
GCSE

FRENCH

8658/SH Paper 3 Speaking Higher Tier
Report on the Examination

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General comments

Changes were made to the 2023 papers to reflect the removal of the regulatory requirement to test vocabulary outside of the published vocabulary list.

The majority of the tests were well-administered and the *Instructions for the conduct of the exams* observed.

Teacher-examiners are encouraged to remind themselves of good practice in the administration of Speaking tests so that, during the teaching year, they can reiterate details to their students at appropriate points and prepare them well for what to expect in the examination. Some points are highlighted in this report, along with comments on specific parts of the 2023 tests.

Digital recordings have improved the sound quality of speaking tests but volume levels can still present problems. Teachers' voices tend to carry further so the volume level should not be set according to the teacher's production. It is recommended that a sound check be carried out with both teacher-examiner and a student, although not necessarily one who is about to take their test, seated for the exam in their expected positions. A brief recording should be made of normal speech and this replayed to ensure that a listener who is not used to these voices will be able to hear clearly what is said. Extraneous noise, whether caused by participants moving questions on the desk, for example a microphone once the role play has been started, teachers shuffling papers, other students on corridors near the examination room or an electric hand drier in the toilet next door are also a challenge. It must be understood that, if the examiner cannot hear the student's response, it cannot be credited. In respect of the shuffling of papers, teachers generally do this in the intervals between sections of the test but problems can occur, for example, in the general conversation when the student is speaking and a teacher consults pages of notes for a new batch of questions, perhaps on a further topic within a theme.

A copy of the Speaking Score Sheet used by examiners can be found at the back of the 2023 mark scheme.

An administrative error this year led to an incorrect sequencing chart being published initially to schools/colleges. This carried an incorrect set of combinations of Role play plus Photo card plus second theme to be explored in the General conversation and meant that a theme may have been assigned both in the Photo card and the General conversation. This was discovered at the very start of the testing period and corrective action was taken and schools/colleges were issued with a replacement sequence chart. There were unfortunately errors on Photo card I and Photo card P which were notified to schools/colleges and this notification detailed the action to be taken for tests yet to take place. A replacement Teacher's Booklet was also provided.

Teacher-examiner Tester Performance records (TTPRs)

The information provided on the TTPR is intended to provide teacher-examiners with feedback on the conduct of the speaking tests to inform the conduct of future tests. It is not possible to provide more detailed feedback than the information on the TTPR form. The feedback is provided on the basis of need only and will not be necessary for every school/college.

A breakdown of marks for each section of the speaking test for each student in your centre is available free of charge in ERA (Enhanced Results Analysis). ERA is accessed via Centre Services.

Role plays

The biggest challenge for students in this section of the test was once again dealing with interrogatives. If their understanding of these was poor, students struggled to formulate a question when required and sometimes to respond appropriately in other tasks, especially, but not only, in the unprepared task.

In the question task, students sometimes asked a question which was totally unrelated to the prompt or simply read the prompt aloud which could not be credited.

Teacher-examiners must ensure they adhere to their script in the role play. Any variation from this is likely to result in a student's response to a particular task being discounted.

Unfortunately, a lack of focus sometimes caused students to fail to score marks, for example when they did not address the points raised in the task.

Teachers are asked to discourage students from giving unnecessarily lengthy responses and developing answers well beyond what is required by the task. It is in the student's interest to address the task but no more. Unnecessary elaboration in the role play can lead to a lack of focus as students attempt to introduce material with which they feel confident in the sometimes mistaken belief that it will be rewarded. It can also lead to the necessary detail which is required being overlooked.

Where the teacher-examiner was required to ask a two-part unprepared question, it was helpful for the majority of students if the two parts were asked separately. Please note that this is perfectly permissible and is indeed advised since it reduces the load on students. Should students successfully volunteer a response to the second part before it has been asked, for example where an opinion is requested in the first part and the second part requires a reason for this opinion, the teacher does not need to put the second question to the student as the task has been fully accomplished.

Please see the published detailed mark scheme for suggested responses for all role play tasks and the marks these would attract. Additional comments on individual role plays are provided below.

