



Oral component

GENERAL COMMENTS

The oral examination was arranged into seven minutes of general conversation, a one-minute introduction to the Detailed Study and seven minutes of discussion of the Detailed Study. It is the teacher's responsibility to follow the advice provided in the *VCE French Study Design*.

Students' level of language and preparation improves every year. Well-prepared students were once again able to successfully demonstrate a working understanding of the questions asked. They developed and elaborated on their responses by giving opinions and additional information and leading the conversation in the direction that was favourable to them. They listened carefully to assessors' questions, responding to what was being asked rather than providing general and rote-learned answers. Their linguistic skills were sophisticated and they possessed excellent knowledge of the content related to the prescribed topics. Students who had rote-learned information and who were not able to answer questions spontaneously did not perform as well as they might have, had they practised more and taken note of the assessment criteria. The general conversation section reflects work studied in previous years, and thorough preparation in the years leading up to Year 12 is essential.

Students and teachers are reminded that French at VCE level requires students to respond with a degree of maturity. Even if students have made overseas trips to improve their oral proficiency, they will still need to prepare for their examination in a very thorough manner and address the requirements of the *VCE French Study Design*.

Although the Conversation and the Discussion criteria appear the same, they assess two very different skills. The Conversation relates to very familiar matters such as school and home life, family and friends, interests and aspirations, and assesses the student's ability to speak VCE level French in a linguistically and culturally appropriate way. The Discussion, on the other hand, is designed to test the student's skills in presenting and exchanging ideas, opinions and information on a sub-topic related to the Detailed Study which explores the language and culture of French-speaking communities. This sub-topic should be of interest to the student and reflect 15 hours of study during class time. A more objective approach is needed in the Detailed Study. In the Discussion students should be able to express personal ideas and opinions on their topics. Students who had rote-learned information struggled to continue when questioned by assessors. Repair strategies were again not frequently in evidence and students often failed to link the texts studied.

The assessment criteria for the oral examination are:

- relevance, range, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas
- capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively
- student's capacity to link with assessors
- effectiveness of communication and repair strategies
- degree of support necessary to maintain the exchange
- capacity to support or elaborate on information, ideas and opinions with reasons, examples, evidence and/or new ideas
- accuracy, range, variety and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar to the context, audience and purpose of the task
- pronunciation, intonation, stress and tempo
- clarity of expression.

To maximise their performance during the oral examination students should:

- have a finely tuned one-minute introduction to their topic and guide the assessors to the focus of the study
- practise using the criteria as part of their examination preparation and be very familiar with what is being assessed
- treat the conversation as an exchange and not a question/answer interchange. Replying with short responses and waiting for more questions does not display adequate conversational skills and therefore does not score highly
- answer each question with some breadth and depth, training themselves to go beyond simple responses by adding information and/or expressing an opinion



- have acquired techniques that cater for their individual learning needs and practise techniques including eye contact and body language. Students should use appropriate language that enables them to engage in a discussion
- express and elaborate on ideas and opinions and be able to justify their comments in unrehearsed situations without resorting to memorised information. Students should have practised numerous ways of answering a question and be prepared for information to be explored in a variety of ways. Weaker students seemed to flounder when questions were phrased in a different manner to their expectations
- learn key vocabulary and structures that allow them to make comparisons and comments and use connecting words accurately so that their responses flow
- be able to converse with ease using basic tenses and moods such as the present, future, perfect, imperfect and conditional
- listen to the tense of the verb asked in the question and answer with an appropriate tense
- be able to self-correct, ask for clarification and develop repair strategies in order to avoid lengthy pauses
- know how to make reference and link their opinions to the texts studied
- appreciate that what they say will often prompt assessors to ask questions about that information
- use visual aids only if they have been carefully chosen and the content rehearsed
- appreciate that merely quoting dates and rote-learned lines may seem stilted if they have not adequately prepared.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Conversation

The most successful students had clearly prepared well. These students provided extensive and non-predictable responses, advancing the exchange assertively while simultaneously displaying a confident command and range of accurate and sophisticated language and vocabulary. These students demonstrated excellent mastery and working knowledge of the basic tenses and were at ease using more complex structures such as the passive, causative *faire* and the subjunctive. They were able to develop on comments made by the assessors as well use connectives from one tense and topic to another by using appropriate connectives. These students maintained a consistent pace without unnatural pauses and were able to direct the conversation with assessors. It was evident that these students had practised gap-filling and conscious self-correction techniques as well as strategies for linking with the assessors.

Conversely, less proficient students were satisfied with simplistic answers, often struggling with basic questions and structures. Their responses were frequently minimal, mediocre and memorised at the proverbial 'last minute'. They generally offered simplistic responses at an elementary standard, often with false starts. Their pronunciation was frequently stilted, and stress and tempo were weak. Some less proficient students relied heavily on rote-learned material and were not able to respond effectively when asked questions that were not in an order they were expecting. Moreover, they were unable to advance the conversation and rarely used connectives, often resorting to anglicisms and pre-learned material to compensate for their lack of preparation or gaps in their grammatical knowledge. These students tended to confuse genders and pronouns, were unable to make subject-verb or noun-adjective agreements and were frequently unable to use basic tenses required at VCE level. Too often these students merely stated information that did not support the requirements of the Conversation section and had difficulty in offering, expanding on and justifying opinions.

Section 2 – Discussion

It is imperative that the topics and sub-topics chosen for the Detailed Study be chosen carefully. This section of the examination is designed to be a discussion – not a memory test – about French life and culture. The discussion needs structure and definition, and the texts selected should be appropriate for the cohort of students and lead to discussion.

