

2021 VCE Tamil oral external assessment 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.

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 topic, 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.

Some students presented an excellent range of information, opinions and ideas and responded readily and confidently to the questions and stimulus. Many students used a range of vocabulary appropriate not only to their subtopics but also to their conversations. They used 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

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 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 fluent and confident in their speaking, but did not appear to have prepared for the conversation adequately. They used the same information, sentences or phrases for most of the questions put to them and then waited for the next question. After confirming that the student would not elaborate further, assessors had to change the subtopic and ask different questions not related to the previous one; in these cases, the purpose of conducting a full conversational exchange was not fully met.

Some students responded to questions with one or two words only. Students are encouraged to prepare a range of information suitable for open-ended questions and practise their conversation skills.

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 Tamil 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 Tamil 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 Tamil-speaking community.

Some students were thoroughly prepared and produced confident responses during the discussion, drawing on related ideas that moved the discussion forward with skilful and accurate use of a range of sophisticated vocabulary and structures, including proverbs and idioms where appropriate. 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 with excellent intonation, stress and tempo, then continued the discussion using phrases that allowed a smooth conversational transition, such as மீண்டும் இப்போது எனது ஆய்வுக்குச் செல்கிறேன் (I am back to my research now). This demonstrated thorough preparation and clear understanding.

If choosing a classic text, students should refer to a variety of sources, link the discussion to the literature and avoid reciting learnt material verbatim. Students need to understand the content well enough to discuss it effectively. Many students presented in a purely informative way, to the exclusion of any discussion of issues. Some delivered memorised paragraphs in monologue style and presented facts very rapidly, exhausting their discussion time. Even though their language skills, such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, were at a superior level, they were unable to demonstrate their capacity to advance an exchange in communication. Students need to present their ideas and opinions in a logical and relevant fashion, which is the aim of a discussion, and give the assessors opportunities to ask questions.

Almost all students supported their discussion with objects such as photographs, tables and diagrams.