Role Play 10

Task a: some students struggled to express a problem with their phone. A lack of understanding of *quoi* in the prompt may have been at the root of this rather than an inability to express *ne marche pas* or *ne prend pas de photos* etc.

Task b: an appropriate question was generally achieved but, interestingly, *(Est-ce que) je peux ...?* was largely absent from those heard, suggesting this may not be in some students' repertoire.

Task c: *l'achat* in the prompt may not have been recognised by all or a lack of understanding of the interrogative pronouns may have hindered some students from delivering an appropriate response but this was mostly well answered.

Task e: *marque* was not well known but most students scored at least one mark, for a colour.

Role Play 11

All questions were mostly well executed.

Role Play 12

Task b: students sometimes ignored the requirement for *deux activités* and instead gave opinions. Mostly, students announced the most important celebration in their family and then went on to give two activities.

Role Play 13

Task b: the *dans le passé* element was not always addressed, with students stating a job they currently undertake. This meant that the maximum mark which could be awarded was one.

Task d: some students appeared not to understand *à l'étranger*.

Role Play 14

Task c: *bulletin scolaire* was not known by a lot of students. Some made reference to aspects of their school day, others to school uniform, having made the link from other occurrences of *scolaire* (*journée scolaire* and *uniforme scolaire*) with which they were presumably more familiar.

Role Play 15

All questions were mostly well answered.

Role Play 16

Task b: most students asked to change their room. A frequent detail given in task (a) was to state that the room was too small so, in task (b) they often stated *Je voudrais une chambre plus grande*.

Task c: some students struggled to formulate a question. Possible responses to the prompt were *Où est le centre-ville ? / Le centre-ville est loin ? / Qu'est-ce qu'il y a dans le centre-ville ? / Il y a un bon restaurant dans le centre-ville ?*

Role Play 17

Tasks a, b and c were well answered.

Task d: the pronunciation of *Espaces verts* was often poor.

Task e: some students did not grasp the meaning of *Le meilleur site touristique* although, following repetition by the teacher-examiner, some did then go onto to give an appropriate, accurate response.

Role Play 18

Task a: this prompt was sometimes problematic. Students could have asked *Vous avez un horaire de la piscine ?* or *Il y a ... / Je peux avoir ...?* or they could have enquired as to when the swimming pool opened or closed. It is possible that they did not recognise *horaire* although it was expected that they would know this as timetable from school, if not from the area of travel.

Task c: students often overlooked the *où* element contained in the question and offered food questions, having heard *... mangez-vous?*

Task e: many students appeared not to know *alimentation* and *habitudes* was not dealt with well. Perhaps some students only recognise *habitude* in the context of *d'habitude*.

Photo Cards

Students found ample material to describe in the photos presented. Schools/colleges are reminded that responses to the first question must be rooted in the photograph. On occasions, students mentioned things which were not in the photo or gave details which were unrelated to the visual they had. These utterances were discounted. Personalisation of the photo is similarly inappropriate in this task. For example, students should not refer to any individuals depicted as *mon père* or *mon cousin* etc.

A greater degree of precision in their responses would assist students to communicate their ideas. Some students used *il* or *elle* without clarifying which individual featured they were speaking about. Students sometimes tried to express their ideas in a present continuous tense, reflecting English usage, for example, *ils sont regardant* or *ils sont regarder* (sic). Practice in describing common actions featured in pictures or photos would be beneficial so that students become accustomed to generating sentences using common verbs such as: *il/ils (etc) parle/parlent; mange/mangent; regarde/regardent la télé; étudie/étudient*.

In the other four questions too, students' responses must be relevant to the question asked. Unrelated material is discounted; therefore, teachers are advised to discourage their students from introducing material which has a very loose, or no connection to the information requested in the question.

Teachers are advised to read carefully the guidance on paraphrasing questions: some did this well whilst others, in their quest to assist students, did not convey the meaning of the original question or added to it such that they gave additional assistance, often via interpretation or explanation of the question.

Furthermore, teachers are reminded that it is inappropriate for them to introduce their own, additional questions in this part of the test. They are discounted and any response from the student is not credited.

As in the role play, teacher-examiners may, in a two-part unprepared question, separate the two parts and this is often to the benefit of students. Should students successfully volunteer a response to the second part before it has been asked, for example where an opinion is requested in the first part and the second part asks for a reason for this opinion, the teacher does not need to put the second question to the student.

