as many relevant points as possible. There is a significant difference between making a point and developing a point and a student will only access the highest marks if he/she uses the questions to sustain a conversation. The student who gives only very brief responses to the printed questions will achieve only a low score. It is essential, therefore, that students are well practised in maximising their use of preparation time so that they can respond as necessary. The examiner may ask follow-up questions in between the printed questions. The examiner must then ask further questions relating to the sub-theme.

The student must ask the teacher two questions arising from the material on the card. Students are advised to prepare this in their preparation time. If the student does not ask these questions, the examiner should invite them to do so before the end of the discussion by saying, for example, 'Do you have any questions for me?'. The teacher-examiner should give only a brief response in the target language to the student's questions. If the student asks only one question arising from the content of the card, the maximum mark that can be awarded for AO2 is 4; if the student asks no questions arising from the content of the card, the maximum mark that can be awarded for AO2 is 3.

### Part 2: Presentation and discussion of the individual research project

The importance of providing questions which require students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of what they have researched in responding to questions eliciting views and opinions and challenges to explain, develop further, justify and defend, cannot be overstated.

The following case studies – one each for A-level French, German and Spanish individual research project discussions – illustrate the range and scope of questions that would be appropriate for this discussion.

Prior to the test taking place the student will have submitted a list of points referring to aspects that he/she had focussed on during the research into the chosen topic. These points will form the basis of both presentation and discussion.

## French case study

The student has chosen *l'abbé Pierre* as the subject of an individual research project.

It is assumed that in the course of the presentation by the student, mention is made of the main stages of the abbé Pierre's life and work and of the Mouvement Emmaüs.

Questions from the examiner might then focus on the following areas:

- *A votre avis, est-ce que l'abbé Pierre est un personnage principalement politique ou religieux ?*
- *Quel a été l'impact, selon vous, du Mouvement Emmaüs ?*
- *Que savez-vous du travail de la Fondation Abbé Pierre dix ans après la mort de son fondateur ?*
- *Et l'abbé Pierre, c'est quelqu'un que vous admirez ? Pourquoi / Pourquoi pas ?*
- *Pourquoi avez-vous choisi ce personnage comme sujet de vos recherches ?*
- *Parmi les documents ou les sites web que vous avez consultés lequel a été le plus utile ?*
- *Comment avez-vous réagi à ce que vous avez appris ? Est-ce que cela vous a inspiré(e), par exemple ?*

Further examples of IRP titles for French

- The increase in obesity in France - causes and solutions.
- Are abortion laws in France acceptable or not?
- Do French women really have equality of opportunity?
- Is the French comic-strip a major art-form or simply entertainment?
- Is Tintin a racist comic-strip?
- Why are francophone comic-strips so successful?
- The New Wave and its impact on French cinema
- How has the French family unit evolved over recent years?
- Are new technologies a good or a bad thing for French society?
- Can France be said to be the country of new technologies?
- Is tourism in France a plus for the economy or a disaster for the environment?
- Paris - myth and reality
- How to tackle crime in France. Should we punish or rehabilitate?

## German case study

The student has chosen *Das Phänomen Aldi und Lidl* as the subject of an individual research project.



During the presentation, the student may give a brief outline of the history and/or development of the German supermarket chains; he/she may talk about the companies' founders, may explain some of the business practices or the underlying ethos of the two companies. In addition the student may describe some of the characteristics of the stores, the type of merchandise on offer and may give reasons for the success of Aldi and Lidl.

Questions from the examiner may then focus on the following aspects:

- *Wie viel Einfluss haben die Gründer von Aldi und Lidl noch auf das Unternehmen?*
- *Wie erklären Sie die Tatsache, dass Aldi und Lidl auch außerhalb Deutschlands erfolgreich geworden sind?*
- *Was hat Sie an diesem Thema besonders interessiert?*
- *Inwiefern werden Aldi und Lidl auch kritisiert und wie denken Sie über diese Kritik?*
- *Glauben Sie, dass Aldi und Lidl in der Zukunft ihren Marktanteil noch vergrößern können? Warum (nicht)?*
- *Wie haben Sie die notwendigen Informationen für dieses Thema gefunden?*
- *Haben Sie als Teil Ihrer Recherchen mit einem oder mehreren Mitarbeitern von Aldi oder Lidl gesprochen? Wenn ja, was haben Sie dabei erfahren?*

Further examples of IRP titles for German'

- Was Friedrich II of Prussia really 'the Great'?
- What are the reasons for Germany turning its back on nuclear energy and what will be the consequences?
- To what extent has the free movement of people within the EU benefited Germany economically?
- Is Angela Merkel the most influential politician in Europe today?
- How has racism influenced German society in recent years?
- What is Bertold Brecht's influence on modern German theatre?
- In what way was *Frühlings Erwachen* a controversial play and how did it influence German literature in the 20th century?

