

2021 VCE Hebrew oral external assessment report

General comments

The Hebrew 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.

Responses that scored highly used an array of communication strategies to maintain and advance the exchange, regardless of the level of accuracy displayed. Students responded with confidence on various general subtopics and needed little support. Less successful was some students' reliance on rote learning. Trying to divert the conversation to rehearsed responses hinders the appropriateness and effectiveness of the communication.

Students who scored highly in the Hebrew conversation section successfully demonstrated an ability to use a range of vocabulary, expressions and sentence structures. Richness of language and appropriate register

and style characterised these conversations. Less successful was the reliance on repeated expressions and limited vocabulary knowledge, for example repeated phrasing: 'that's really, really good' or 'that's really, really important' (זה ממש חשוב, זה ממש טוב). Unskilled use of a sophisticated word (mispronounced or out of context) was a hindering factor, for example, saying 'under the light of the sun' (תחת אור השמש) when talking about one's preference to be outdoors.

Rich expression indicated depth and breadth of content. Successful responses expanded and elaborated on a range of subtopics. Less successful were attempts to draw the conversation back to the same subtopic.

There were occasions when students did not understand the questions and had difficulty asking clarifying questions. While it is accepted that at times a student may ask assessors to repeat a question, or even ask for a different question, it is not appropriate to over rely on this strategy. The latter shows a limited ability to converse on a range of subtopics and shows little evidence of preparation.

In the conversation section of the Hebrew oral examination, the issue of fluency versus accuracy sometimes appeared. Successful students were able to express meaning appropriately with minimal errors. Less successful was ignoring or masking issues of grammatical accuracy with an increased tempo or speaking pace, which at times led to mispronunciation and lack of clarity.

Section 2 – Discussion

Following the conversation, the student indicates to the assessors 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 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 Hebrew 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 Hebrew 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 Hebrew-speaking community.

Discussions that scored highly demonstrated excellent preparation of the Hebrew detailed study subtopic, characterised by an evaluative approach to their resources. Students were able to compare and contrast ideas and opinions and elaborate on different points of view effectively. Less successful were discussions that reflected the limited scope prepared or the uninformative nature of the resources selected. Focusing the discussion on basic facts (for example, resources' dates, creators and main content) limited the breadth and depth of the discussion.

Discussions that scored highly used a range of rich vocabulary accurately and in appropriate relation to the detailed study discussed. Discussions that did not score well were most likely due to lack of preparation; students who clearly felt more comfortable speaking the language sometimes relied on this / their familiarity with the language rather than understanding the importance of preparation for the discussion section.

Likewise, students who only focused on one point of view or one resource found it difficult to carry the discussion forward with confidence and elaborate on a range of ideas.