

2021 VCE Karen oral external assessment report

General comments

The VCE Karen 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.

The students performed well in the 2021 oral examination. They could speak Karen very well and naturally; a few of them spoke with a slight accent. Most students scored more highly in the conversation section than the discussion section. Some students were very relaxed; a few seemed less prepared, which impacted their ability to engage with the assessors. Students need to focus on repair strategies in order to quickly recognise and correct any mistakes rather than not saying anything. Some students replied 'yes' or 'no' or gave very short answers, which impacted the flow of the conversation; assessors needed to prompt them in order to continue the conversation. Students should explain their answers and engage fully in the conversation and discussion.

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.

Since the conversation was about family, community and themselves, it was more natural and accessible for students because it mostly involved daily languages and terms. However, students found some challenges when they came across more technical words and terminology. It is recommended that students practise speaking Karen daily with their family members and friends. It is so important for them to learn and familiarise themselves with terms they do not know as much as possible.

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 Karen 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 Karen 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 Karen-speaking community.

Students did not score as well in this section because not all students were aware of the specifications for this section of the examination and had therefore not prepared adequately. The presentation was for one minute only and the rest of the time was about questioning and discussion, so students need to expect and prepare for a variety of questions from the assessors. They also need to do proper preparation about the subtopic they will present and equip themselves with the new vocabulary and terms related to the subject.

Preparation is the key element. Students who scored highly were those who came to the test well prepared.