## Spanish case study

The student has chosen the lasting impact of the *Aznalcollar* environmental disaster on the *Doñana* National Park as the subject of an individual research project.

It is assumed that in the course of the presentation by the student, mention is made of the status of Doñana as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the events of April 1998 when toxic waste was spilt in the park, the impact on the ecosystem and the effectiveness of measures taken to protect it.

Questions from the examiner might then focus on the following areas:

- *¿Por qué tiene el Parque Nacional de Doñana tanta importancia medioambiental en el mundo?*
- *¿Qué aspectos de la biodiversidad del parque se vieron más afectados por la fuga de residuos tóxicos?*

- *¿Opinas que se hubiera podido evitar el desastre?*
- *Que tú sepas, ¿el ecosistema ha sufrido daños permanentes como resultado del accidente?*
- *¿Qué ejemplos de la flora y la fauna te interesan más?*
- *¿Por qué crees que el lince ibérico es emblemático de Doñana?*
- *En tu opinión, ¿hay suficientes controles sobre el turismo dentro del parque?*
- *¿Qué otras amenazas existen para Doñana en la actualidad?*

Further examples of IRP titles for Spanish

1. To what extent have Spanish women achieved equality since the death of Franco?
2. Analyse the symbols in Picasso's *Guernica*.
3. Discuss the challenges that Spain's tourist industry is currently facing and what lies ahead for the future of this industry.
4. What are the causes and consequences of drug trafficking in Mexico?
5. How did the society of the 1920s and 30s influence the works of Lorca?
6. Evaluate the common themes present in Pedro Almodovar's films.

## Understanding what is being assessed and how this influences the conduct of the test

It is important that examiners understand how the student's performance in the speaking test is assessed, and how some Assessment Objectives impact on the conduct of the test.

Assessment Objective 1 covers pace of delivery and how easy or difficult it is to follow what a student is saying. It also includes how the student develops ideas and opinions and how they respond to unpredictable elements in the discussion of the sub-theme in Part 1 and how they respond to questions about their research in Part 2.

In terms of the conduct of the tests this means that there must be opportunities for students to develop their points. Some may do this independently but the vast majority will require some form of prompt or invitation to give a little bit more on a particular idea or opinion. Examiners who move on to a new question rather than exploring a question more fully are not giving their students the opportunities to develop answers. Likewise there have to be unpredictable elements in order that students can demonstrate an appropriate response to these.

Assessment Objective 2 covers the student's understanding of the material on the card, including the target-language headings, any statement of opinion, any factual or statistical information and the printed questions. If a student's response to a question shows that material has been wrongly interpreted or understood, the examiner must use questions that give the student a chance to correct this. If a student's response suggests that part of card has been overlooked (eg advantages and disadvantages and the student only talks about advantages) the examiner should explore that aspect or those aspects not mentioned in the student's response.

Assessment Objective 3 covers the variety of vocabulary, the complexity of language, the application of grammar and pronunciation and intonation. The latter two cannot be influenced by the examiner during the test itself but the style of

questioning and the level of linguistic sophistication introduced through the questions can certainly affect the complexity of language expected of the student.

Assessment Objective 4 covers the student's knowledge of aspects of the sub-theme covered in the Part One discussion and aspects of the topic that has been researched. The new specification requires that themes, sub-themes and topics are studied in the context of target-language cultures and communities and that this knowledge of society is specifically assessed and credited in the speaking test. Therefore examiners must remember to create opportunities for students to demonstrate this knowledge. The following questions may allow them to do so:

- What do you know about...?
- What have you learned about...?
- My impression is that in (country) this is the situation. Would you agree? Do you think that's the case? Is that what your studies have shown?

Examiners should use any visits abroad as a further dimension to this target-language country specific knowledge.