



Oral Component

GENERAL COMMENTS

The majority of students were well prepared for the conversation section, covering the topics of school, family, friends, hobbies and interests, and future aspirations.

For the discussion section, students prepared one of the following three topics:

- an historical topic – the battle of Kosovo in 1389, and sub-topics related to the event
- a literary topic – the role of men and women in Serbian society in the past and today as seen through literature, film, or magazine or newspapers articles as well as through real life stories
- a topic concerning Belgrade, the capital of Serbia – the city's history, famous buildings, events, services and what makes Belgrade an exciting place to visit and live in.

In terms of overall performance, well-prepared students showed their willingness to use a greater range of vocabulary and to share their knowledge with the assessors. They used gap-filling strategies successfully, built on comments made by the assessors, and used repair strategies if needed. Those who were less successful often did not speak correctly; they used colloquialisms, and their lack of knowledge of grammar resulted in an inability to produce correct sentences in Serbian. It appeared that some students did not find it necessary to prepare for the examination as they expected a natural flow of sentences based upon their use of the language in everyday situations. It has to be noted that students born in Australia put a lot more effort into their preparation than those who had come to Australia in recent years and who regarded themselves as fluent speakers of the language.

It is advisable that themes for the detailed study should be chosen carefully, taking into consideration the student's interests as well as the variety of resources available.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section 1 – Conversation

Most students were well prepared and talked about their families, friends, school, future, hobbies and interests. They were keen to talk about their interests and hobbies and their future aspirations.

Well-prepared students were able to talk about any area of general conversation. They connected well with the assessors, used appropriate and rich vocabulary to describe their activities and used accurate grammar with little or no need for self-correction. They moved the conversation forward, were interesting and showed pride in their achievements.

On the other hand, some students came with little or no preparation. They appeared to expect that their fluency would suffice, but found the seven minutes of conversation very long, due to the fact that they talked too fast and finished their responses but were unable to add any additional information to sustain the conversation. Others hesitated or paused in their answers, hoping to use up more time in this way. Very often they would wait for questions, viewing this part of the examination as a question-answer type interview, and did not take any initiative or elaborate on their answers.

Less able students also showed gaps in their knowledge of grammar, especially the use of cases, which is crucial in Serbian. This was sometimes because the student had limited exposure to Serbian at home. Other students had difficulties because they used a dialect of Serbian in which the omission of some of the cases is the norm (this is not the case in standard Serbian). Students should practise more grammar- and pronunciation-based exercises to learn how to use the seven cases in Serbian.

Students should also pay more attention to sentence structure as it was evident that some students tended to use English rather than Serbian word order, adjusting their pronunciation and stress pattern to English rather than focusing on Serbian pronunciation and word order.



Section 2 – Discussion

Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively

Many students were well prepared and showed an understanding of their chosen topic by clearly stating the sub-topic of their detailed study, its focus, and the resources used.

Students who chose the battle of Kosovo, which is rich in its many aspects of interpretation, were able to choose a sub-topic that best suited their knowledge and level of language proficiency. Sub-topics included: 'heroes of the battle', 'women of the time', 'heroes versus traitors', 'significance of the battle for young people in Australia', 'commemoration of the battle – national identification', and 'history of the battle written in folk poems'.

A smaller number of students chose to discuss the role of men and women in Serbian society in the past and today; these students were generally well prepared and talked with interest, usually taking sides and supporting either women or men and their way of living and treating others. The sub-topics were: 'today it is easier to be a woman/man', 'traditional and modern jobs', 'life of women in the past', 'traditional point of view versus modern point of view', and 'women in the Serbian community within Australian society'.

Students who chose the second topic were generally more relaxed and confident in their verbal skills. Even though they had to refer to the resources used and studied, they could also draw on their own experience and real life knowledge, which helped them to defend their point of view.

