

2020 VCE Sinhala oral examination report

General comments

The Sinhala 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.

Following the Conversation, the student will indicate to the assessor(s) the subtopic chosen for detailed study and, in no more than one minute, briefly introduce the main focus of their subtopic, alerting assessors to any objects brought to support the discussion. Suitable objects include photographs, maps or diagrams. 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 Sinhala is spoken, with students being expected to make reference to texts studied.

The choice of subtopic for the Detailed Study is very important. It should be an engaging topic that motivates the student to become familiar with the content and vocabulary needed, and thus be more skilled to support and 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 types of texts used by students should vary in complexity and be in Sinhala so that students can become aware of key vocabulary related to their subtopic. Students must be prepared to use language spontaneously in unrehearsed situations. 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 Sinhala-speaking community.

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 topic, but I think ...', 'I don't know, but I feel ...' and 'I am not sure about this question but I know ...'.

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 repeat or rephrase questions
- normal variation in assessor body language is acceptable.

Three criteria are used in assessing both the Conversation and the Discussion: communication, content and language. Details of the assessment criteria and descriptors are published on the VCAA website. It is important that all teachers and students are 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.

Most students performed to a very good standard, while some students reached an excellent standard in some criteria. A few students needed the assessor's support to complete the time limit for the Conversation or the Discussion. Students must take care to respond to the assessor's questions and provide information appropriately. Also, students should try to use intonation and tempo when trying to stress the important information in their Conversation and Discussion.

The subtopics selected for the Discussion were generally relevant and appropriate.

Section 1 – Conversation

Many students were able to maintain the Conversation effectively by responding readily and confidently. Most students carried the Conversation forward with minimal or no support. Student responses that were very brief or not relevant did not score well. Some students relied on providing information they had prepared without listening carefully to the question and adapting their answer appropriately.

Many students demonstrated a very high level of preparation and provided an excellent range of information, which they were able to elaborate upon and clarify. Some expressed their ideas and opinions and provided information to support them. A minority of students appeared to have gaps in their preparation, which affected their capacity to explain and clarify their ideas and opinions effectively.

Most students used the language in a culturally appropriate manner. In many instances, there was very good control of vocabulary, which was used appropriately. The correct grammar and sentence structure were used in their expressions. Highly appropriate style and register were used in the language. Self-correction was evident in many instances. A few students needed help to maintain a conversation about their personal world for the required time of seven minutes. Students would benefit from exploring various aspects of this topic, including but not limited to the examples given in the study design and examination specifications. They could also focus on developing strategies for expressing their ideas and opinions related to these aspects and reflect on what kinds of questions they might get asked in response to the information they provide.

Most students had excellent pronunciation, and their stress and tempo were often at a very good level.

Section 2 – Discussion

Most students responded readily to the assessors with confidence. Most were able to carry the Discussion forward without any support and used very good repair strategies when required.

Most students demonstrated an excellent level of preparation, as evidenced by their capacity to elaborate on and clarify their opinions and ideas. Many students expressed their ideas and opinions and were able to defend them either where relevant or when asked by the assessors.

Generally, a very good range of sophisticated language was used appropriately with correct structure. Also, appropriate style and register were demonstrated to a very good level.