Below are some specific points relating to this year's photo cards.

Photo Card J

All aspects were well answered.

Photo Card K

The questions were well answered.

Question 5

Some students answered for themselves rather than in respect of their friends.

Photo Card L

Question 2

Some students struggled to produce an accurate rendering of *Je préférerais*.

Question 4

Mieux was not recognised by some. At times, this led to more generalised responses regarding relationships with different members of the family.

Photo Card M

Question 3

Lower attaining students found use of the imperfect tense challenging. A good number of students began their answer in the imperfect tense but added extra details of opinions and justifications of these in the present tense, which meant that ideas were not always clearly expressed.

Photo Card N

Question 5

Journée was taken by some to mean 'journey'.

Photo Card O

Question 3

As in Photo Card N, *journée* was sometimes misinterpreted as 'journey'. Some students either missed the reference to *la semaine dernière* in the question or found it difficult to produce accurate perfect tense verb forms for they described the activities of a typical school day in the present tense.

Question 5

A l'étranger was unknown by lower attaining students.

Photo Card P

Question 2

Some students were not familiar with *magasins caritatifs* or could not think of an advantage of shopping there, leading to a struggle to produce an appropriate response.

Question 3

This was better answered than question 2, with ideas of working or donating expressed.

Questions 4 and 5

Generally, well answered.

Photo Card Q

Question 1

The contents of the photograph were often very fully described.

Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5

Responses were well developed.

Photo Card R

Question 3

Améliorer was not always known and some students could speak of problems but found suggesting solutions difficult.

Question 5

Lower attaining students could only give limited responses. The need to use the imperfect tense restricted the expression of their ideas.

General Conversation

Once again this year, there was a small number of schools/colleges who allowed their students to give a 'presentation'. Please note this is not an acceptable format. The emphasis is on dialogue not monologue.

Mostly, examiners reported a balance of time given to the exploration of the nominated theme and that of the second theme.

In their questions, some teachers strayed beyond the theme which was being discussed. Teachers are reminded to check which sub-topics fall into each theme to avoid this since a preponderance of questions on a particular theme may lead to a greater proportion of time being spent on that, to the detriment of the other theme and as a result, a penalty being imposed since the minimum required time is not given to both themes.

In terms of Communication, teachers are reminded that marks are based on the amount of information successfully conveyed by the student. Marks also take into account any ambiguity introduced and reflect how much the student elaborated on their answers. High attaining students should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce longer utterances. This can be achieved by students being encouraged to develop responses of three or more clauses when possible.

It is beneficial for all students if questions are tailored to their interests and ability level; individual accounts are more impressive than those that appear to have been generated by a 'template' approach. Similarly, a standard set of questions is unlikely to elicit the best performance of the whole ability range.

Teachers are advised that there is no need to cover every topic within a theme. Indeed, such an approach can lead to a very disjointed exercise which in no way resembles a conversation and potentially puts students at a disadvantage as there is no flow to the questions put to them.

The attention of teachers is drawn to questioning technique. Closed questions are of very limited usefulness. They may be employed, for example, to re-focus a student who is struggling before the teacher reverts to open questions, but students cannot score marks if they do not demonstrate use of the language themselves.

With regard to the Range and accuracy of language strand, high marks were achieved by students demonstrating a successful use of vocabulary and structures referring to least one time frame other than the present.

The quality of pronunciation varied greatly. Where poor pronunciation seriously hindered comprehension, this could also have an impact on the Communication mark. Clear pronunciation was frequently undermined where students attempted to present language with which they were generally unfamiliar and, as such, resorted to reciting rather than delivering with any understanding.

In order to give students an opportunity to demonstrate an ability to respond spontaneously in the test, it is recommended that teachers incorporate simple queries or requests for further detail in their general classroom exchanges so that students learn to expect this approach.

Teachers are advised that there is no need to announce the full title of themes in the general conversation. Indeed, this reduces the overall time available and limits the opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability. Correct timings were generally observed.

