

2020 VCE Tamil oral examination report

General comments

The Tamil oral examination assesses students' knowledge and skills in using spoken language. The examination has two sections – a Conversation of approximately 7 minutes, during which students converse with the assessors about their personal world, and a Discussion of approximately 8 minutes.

Following the Conversation, the student will indicate to the assessor/s the sub-topic chosen for detailed study and, in no more than one minute, briefly introduce the main focus of their sub-topic, 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 sub-topic; it is not an opportunity for students to list all their information or texts.

The focus of the Discussion will be to explore aspects of the language and culture of communities in which Tamil is spoken and the student will be expected to make reference to texts studied.

The choice of sub-topic for the Detailed Study is very important. It should be an engaging topic that motivates them 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 type of texts used by students should vary in complexity and be in Tamil so that students can become aware of key vocabulary related to their sub-topic. Students are reminded that they must be prepared to use language spontaneously in unrehearsed situations. Students must 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 sub-topic and different aspects of the texts. Students must be able to relate this to the Tamil-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 student 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.

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 [Tamil study page](#). 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.

Specific information

In 2020, students' oral performances were of a high standard. The majority of students presented an excellent range of information, opinions and ideas and responded readily and confidently to the questions and stimulus. They used a range of vocabulary appropriate to their sub-topics, with excellent pronunciation, and they employed suitable facial expressions and gestures. They demonstrated the ability to maintain their conversations and discussions by linking effectively with assessors.

Section 1 – Conversation

Students who scored highly appeared to enjoy the questions and the stimulus put to them, brought real-life stories and experiences, and participated in the conversation with an excellent level of understanding and confidence.

Some students, who seemed to be habitual speakers of Tamil, were very fluent and confident in their speaking but did not appear to have prepared for the Conversation adequately. They offered extremely brief one- or two-word answers to the questions put to them (including open-ended questions) and then waited for the next question. After confirming that the student would not elaborate further, assessors had to change the topic and ask different questions not related to the previous one; in these cases, the purpose of conducting a full conversational exchange was not met.

Some students immediately started to talk about themselves, their family, their education, etc. (நான் என்னைப்பற்றிச் சொல்லப்போகிறேன் ...). They mistakenly thought that the first part required a speech about themselves and the second part required another speech on sub-topics.

Some students answered some questions incorrectly, for example, responding by describing only disadvantages when asked what advantages there were in learning from home/remote learning through the internet.

Section 2 – Discussion

Most students were thoroughly prepared and produced confident responses during the Discussion, drawing on related ideas that moved the Discussion forward with skilful and apt use of proverbs and idioms. They were able to respond capably to questions from the assessors. When logical questions were put to them, they were able to answer them to a high standard and continued the Discussion using phrases that allowed a smooth conversational transition. This demonstrated very thorough preparation and clear understanding.

Some students selected different classic texts from the Tamil canon for their sub-topics from a single online resource or heard the story from someone for the Discussion, for example, '*Silappathiharm* – literary masterpiece of Tamil' or 'The communication techniques used in *Kambaramayanm* could be applied now'. Most of these students were unable to respond with more than a brief summary of their chosen story. They recited verbatim, reflecting little or no understanding of the content. Symptomatically, when they could not recall particular words, they spent valuable time to recover their momentum. To continue the 'speech', they had to repeat the same sentence more than twice. Some of these students were not able to expand upon their stories with original ideas, to present excerpts of the stories, or provide a wider context to what was supposed to be in the Discussion. Some students did not even know the relationships of the main characters in the original texts or whether the texts were in the form of prose or verse. These students related these stories assuming that the assessors would know them as well. This approach was unable to be awarded high marks, since the students could not present an adequate range of information, ideas and opinions.