

Notes and guidance: How to conduct AS speaking tests (3T and 3V): Paper 3 Speaking

These guidance notes provide advice on how tests are to be recorded, and on how tests should be conducted for AS French, German and Spanish. Please read them in conjunction with the AS French, German and Spanish Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations.

This guide supports:

- AS French: 7651/3T and 3V
- AS German: 7661/3T and 3V
- AS Spanish: 7691/3T and 3V.

How tests should be recorded and submitted

Quality of recordings

Schools/colleges are asked to pay particular attention to the quality of their recordings as examiners cannot mark what they cannot hear. Clear recordings with no background hissing and with students well positioned in relation to the microphone are essential so that their responses are audible. Centres are reminded that external noise from other students, doors banging on corridors, noise from lawnmowers etc are a major distraction for examiners and students and can have a negative impact on a student's performance.

Schools/colleges may like to consider using digital voice recorders which are available for £30-£40. They are the size of a mobile phone, automatically record in MP3 format, produce very clear recordings and do not need an external microphone. Our GCE MFL visiting examiners use these devices very successfully. The transferring of files from the digital recorder is a very straightforward operation and does not require a great level of technical expertise.

Advice and guidance on how tests are to be conducted

The nature of oral communication

A speaking test is very different from a written test. It involves live communication and interaction between two people. A number of points need to be kept in mind. First of all, a spoken utterance cannot be undone – whereas written sentences can be crossed out and rewritten. So whilst a particular utterance may well be revised, amended or corrected, the original version still forms part of the communication as a whole and cannot be deleted.

Secondly, spoken communication is never totally under the control of any one speaker and depends on the unpredictable interaction between both participants i.e. between examiner and student. Although there are certain standard strategies in all forms of verbal exchange, there is a fair amount of uncertainty as to what will happen next. Students need to adjust and readjust their responses frequently during the course of the examination. In a written examination they can control their own thought processes without being interrupted.

Examiners need to be attentive and responsive to the progress of the exchanges between themselves and students for the conversation to develop with natural spontaneity.

Examining techniques that might 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 in detail personal experience related to students' ideas.
9. Registering agreement too soon before students have had time to explain fully their opinions.
10. Flippancy or jokes which may not be understood by students.

Not only does this restrict your student's chance of gaining marks, it can lead to other disadvantages too:

- they can make students reluctant to talk by encouraging feelings of incompetence or inadequacy (1, 2, 3 & 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 & 10)
- they can prevent students from amplifying and developing their ideas in an independent fashion – a requirement of the assessment criteria (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9)
- if the examiner talks too much in these ways, the student receives the implied impression that there is no need to make more than one or two utterances to each question in order to score satisfactory or even high marks – an expectation is set up in the student early in the test that it is not worth developing ideas because there is not time to do so before the next question is asked (4, 6 & 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 (see later), 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 always, vary with his/her degree of response. Less able students will require more frequent prompting whereas stronger students will need very little. There is a need to ensure that the frequency with which questions are put does not intrude upon the student's thinking time, nor stifle any fullness of reply.

Successful examining techniques

The examiner has a very significant responsibility for the type of performance which a student is able to demonstrate. The speaking test is the only one of all the papers in the whole examination where the examiner selects the questions,

but does so as the test is proceeding. The examiner's objective in both parts should be to encourage every student to reach his/her linguistic ceiling within the allotted time.

To provide the conditions for this to occur, it is insufficient to know beforehand just what kind of questions to pose. It's necessary to develop the skill of realising which questions can be most effectively asked at any particular point in the ongoing dialogue to extract the best performance from the student.

There are four areas of examining technique which relate to successful spoken examining.

1. Structuring the dialogue within the available time

The student should be permitted to use the time available to his/her advantage to be given the chance to talk and sustain the interchange as much as possible. The more the examiner talks, the less chance of the student being able to show what they can do.

Few students are capable of reacting immediately and accurately all the time to questions in the foreign language, as they would normally be capable of doing in their native tongue. Now and again during the dialogue they may need a little time to marshal their thoughts, think through replies and compose utterances, while also attending to the quality of the language to be used. The examiner needs to be conscious of the time limits of both parts of the test and be prepared to allow a short time for reflection or to stimulate the student into amplifying ideas as fully as possible.

