

2020 VCE Swedish oral examination report

General comments

The Swedish oral examination assesses students' knowledge and skills in using spoken language. The examination has two sections – a Conversation of approximately 7 minutes, during which students will converse with the assessors about their personal world, and a Discussion of approximately 8 minutes.

Following the Conversation, the student will indicate to the assessor(s) the subtopic chosen for detailed study and, in no more than one minute, briefly introduce 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 no text or very little 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 Swedish 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 topic that motivates students to become familiar with the content and vocabulary needed, and thus be more skilled to support and 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 Swedish so that students can become aware of key vocabulary related to their subtopic. Students are reminded that they must be prepared to use language spontaneously in unrehearsed situations. 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 Swedish-speaking community.

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 topic, but I think ...', 'I don't know, but I feel ...' and 'I am not sure about this question but I know ...'

It should be noted that during the oral examination:

- students may be asked a variety of questions with 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.

Three criteria are used in assessing both the Conversation and the Discussion: communication, content and language. Details of the assessment criteria and descriptors 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.

The students taking part in the Swedish oral examinations in 2020 were all very well prepared on the day and showed that they had acquired high-level skills in the language during their VCE studies. They all expressed a great interest in their Swedish studies, and it clearly showed in the results, which were of a high standard.

Anglicisms are difficult to avoid for anyone who functions in two Germanic languages, so students need to be aware of the more common 'traps'. They include instances of both vocabulary and grammar:

- the gender of nouns – there are only two genders in Swedish, but they can present a stumbling block
- the six declensions of Swedish nouns – this tends to fall into place with time as extended use of the language makes it more obvious where a noun belongs
- prepositions that are similar yet different – again, practice makes perfect
- adverbs expressing location and direction – an easy rule, but it needs to be applied every time, so awareness combined with practice should be the solution
- word order in subordinate clause – an understanding of sentence-building using main clauses and subordinate clauses is essential in order to get this right.

Some of the students seemed to have mastered a majority of the above, whereas others still seemed to have a little way to go to reach perfection. Overall, students performed their tasks at a high linguistic standard.

Section 1 – Conversation

All students showed great capacity to maintain and advance the oral exchange appropriately and effectively. They had clearly worked hard at this part of the exam. Some students needed more encouragement than others to express their opinions and ideas rather than just present a story, but all managed very well.

The students had no problems moving on to a new area if prompted by the examiner, and questions and/or requests for additional information were answered without difficulty.

Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar varied somewhat among the students. Most errors were in the classic areas of language transfer, such as occasional literal translations, word order, definitions and adjective–noun agreement. Overall, the language was generally appropriate for the context, and there was good variation in expression as well as vocabulary.

Section 2 – Discussion

It was obvious that the students had prepared their discussion segment well, using a range of texts that included web-based articles, podcasts, Swedish government publications, television programs and films. In some cases, hints of memorisation of material were apparent, particularly at the start of their presentations, but a few questions or comments generally moved the students into a less-rehearsed discussion, where students showed their command of both their studied subtopic and their language. In some cases, students appeared to have been more geared towards searching for facts and presenting these well rather than drawing conclusions to form opinions and elaborating on new ideas, which should be essential elements when discussing a subtopic.

In this context it is important to choose discussion subtopics that give the students good opportunities to develop and express their own ideas and opinions. Teachers and students are encouraged to explore the possibilities represented by the prescribed themes and topics, and are reminded that they may either select subtopics from the list of examples in the study design or select their own, as long as these align with the prescribed themes and topics. Subtopics that are sufficiently broad to accommodate a range of interests and perspectives will provide each student with opportunities to effectively clarify, explain and defend a range of opinions, ideas and information relevant to the subtopic.