Topics relating to Belgrade were interesting and appropriate; for example, 'famous theatre companies', 'architecture in Belgrade' and 'Kalemegdan'. Some students who chose to talk about Belgrade showed a genuine interest in its rich history, architecture and people. They showed how well-prepared a topic can be if it is interesting and relevant. However, more than half of the students who chose this topic were not well prepared and the topic seemed somehow alien to them; they did not have first-hand experience and did not show any real interest. Rather, students seemed to choose the topic because they hoped it would be easy to prepare as it was more factual and seemed to require less effort than the other two. The majority of students who chose to talk about Belgrade showed that they went through a great deal of preparation to find resources for the topic; however, the choice of an irrelevant sub-topic marred some performances.

Most sub-topics were interesting and challenging, requiring good proficiency in the language. They involved lots of reading and research by students and lots of practice by their teachers. It is important to realise that students are expected to express ideas and opinions during the discussion of the detailed study.

Resources used reflected the resourcefulness of teachers and students, who had prepared materials that ranged from written resources such as books, folk poems, legends and stories, and reports and historical data from the Internet, to audio-visual resources such as documentaries or movies. Some students also brought visual images which helped them in their discussion. This was especially the case when they were talking about the battle of Kosovo, which they tried to illustrate with reproductions of Kosovo's maiden, Kosovo's monasteries or Kosovo's heroes – Czar Lazar or Milos Obilic. They referred to the visuals and drew conclusions, or used them as descriptive items to support their opinions.

It has to be noted that some students dealt superficially with their chosen sub-topic. They were not able to discuss it in detail, offer a fresh view on the problem, or express an opinion. It is advisable that students choose their sub-topic wisely, use more resources and focus on a particular aspect which can incite discussion.

Relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas

Most students showed maturity and responsibility for their learning in the way they discussed their chosen sub-topic. For the first topic, on the battle of Kosovo, the better students were able to compare and contrast types of texts and/or significant characters in the Kosovo epic (for example, a folk poem about Czar Lazar and a historical article/biography). They discussed the influence of other people of this time and later, or the influence of two contrasting figures of the time, one hero and one traitor, and how they were shown in history and folk literature.

Students were not as bound by historical data for the second topic, instead having to refer to the resources and interpret them in the light of the past or the present. They had to give good reasons for their opinions, and choose their resources well if they wanted to quote them and draw upon them. Most of the students who chose this topic opted for more modern sub-topics or aspects of life of either men or women, which was shown through their choice of resources. They discussed the current situation for their generation more readily than the past and the life of 19th Century women or men. They seemed more interested in what the future holds for them and how their traditions and traditional upbringing



will affect their relationships or work. These students used more modern films and newspaper or magazine articles to back up their opinion, or used their own experience to justify their theories.

For the third topic, students relied on factual data to learn more about Belgrade's history, architecture, significant buildings, monuments and other places of interest. Well-prepared students were able to discuss a particular sub-topic in depth with much detail and data, and were able to discuss the significance of a particular institution or building at the time of its foundation and today. Some students also showed an excellent knowledge of film and theatre through their presentation on famous theatre companies in Belgrade, which are renowned and acclaimed for their performances throughout the world.

Accuracy, range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

The most common errors made by students were in the use of cases and the agreement of nouns with adjectives and verbs. These problems could be explained by the prevalence of dialects or a lack of fluency in students born in Australia. Some students showed a tendency to use English sentence structures, which led to confusion and mistakes. Others used a lot of colloquialisms as they would at home in everyday communication with their parents – although these certainly add to the richness of the language, they are not a part of standard Serbian. Most students were fluent and were able to carry on the discussion. Those who had studied hard and prepared throughout the year performed well.

Clarity of expression

Most students discussed their detailed study topic well, as they were better prepared and had a better understanding of what was required from them in the second part of their examination. Good students were prepared with interesting details and opinions to share with the assessors. They were confident and referred to the resources they used while working on the detailed study. The points they wanted to make came across very clearly and effectively.