It was pleasing to note that some teachers have changed their approach and invited students to ask a question during their exploration of the first theme. As this is the theme the student has chosen, they have the opportunity to be better prepared. It also means that the student's question does not run the risk of coming out-of-time, as when it is requested at the end of the discussion of the second theme.

Advice to teacher-examiners

General

- Carry out a short test recording before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity, preferably with a second participant who should sit in the seat students will use.
- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly but remember that teachers tend to be accustomed to projecting their voices, so position the microphone closer to the student, who is likely to be more softly spoken.
- The *Instructions for the conduct of examinations* document is on the AQA public website and should be reviewed every year by teachers conducting speaking tests to ensure they conduct the tests in accordance with the instructions.
- In the document mentioned above, there are instructions on how to introduce each student in English. You must include these details at the start of the recording for every student:

GCSE French examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, student number ____, student name ____. Role play number ____, photo card letter ____, general conversation theme chosen by student Theme (1, 2 or 3).

- Everything said by both the teacher-examiner and student must be clearly audible. Examiners will refer instances of whispering to AQA.
- Once you have introduced the student and the specific details of the elements to be covered in his/her test, use French throughout the exam itself. Not only is this good practice, it will deter students from reverting to English in any exchanges with you.
- Respond positively to what students say, even if it is not accurate or effective French. It will encourage them for the rest of the test.
- Practise pronunciation as often as possible. Mispronunciation of basic sounds can lead to a failure to communicate ideas.

Role play

- Do not vary the script set out in the Teacher's Role. Adapting this to your own version will mean that the student's response will receive a mark of 0 for Communication in that task.
- If you believe that a student is starting to give the wrong answer to your question, stop him/her and repeat the question. Once the student completes an incorrect answer, a mark of 0 for Communication is given for that task, even if you repeat the question and a correct answer is given subsequently.
- If a student asks for repetition of your question or if there is no answer, you may repeat the question.
- If there is a two-part question in an unpredictable task, it is advisable to ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. It is acceptable to ask both questions together but, by splitting them, a possible overload on the student can be avoided.

Photo card

- Ask all five questions in the Teacher's Booklet, but do not ask any other questions of your own.
- You may paraphrase a question, provided the same meaning is maintained. However, be certain that this is the case and that you have not given any additional assistance to the student or the student's reply will not be credited.
- If there is a two-part unseen question, it is advisable to ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. It is acceptable to ask both questions together but, by splitting them, a possible overload on the student can be avoided.
- Monitor timing. If a student's replies are very long and it appears that you may not be able to ask the final question in the three-minute maximum time, it may be better to interrupt an answer and move to the next one.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible. Opinions and adjectives are the most obvious areas to focus on.
- Train students to give and justify opinions without necessarily being asked to do so. This can form the basis of different starter activities.
- Be sensitive to the ability of the students – someone who struggles to describe his/her town is unlikely to be successful discussing more challenging aspects of the topic, for example the impact of global warming.
- Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests. Do not ask all students identical questions.
- In order to achieve a greater sense of spontaneity in the conversation, follow up a student's response by asking about what they have just told you.
- Announce the change of theme in French: *On va changer de thème et on va parler au sujet du thème numéro ...* etc.

- Monitor the time. If one of the themes lasts for less than 2'30", there is a deduction of two marks in the Communication section.
- The maximum length of the general conversation is seven minutes. Once the student has completed his/her answer to the last question asked before the seven-minute point, nothing else will be credited.
- Remember to prompt students to ask you a question if they do not do this of their own accord. It is perhaps advisable for them to ask you a question in their nominated theme. It is not a good idea to leave this until late in the conversation as time may run out before this point.
- Ensure that the student's question **is** a question and not an instruction or an invitation, such as *Décris-moi ... / Parle-moi de*
- If the first question the student asks you does not make sense, ask for another.

Advice to students

- Use the 12 minutes' preparation time wisely. You can write down exactly what you are going to say in the role play tasks and in response to the three prepared questions on the photo card.
- For the photo card questions, try to prepare answers of at least three sentences, using a verb in each one.
- In the unprepared questions in the role play and photo card sections, listen carefully to the questions that your teacher asks you. Do this for all of the questions in the general conversation too.
- Make sure you know common question words.
- You can ask for repetition of a question in any part of the test, but ask in French if you possibly can.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.