2. Question sequencing

The worst possible way of conducting a spoken test is to follow a preset list of questions. This is because the examiner's task is to frame questions and comments *on the basis of the student's responses* with the objective of stimulating an exchange of views. All examiners must adopt the practice of proceeding on the basis of what the student says, rather than to use a preset list of questions. Preset lists impose too rigid a structure upon the interchange and lead to an interrogation rather than an exchange of opinions. All students are different and cannot be matched to a rehearsed determined question sequence. Question sequence is determined by the responses given by the student, such that the appropriateness of each question is decided by the examiner as the test progresses.

Question types

There are two different types of question: closed and open. The former elicit short responses such as yes, no or a one word or one phrase answer (column A below), while the latter require longer answers (column B below).

A

Which programmes do you watch?

B

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 run the danger of leading to insufficient oral communication from students and indicate too great a dominance over the content and direction of the test by the examiner. A further corollary of such responses is that they make students over reliant on the examiner and so severely limit their potential for amplifying their own opinions. The examiner should always aim to use questions of the type outlined in column B and avoid engaging in the tennis match type of dialogue, consisting of a whole series of regularly frequent questions and regularly short answers. Some questions of the type in column A might well be used to initiate a dialogue.

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

- *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?

3. Further questioning techniques

Since students have to demonstrate their maximal expertise in expression to gain the highest marks of which they are capable, the teacher examiner's skill needs to be sufficiently developed to be able to exploit confidently some of the more difficult areas of oral examining. These areas include rephrasing a question already posed due to insufficient response, repeating a question, changing topic, using short prompts and dealing with irrelevant answers.

Rephrasing

Rephrasing means altering the angle of the question to accommodate the student's response or lack of response. The two instances where this technique is 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 the student has not heard it or interpreted it correctly. If the question has not been understood it is usually unwise to repeat it more than once since this could constitute a waste of the student's time.

In this case another question on a different aspect is 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 discouraged from dwelling on what will for them be a sense of failure... That's OK. Don't worry. We'll talk about something else will help reassure the student.

Short prompts

To encourage development of a student's language there is no need to pose a long question when discussing a sub-theme. In accordance with a student's replies, short prompts can be used to advantage, particularly 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, are: 'Why?', 'Why not?', 'Explain that' and 'How do you know that?'

Irrelevant answers

It should be noted that answers which do not constitute a reply to the question asked – common amongst those less able students who tend to say everything they know about a topic instead of addressing the question put – cannot be credited. Care should be taken to direct the student's thinking along relevant lines as soon as irrelevant answers appear.

Given all that has been said about the nature of the interchange between teacher examiner and student and the framework in which it should take place, it becomes quite clear that the test in no way approaches a completely natural conversation; it should be viewed as a structured dialogue.

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 New AS French, German and Spanish Conduct of the Examinations which is issued for each assessment session.

AS Paper 3

The 15 minutes preparation time prior to the speaking test is for the reading and preparation of both of the cards on which the test will be based.

Part 1 (6-7 minutes) is a discussion of stimulus material which will be an A4 card with a small amount of information on it in the form of printed matter, diagrams, pictures, graphs, etc. together with three introductory questions. All 12 provided cards are based on aspects of the six AS sub-themes (two cards on each sub-theme). The exact amount of text, visual element, etc will vary depending on the topic in question and on the natural variety of the material itself.

Students will be given a pair of cards from one of the six sub-themes and must choose one for discussion. They will be permitted to make notes which they may bring into the examination room and may refer to at any time during this part of the test.

The student's response to the stimulus material will be assessed in terms of their knowledge and understanding of the aspects of the sub-theme which are covered and how well they express and develop ideas and opinions, as well as on their language and delivery. They must also ask a question and failure to do so will affect the A02 mark. This part of the test must last no longer than 7 minutes.

Part 2 (6-7 minutes) is a discussion of stimulus material from a different sub-theme from the one discussed in Part 1. The material will be on an A4 card with a small amount of information on it in the form of printed matter, diagrams, pictures, graphs, etc. together with three introductory questions. All 12 provided cards are based on aspects of the six AS sub-themes (two cards on each sub-theme). The exact amount of text, visual element, etc will vary depending on the topic in question and on the natural variety of the material itself.

Students will be given a pair of cards, each from a different sub-theme. These cards will be from the other main theme from the cards given to the student for Part 1. The student must choose one of the two cards from the pair for discussion. They will be permitted to make notes which they may bring into the examination room and may refer to at any time during this part of the test.

