

# 2020 Yiddish oral examination report

## General comments

The Yiddish 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 Yiddish 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 Yiddish 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 Yiddish-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 that 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.

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.

Students performed to a very high standard in the 2020 VCE Yiddish oral examination.

Overall, there was an excellent level of comprehension, with students responding competently to a range of questions and topics. Students communicated effectively, maintaining and advancing the conversation appropriately in Yiddish. In general, students were able to elaborate on their comments and respond well to unexpected questions. Conversation flowed well in most examinations, with students expressing themselves clearly, freely and in depth. High-performing students were comfortable in carrying the conversation forward with self-assurance, whereas lower-performing students required some support to maintain the conversation.

Students generally responded in appropriate tone, style and register. Most students demonstrated very good pronunciation. High-performing students drew on a broad range of vocabulary accurately and appropriately and used idiomatic speech naturally and authentically. Most students used grammatical structures correctly, with some errors in consistency between adjectives and nouns. Lower-performing students mixed up the auxiliary verbs in past tense, placed the verb in the wrong position in the sentence, or did not apply the accusative or dative correctly. In such instances, students were able to make themselves understood, despite these errors.

## Specific information

### Section 1 – Conversation

In the Conversation section of the examination, students interacted very competently with the assessors, providing relevant responses to a range of questions. One of the notable features of this year's examination is the aptitude that students demonstrated in carrying the conversation forward. Students responded thoughtfully to questions about their experiences over the past year, and their plans for the future.

Students who scored highly spoke confidently, with minimal hesitations. They used appropriate Yiddish syntax and word order, and they drew on an extensive vocabulary, expressing themselves coherently and with depth in Yiddish. It was pleasing to note the use of appropriate idiomatic Yiddish expressions.

Lower-performing students used a more limited vocabulary. Some students used incorrect word order, particularly with respect to the position of the verb in the sentence. Other errors included using the incorrect auxiliary verb in the past tense and inconsistent gender of articles and adjectives.

### Section 2 – Discussion

Overall, students demonstrated an excellent level of preparation for the Discussion section of the exam, selecting relevant and meaningful texts to study. Students generally introduced their texts effectively. They were able to discuss these texts clearly and coherently. Most students responded very well to higher order questions, elaborating on their opinions and ideas effectively. Higher-performing students were able to analyse their texts in depth, comparing and contrasting the selected texts and linking them to the sub-topic chosen for the detailed study. Lower performing students were less effective in analysing their texts and tended to limit their responses to descriptions about the content of the texts. Lower performing students were also more hesitant with their language and used a more restricted range of vocabulary.

The 2020 cohort of VCE Yiddish students impressed the assessors with their ability to converse freely in Yiddish in depth and with self-assurance.