



2011 Languages: Chinese Second Language GA 3: Examination

Oral component

GENERAL COMMENTS

There are two sections in the Chinese Second Language oral examination: the Conversation and the Discussion. The conversation assesses students' ability to speak Chinese spontaneously in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way. It relates to familiar personal topics: school and home life, family and friends, interests and aspirations. The discussion of the Detailed Study assesses students' skills in presenting and exchanging ideas, opinions and information on a sub-topic related to Chinese-speaking communities.

The majority of students were familiar with the examination procedure and were well prepared for the two sections. The most successful students understood the questions asked and were able to develop their responses and advance the exchange. However, there were some students who had trouble sustaining the exchange due to a lack of preparation. In addition, there were some students who needed more examination strategies and confidence in order to support and elaborate further on their ideas and opinions.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Conversation

This section provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency in using spoken Chinese. The most successful students had prepared thoroughly for this section and were able to advance the exchange assertively, displaying a confident command and range of sophisticated language and vocabulary. It is very important that students listen carefully to questions. They should ensure that they address what they are being asked and give relevant responses.

Communication: Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively
Clarity of expression

The most successful students provided extensive responses to the questions asked, confidently moving the exchange forward while simultaneously using accurate language, an excellent range of vocabulary and complex structures. Most students interacted with the assessors effectively, were willing to share information and had good repair strategies.

Students should not assume that assessors will ask the same questions as were asked in their school's practice oral examination. Assessors may ask questions at various points, usually when they are interested to know more about a comment or when they would like to change the general flow of the conversation. An interruption does not mean that the student has answered incorrectly, simply that the assessors would like to lead the conversation in another direction.

During the conversation, students must not reveal their school's name or provide specific information about their school, such as '我的学校是墨尔本的一所精英中学。' (My school is a selective school in Melbourne.)

It was pleasing to see that most students spoke clearly and with good pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo, and paid attention to the four tones and the pronunciation of *zhi*, *chi*, *shi* and *zi*, *ci* *si*.

Content: Relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas

Many students spoke effectively about their family, school, subjects, friends and holidays. Those who elaborated on and explored their ideas with ease performed well and had successful conversations. They gave interesting responses and engaged the assessors by using eye contact and appropriate body language. The less successful students gave responses that were simplistic and lacked evidence of a depth of knowledge about grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, they exhibited a limited capacity to vary sentence structures. Some students also had difficulties giving relevant, structured responses to questions.

Language: Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

Many students used a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar, which was crucial to attaining high marks. Successful students showed consistent use of style and register and were able to rephrase when necessary. However, some students did not use measure words accurately, such as 一个宠物, 一所医生 and 一间教室楼, etc.



Section 2 – Discussion

In the one-minute introduction to the Detailed Study discussion, students were required to indicate to the assessors the main focus of the chosen sub-topic, alerting assessors to any objects brought to support the discussion. Most students demonstrated competence to cope with the discussion. Some were underprepared and had difficulties in responding when they were asked unexpected questions. Some did not specify the focus of their Detailed Study in their one-minute introduction.

Communication: Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively **Clarity of expression**

A number of students were competent in their use of language and had sufficient knowledge to maintain an even flow of conversation during the seven-minute discussion. They were highly skilled in expressing and elaborating on ideas and opinions, substantiating them with evidence. These students used connectives and demonstrated the capacity to use an extensive range of vocabulary, as well as a range of complex structures and accurate language. However, there were some students who were very simplistic and brief. These students often did not listen to the assessors' questions carefully and provided memorised answers that did not match the questions asked. Some students did not understand the start of the Detailed Study when the assessor said '现在请说一下你研究的题目' ('Now please tell us your Detailed Study topic').

Students' performance shouldn't be affected by unexpected questions asked by the assessors. Instead, they can either say '老师，对不起，这部分我没学过，可是我学过...' ('I'm sorry that I haven't learnt this, but I have learnt ...') or use their own background knowledge to respond as it is the language skills that are being assessed rather than their knowledge. However, students need to avoid overusing answers such as this. Students cannot assume that assessors will only ask them the questions they have practised and are expecting. In addition, they should not expect that assessors will spend the same amount of time on each aspect prepared.

Content: Capacity to present information, ideas and opinions on a chosen topic

It is essential that the topic for the Detailed Study explores the language and culture of Chinese-speaking communities and is based on a sub-topic related to one or more of the prescribed topics in the study design. The topic should be of real interest to the student and be appropriate for their level of maturity and language. The topic selected should also have sufficient depth to generate and sustain a seven-minute discussion.

There were many students who prepared their topic thoroughly. Some students discussed their resources in depth and explained connections between the texts with elaborate and detailed answers, discussing what they enjoyed and found interesting about their topic, and demonstrating excellent understanding and knowledge of their Detailed Study. Some students were able to follow the flow of discussion, keep their answers relevant, provide a range of information and ideas on the topic, and support their opinions with good examples. However, some students tended to rely too heavily on the assessors to guide them through the discussion. At times, students answered in very brief sentences when they could have conveyed their understanding of the sub-topic to a greater extent.

Some students did not expect that the assessors would interrupt them during the assessment. They need to understand that this section is a discussion rather than a mini-presentation. There should be plenty of interaction between students and assessors during the discussion. Capable students should not be concerned if they cannot answer difficult questions as assessors are simply giving them the opportunity to demonstrate the extent of their linguistic ability.

Successful topics that produced enthusiastic responses from students included 中国结 (Chinese Knot)、汉字 (Chinese Characters)、夫子庙 (Confucius Temple)、周庄 (Zhouzhuang Town)、熊猫 (Pandas)、姚明 (Yao Ming)、中国乒乓球 (Table tennis in China)、上海弄堂 (Shanghai Alleyway) and 冰雕 (Ice Sculpture).

However, there were some topics that might have been too factual and descriptive for the students to present and express opinions, such as 金丝猴 (Golden-haired Monkey)、东方明珠塔 (Oriental Pearl Tower) and 颜色 (Color). Some students stated that they had studied a number of texts, but these students were unable to demonstrate adequate knowledge or link the topics and the texts.

A small number of students presented topics that had no obvious links to Chinese-speaking communities.

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Language: Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar

Range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

This criterion emphasises the importance of accuracy, range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar. The more successful students exhibited an excellent range of vocabulary and sophisticated expression and used accurate grammatical structures.

The Detailed Study discussion section is quite different from the Conversation section. The language used in the Discussion will 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 unable to understand them when they were used by the assessors.