2021 VCE Portuguese oral external assessment report

General comments

The Portuguese 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.

Students who scored highly were able to provide detailed answers, in which they clarified and elaborated on ideas or opinions. For example, when talking about their experiences in a Portuguese-speaking country, they were able to discuss what they liked the most and explain why. Other students were able to explain the reasons behind their future plans rather than simply providing a single-sentence answer.

Section 2 – Discussion

Following the conversation, the student indicates to the assessor 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 the Portuguese language 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. Students should choose a subtopic they feel comfortable speaking about in an examination setting and on which they have plenty of information that motivates them to become familiar with the content and vocabulary needed, and able 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 Portuguese 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 Portuguese-speaking community.

It is advised that students have strategies in place to deal with possible questions for which they don’t have an answer or have forgotten an answer.