



2013 Languages: Chinese Second Language GA 3: Examination

Oral component

GENERAL COMMENTS

In the 2013 Chinese Second Language oral examination, a number of students handled the Conversation well, demonstrating thorough preparation. They appeared confident and responded readily and clearly. Stronger students offered opinions spontaneously, while weaker students had difficulty maintaining the conversation and needed frequent support from assessors.

In the Discussion, successful students understood their chosen sub-topic and demonstrated that they had studied various resources. They explored their sub-topics in sufficient depth and their opinions and ideas were supported by interesting examples and evidence from the resources studied. In addition, these students were also willing to lead the discussion, despite some vocabulary and grammatical errors. However, those who gave a memorised mini-presentation about the topic needed to be interrupted by the assessors.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Conversation

This task consisted of a seven-minute conversation about the student’s personal world, which included school and home lives, family and friends, and interests and aspirations. This section assesses students’ ability to speak Chinese in a linguistically and culturally appropriate way.

Communication

Criterion 1 – Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively

The most successful students provided extensive responses to the questions asked, confidently moving the exchange forward using accurate language, a sophisticated range of vocabulary and complex structures. Some students had an effective interaction with the assessors, volunteered information and were able to move the conversation forward with good repair strategies.

Students should be aware that relying too heavily on prepared responses can be detrimental to the natural flow of the interaction, especially when an answer to a question requires extra information. Therefore, it is important for students to develop a range of repair strategies, including the ability to rephrase and request clarification in different ways. Some students needed to provide more information when asked questions, rather than respond with single-sentence answers. Other students did not wait to hear the whole question and answered too quickly. Students must listen carefully to the assessors and respond relevantly and appropriately.

Several students continued talking in the conversation without giving assessors any opportunity to interact with them. These students need to be aware that this section involves a conversation, not a presentation.

Content

Criterion 2 – Relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas

The majority of students were able to sustain a coherent conversation and express their ideas efficiently. Those who elaborated on and explored their ideas achieved the highest marks. They gave interesting responses and engaged the assessors by using eye contact and appropriate body language. Some students missed out on marks by failing to enter into a more detailed discussion, even though they had understood the questions. Weaker students gave monosyllabic responses and waited to be supported with further questions.

Students should not assume that they will be asked the same or similar questions as in their mock oral examination at school. In order for students to show their language ability, assessors might ask them some questions that require extra information and sophisticated responses. In this situation, students need to listen to the assessors carefully and respond relevantly and appropriately.

Several students used Chinese proverbs and sayings appropriately in the Conversation. Some students were able to explain the meaning of these proverbs and sayings, but others were not aware of the meanings despite having learnt them by heart.



Language

Criterion 3 – Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

Criterion 4 – Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

Criterion 5 – Clarity of expression

Students need to remember that once they walk into the assessment room, everything they say except their student number must be in Chinese. Several students used English words in the conversation, such as ‘I mean...’, ‘Oh, sorry’ and ‘Oh, yes’, etc. This should have been avoided.

Many students used a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar, expressing themselves clearly in a linguistically and culturally acceptable way. A number of students showed consistent use of style and register and were able to rephrase if necessary.

Section 2 – Discussion

Students were required to give a brief introduction to the Detailed Study (in no more than one minute) by indicating the main focus of their sub-topic and bringing to the attention of assessors any objects they had brought in to support the Discussion.

It is very important that students carefully choose the sub-topic for their Detailed Study. Any topic selected is acceptable as long as it follows the guidelines of the *VCE Chinese Second Language Study Design* and relates to exploring and comparing aspects of the language and culture of the Chinese-speaking communities. As this section involves a discussion, a topic needs to have suitable content and issues for the student and assessors to discuss. The topic also needs to suit the student’s language capacity and allow the student to express his/her opinions. Some students covered too many aspects in their Detailed Study and as a result every aspect was lacking in depth and focus. This did not lead to a good discussion.

Most students, however, demonstrated the ability to cope with the discussion. Some were underprepared and had difficulties in responding when they were asked unexpected questions. Some did not specify in their one-minute introduction the focus of their Detailed Study.

Communication

Criterion 6 – Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively

Many students were able to handle questions well and had sufficient knowledge in order to maintain an even flow of discussion. Supporting objects often helped students to develop answers and sustain the discussion. However, some supporting objects or illustration materials had many Chinese characters on them. Students need to be aware that if they bring supporting material, only objects with minimal language such as photographs, diagrams and maps are accepted.

Some students need to improve their communication strategies, including knowing how to ask for clarification when they are not sure of a question. Students cannot assume that assessors will only ask them the questions they have practised at school. If there is an aspect asked that is not covered or that is not closely related to their Detailed Study aspects, students should say something like, ‘老师，对不起，这部分我没学过，可是我学过... (I’m sorry that I haven’t learned this, but I’ve learned ...)’ or use the knowledge they have learned to explain, ‘老师，这方面我没有学过，可是我觉得... (I haven’t learned this, but I think ...)’ Students need to be aware that it is their language skills that are assessed in Criterion 6.

Content

Criterion 7 – Capacity to present information, ideas and opinions on a chosen topic

Many students chose a topic that not only reflected their interests, but suited their linguistic ability and promoted discussion. However, some students relied too much on pre-prepared material. Their answers tended to be irrelevant to the questions and were at times repetitive.

Some interesting topics were: 中国的名胜古迹 (Tourist Attractions and Historical Places in China), 丝绸之路 (The Silk Road), 中国家庭的变化 (The Changes in Chinese Families), 李娜 (Li Na), 中国学生的学校生活 (Chinese Students’ School Life), 筷子 (Chopsticks) 和 送礼文化 (Gift Culture). Some of the sub-topics were too specific and it was difficult to develop the discussion, while others tended to lead students towards a mini-presentation rather than a discussion. Some students were not clear about the relationship between the topic chosen and the resources used and failed to clarify, elaborate on and defend their opinions and ideas by using the resources. Students need to practise expressing their opinions and extending them beyond the basic level.

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Language

Criterion 8 – Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

Criterion 9 – Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

Criterion 10 – Clarity of expression

The Discussion section is quite different from the Conversation section. The language used in the Discussion should be less predictable, as there will be many new and unfamiliar words in the resources used by the students. Students should not only master these words but also practise using them in discussion. There were many occasions when students used sophisticated words and expressions in their performance but were frequently unable to hear and understand them when they were used by the assessors.

Pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo are also assessed in the communication section. Strong students maintained a smooth conversational flow. Some students' pronunciation was good but their intonation requires improvement. The most successful students used accurate vocabulary, expressed themselves clearly and used a wide range of sentence structures. Some students were too soft in their vocal delivery and avoided eye contact with assessors.