The topic chosen should also promote linkages with the resources studied. It should allow students to express their opinions as well as generate new ideas by expanding on the topic and should suit the student's language capacity. Students need to understand, be inspired and enthusiastic about the topic they are studying. It is strongly suggested that the sub-topic should include a question or issue that needs to be answered as this lends structure to the student's response. Students should also prepare a diverse range of responses for potential target questions.

The choice of resources chosen to support the Detailed Study is crucial. The texts selected must be of substance and in French, so that students are able to learn relevant and sophisticated vocabulary and structures. In far too many cases the texts, interviews, and films selected as resources were rather limited or in English.



Students must structure their introduction tightly within the one-minute time frame. They should deliver the introduction at a measured pace and provide the title of the Detailed Study as well as the focus of the sub-topic, highlighting issues they had considered and telling assessors if they had brought any support material. Some students went beyond the one-minute limit, launching into a presentation rather than giving an introduction, and were then 'thrown' when assessors interrupted them. Other students cited too many resources and were unable to discuss these documents in depth.

Students should not resort to listing every text they have studied if they are not able to comment on them. They should analyse texts in detail and be prepared to answer any questions, including being able to say that they 'aren't quite sure of the answer' but they 'think that...' or their 'opinion is...'

No topic is appropriate if it is not adequately prepared. An appropriate topic:

- follows the guidelines stipulated in the *VCE French Study Design*
- relates to the language and culture of French-speaking communities
- allows the student to express opinions
- ensures that students understand the links between the texts and the theme
- contains an issue that leads to discussion with the assessors.

The manner in which the topic is handled is fundamental, as the final result is usually dependent on student ability and interest in the topic. This year it was very encouraging to notice that many teachers were generally more vigilant in selecting gender appropriate topics for their students. It was evident that the students had enjoyed their Detailed Study, which in turn led to better results.

Irrespective of the advice provided in previous Assessment Reports, some topics were purely factual, superficial and descriptive. Other topics seemed of limited interest to students, who had little understanding of them and often handled them inappropriately. Often slabs of rote-learned information were followed by ideas and viewpoints, while some topics selected did not relate at all to the information students stated they had studied from the texts. A poor choice of sub-topic also tended to inhibit the student's chances of meeting the criterion that assesses relevance, breadth and depth of information. Some students were unable to link information from the texts to the sub-topic they had studied and were unable to elaborate on their comments, provide opinions or adequately discuss their topic. Good topics enabled students to develop their ideas or offer solutions to problems. Good choices reflected the interests of the student and students were inspired as well as willing to respond using evaluative language. Detailed Studies that did not allow students to have an overall opinion tended to undermine discussion.

Strong students were able to demonstrate an excellent knowledge of their topic, citing three or more varied resources in different text types. Not only were they thoroughly conversant with the content, they were also highly skilled in substantiating them with sophisticated evidence. These students were able to demonstrate an extensive and sophisticated range of vocabulary and connectives, as well as a range of complex structures and accurate language.

Successful topics that produced enthusiastic responses from students included:

- *Le cinéma français- sa contribution au monde du cinéma*
- *L'Esprit Révolutionnaire et la Contestation en France*
- *Les problèmes et la place de l'immigration en France*
- *La Résistance et la deuxième guerre mondiale du point de vue d'une mère française*
- *Le problème des jeunes dans la banlieue parisienne*
- *Le contraste de la discrimination et le racisme dans la société française*
- *L'injustice du racisme*
- *La Résistance*
- *Le rôle de la légende étrangère*
- *L'injustice et les restos du coeur*
- *Problèmes sociaux en France – les SDF, Le Chômage.*

The manner in which these topics were presented generally produced very good outcomes.

Some problem areas were:

- limited information so that students were unable to present and express opinions
- some students stated that they had studied a number of texts but were unable to demonstrate adequate knowledge or link the topics and the texts



- a number of students quoted few or no written resources
- students merely cited information they had downloaded from the Internet and were then unable to go beyond the boundaries of the texts or discuss different aspects of their chosen sub-topic
- a small number of students presented unsuitable topics that had no obvious links to French-speaking communities.

Very weak students presented superficial information and needed a great deal of support. An inappropriate topic choice gave students little opportunity to express opinions or develop their responses. Weak students were generally unable to digress from rote-learned information and lacked the skills to engage in a sustained and meaningful discussion. Some weak students attempted to ‘wing’ this part of the examination by claiming ignorance and trying refer to their written work.

Some general recommendations

Students should:

- limit the texts they study, know them in depth and have a variety of information and opinions about the topic and the issue they have chosen
- be able to discuss the structure, merit, strengths and weaknesses of their resources, how they link with each other and the topic they have studied, which ones they preferred and why, and what conclusion they have drawn from their study
- answer in a variety of ways and use at least two or three sentences in response to every question asked
- not assume that being a native or near-native speaker will automatically result in excellent results unless they have prepared the tasks and demonstrate evidence of having met the assessment criteria
- be prepared to discuss and justify information and provide specific evidence
- be trained to avoid generalisations, lists of descriptive comments and stereotypes
- revise their grammar very carefully in order to avoid basic errors such as *beaucoup des, j'étude, sujet* instead of *matière, au sujet de* instead of *environ de, guerre* instead of *gare*, etc.
- articulate and enunciate clearly when they speak
- avoid Anglicisms and pre-learned material
- practise throughout the year.

On a practical level, it is very important that teachers address their students' learning styles and individual needs as these affect students' overall performance. Students suffering from examination nerves need to address this in time. Students should be reminded that they must be organised before they come to the examination room – they should read the *VCE Exams Navigator*, not wear their school uniform or mention the name of their school and remember to bring their photo identity cards. It is recommended that students wear neat casual dress when attending the oral examination. Students and teachers should refer to the VCAA website <www.vcaa.vic.gov.au> for advice and guidelines in this study.