The student's response to the stimulus material will be assessed in terms of their knowledge and understanding of the aspects of the sub-theme which are covered and how well they express and develop ideas and opinions, as well as on their language and delivery. They must also ask a question and failure to do so will affect the A02 mark. This part of the test must last no longer than 7 minutes.

Guidance points on each part

Part 1: Discussion of first 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.

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.

Students must not be permitted to give lengthy rehearsed responses to questions in the discussion. If, towards the end of the discussion, the student has not successfully asked a question of the examiner, the examiner must prompt the student to attempt to phrase a question: for example *Is there anything you want to ask me? Do you have a question you would like to ask?*

Part 2: Discussion of second 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.

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. This can easily give the impression of an over rehearsed discussion. Students must not be permitted to give lengthy rehearsed responses to questions in the discussion. If, towards the end of the discussion, the student has not successfully asked a question of the examiner, the examiner must prompt the student to attempt to phrase a question: for example *Is there anything you want to ask me? Do you have a question you would like to ask?*

How to decide on what sort of questions to ask

Successful examining relies on the examiner's ability to assess as early as possible how capable a student is of achieving a good mark. They also need to ensure that the student is taken beyond this so that they genuinely fulfil their potential.

In Part 1 and Part 2, follow up questions to the first printed question will allow the examiner to do this. If a student copes with a fairly basic question with no

difficulty then more taxing questions are called for. If a basic question proves challenging, the examiner knows to adjust the level of questioning to something the student can respond to.

If they have difficulty with the easy open ended questions, they should be asked GCSE level type questions. As a general principle, it seems desirable to work gradually from easy questions to more searching ones, provided the student can sustain this progression.

There is little point in persisting with a level of questioning or a subject area which produces minimal response or a collapse in performance. This does not 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 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 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 14 minutes as marking will stop at 14 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 first sub-theme

The students' prescribed sub-theme (ie the one where they have no choice of sub-theme) is discussed first.

Teachers preparing students should be aware of the importance of the development of points in response to the printed questions. 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 the briefest of responses to the printed questions will achieve only a low score. It is essential that students are well practised in maximising their use of preparation time so they can respond as necessary. The teacher may ask follow up questions in between the printed questions. The teacher examiner must then ask further questions relating to the sub-theme.

The student must ask the teacher a question arising from the material on the card. Students are advised to prepare this in their preparation time. If the student does not ask a question, the teacher examiner should invite them to do so before the end of the discussion by saying, for example, 'Do you have a question for me?'. The teacher examiner should give only a brief response in the target language to the student's question. If the student fails to ask a question arising from the content of the card, the A02 mark will be reduced by one band. For example, if he/she would have scored 4, he/ she will score 3 because no question was asked.

Part 2: Discussion of second sub-theme

The second sub-theme is the one the student has chosen from the pair of cards on different sub-themes which are offered to him/her. The discussion on this card should be conducted in the same way as the discussion on the first sub-theme.

Responsive questioning that ensures natural interaction and engages the student in some degree of spontaneous exchanges rather than questions picked off from a set list with little or no follow up on what a student actually says is of the utmost importance. It is also important for teacher examiners to differentiate questions according to levels of ability, so that less able students are not left struggling to respond to questions that are clearly beyond their level of proficiency.

Unless the sub theme is prescribed in the specification for study within a specific context, (eg Germany and the EU) students can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the sub theme in the context of any target language speaking country.

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

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

Assessment Objective 1 is to do with pace of delivery and how easy or difficult it is to follow what a student is saying. It's also about how the student develops ideas and opinions and how they respond to unpredictable elements.

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 that 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 is to do with the student's understanding of the material on the card which covers 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 clearly shows that material has been wrongly interpreted or understood, the examiner must use questions that give the student a chance to correct this.

Assessment Objective 3 is to do with the variety of vocabulary, the complexity of language, the application of grammar and pronunciation and intonation. The latter two cannot really 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 is to do with the student's knowledge of aspects of the sub-theme covered in the two discussions. A significant thrust of this new specification is that themes and sub-themes 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. Examiners must be mindful of the need to create opportunities for students to demonstrate such knowledge.

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, remembering all the time that facts are good but facts that generate some opinion or view are even better.