

2021 VCE Sinhala oral external assessment report

General comments

The Sinhala oral examination assesses students' knowledge and skills in using spoken language. The examination has two sections – a conversation of approximately seven minutes, during which students converse with the assessors about their personal world, and a discussion of approximately eight minutes.

It should be noted that during the oral examination:

- students may be asked a variety of questions of varying levels of difficulty. Questions may also be asked in a different order from the one students anticipate
- assessors may interrupt students to ask questions during either section of the examination; this should be regarded as a normal process in a discussion
- assessors may also repeat or rephrase questions
- normal variation in assessor body language is acceptable.

Students are reminded that they must be prepared to use language spontaneously in unrehearsed situations. Students are not expected to be 'experts'; they are expected to have learnt strategies in order to respond to unexpected questions. It would be valuable for students to learn phrases such as, 'I have not studied this aspect of the subtopic, but I think ...', 'I don't know, but I feel ...' and 'I am not sure about this question, but I know ...'

Students will be assessed in both the conversation and the discussion in communication, content and language. The criteria are published on the VCAA website. It is important that all teachers and students be familiar with the criteria and descriptors, and that students use them as part of their examination preparation. This will help students to engage in a lively and interesting exchange with assessors. Although there are similarities between the assessment criteria for the conversation and discussion sections of the examination, the criteria assess two very different aspects of performance. Students who are well prepared are generally able to demonstrate their abilities and proficiency in the language.

Section 1 – Conversation

Section 1 consists of a general conversation about the student's personal world, for example, school and home life, family and friends, interests and aspirations. It is an organic conversation about the student's personal world. These examples provide students with a basis for preparing a range of interesting and engaging ideas about their personal world, so that they can engage in a spontaneous discussion with the assessors about things that interest them.

Most students answered the questions with relevant information. There were a few instances where students, after answering the question very briefly, continued to talk about information they had prepared. Rote learning was evident in these situations.

Overall, most students performed to a very high standard and a few to an excellent standard.

Many students carried the conversation forward readily and confidently providing information appropriate to the assessors' questions. Repair strategies were not often needed. Only a few students needed the support of the assessors to continue.

Many students presented a very good to excellent range of information by elaborating, clarifying and expressing their ideas and opinions. Only in very few instances did the assessors need to repeat and clarify the question to get the appropriate answer.

Many students had a good grasp of vocabulary and used it appropriately within the context and to express ideas and opinions.

Many students demonstrated a very good to excellent level of awareness of the style and register, which was evident along with the appropriate broad range of vocabulary used in the conversation.

Most students had good pronunciation. Students are encouraged to use the appropriate intonation, stress and tempo to make the conversation more interesting.

Section 2 – Discussion

Following the conversation, the student indicates to the assessor(s) the subtopic chosen for detailed study and, in no more than one minute, briefly introduces the main focus of their subtopic, alerting assessors to any objects brought to support the discussion. Suitable objects include photographs, maps or diagrams, and should include very little or no text. The support material must have minimal writing, which includes only a heading, name or title.

The one-minute introduction should give assessors an indication of the area of discussion. The purpose is for students to briefly introduce their chosen subtopic; it is not an opportunity for students to list all their information or texts.

The focus of the discussion is to explore aspects of the language and culture of communities in which Sinhala is spoken, with the student being expected to make reference to the texts studied.

The choice of subtopic for the detailed study is very important. It should be an engaging subtopic that motivates students to become familiar with the content and vocabulary needed, and to elaborate on information, ideas and opinions. It is important that students and teachers select materials for the detailed study carefully so that students are exposed to a variety of views. The type of texts used by students should vary in complexity and be in Sinhala so that students can become aware of key vocabulary related to their subtopic. Students should be able to draw on the texts they have studied and make links between the texts to support, expand on and explore opinions and ideas on the subtopic and different aspects of the texts. Students should be able to relate this to the Sinhala-speaking community.

The subtopics selected by the students were highly appropriate and interesting. Most students demonstrated a very high level of preparation. In a few instances, rote-learning was evident. In these cases, the assessors prompted the students with questions to ensure it remained a discussion.

Most students carried the discussion forward confidently by responding appropriately to the assessors' questions. There were only a few instances where the students continued with their presentation without responding directly to or avoiding the questions. Repair strategies were required only in a few instances and were used successfully.

In most instances, students presented the information in sequence, answering the questions appropriately and elaborating on the facts logically. Most students were able to express ideas, opinions and suggestions about the subtopic they had selected for the discussion. Expressing opinions is an important area that students need to prepare for in their discussion. The appropriate style and register were used in the discussion.

Most students had a high level of vocabulary to express their ideas and opinions, and a few students used sophisticated vocabulary appropriately to present information relevant to their subtopic.

Most students had good pronunciation. But appropriate intonation and stress were not always evident. This is another important area that students need to prepare for in their discussion.