

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in Chinese (4CN0/03)
Paper 3: Speaking

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4CN0/ 03 Paper 3: Speaking

Principal Examiner's Report 2016

General Review

The Unit 3 speaking examination is a compulsory part of the International GCSE Chinese qualification. This examination includes two sections and lasts for a total of 10 minutes: Section A (4 minutes) and Section B (6 minutes).

In the exam session of 2016 most centres prepared well for this speaking examination, and the majority of candidates demonstrated performances of good quality resulting in high scores. However, a number of centres did not fully commit to the exam procedures and requirements which therefore affected their candidates' performances.

The following summary can be used to initiate ideas for future examinations:

Speaking examination requirements:

This speaking examination covers 5 topic areas and all sub-topic areas can be found on page 11 of the International GCSE Chinese Specification (Issue 3).

Topic A: Home and abroad;

Topic B: Education and employment;

Topic C: House, home, and daily routines;

Topic D: The modern world and the environment;

Topic E: Social activities, fitness and health.

Candidates need to choose their exam topics from any three of these five topic areas, and all three speaking topics must not be the same. Failure to comply with this rule can lead to no credit being awarded to the clashing areas. It is essential that centres pay attention to this point.

Section A: Two parts in this section, 4 minutes in total:

Presentation:

Picture based presentation for 1 minute (monologue). Each candidate needs to choose their own visual stimulus for this part and describe details of the chosen stimulus for 1 minute. Please be aware that all pictures (including old exam materials) displayed in the International GCSE Chinese Sample Assessment Materials must not be used for this speaking exam. Centres, candidates and interviewers should be restricted from using them. Candidates' assessed results can be affected if this is the case. The used visual stimulus must be attached with the candidate coversheet together for the external assessment.

Here, if the candidate's presentation time is over 1 minute, the additional speaking time does not help candidates towards receiving a high score. However, when candidates' speaking time is less than 1 minute, it can lead to a deduction of marks for candidates. Centres must take the above points into account.

Conversation:

An interactive conversation (3 minutes long) based on the chosen stimulus follows on from the presentation. Interviewers must ask meaningful and structured questions related to the chosen visual stimulus, which should include direct and indirect questions to the chosen stimulus first, and then extension questions within the topic area. All three types of questions can encourage candidates to demonstrate his/her own speaking and understanding skills of the language proficiency. Close-ended questions are not helpful for candidates.

Time management is another considerable factor. Excess speaking time cannot benefit candidates' scores, but less speaking time can certainly affect the assessing result. Interviewers should consider the conversation time of 3 minutes in this section.

Section B: Two conversations in this section, 6 minutes in total:

Conversation 1: a different topic area from Section A - interactive conversation's time is 3 minutes.

Conversation 2: another different topic area from Section A and Section B (conversation 1) - interactive conversation's time is 3 minutes.

In this section, interviewers should ensure that the speaking time for each conversation is 3 minutes; and interviewers should also ensure all questions asked should be clear, understandable and well structured. Failure to do so can downgrade candidates' performances.

Time management again is crucial because excess speaking time cannot help in improving candidates' scores, but less speaking time can also have a negative impact on the assessing result. Consequently, interviewers are the main directors for this section.

Because candidates do not have preparation time prior to this speaking examination, good practice is very important for candidates before the scheduled assessment date. Centres should ensure their candidates have received adequate training and practice from their schools prior to this examination.

Assessment: Section A (Presentation and conversation)

Presentation, conversation and fluency (10 marks)

The majority of candidates prepared well and performed to a high standard in their presentations this year. They also demonstrated confidence and fluency in their conversations which has guaranteed them receiving high scores.

However, there were a number of issues for the 2016 speaking exam; therefore centres, interviewers, and future candidates are required to consider the following in their future exams:

1. Some candidates were not credited in this part of their presentation because they gave no description or inadequate details to the chosen visual picture. For example, when a chosen picture was a school building, one candidate did not describe the details of the picture itself and talked about her schoolmates and her studies at the school instead. As the spoken presentation does not provide direct information regarding the chosen stimulus, the score will be affected.

2. This year, a large proportion of candidates' marks were let down due to the fact that interviewers simply neglected asking direct questions to the chosen stimulus.

Centres and their appointed interviewers should follow the instructions set in page 39 of the International GCSE Chinese Specification (Issue 3) and the main requirements for the conversation of Section A mentioned above, in order to support their candidates in the future exams.

3. Some irrelevant, or inappropriate, questions were asked by interviewers again this year which let down the performance of their candidates. For example in the chosen stimulus of a school ski trip, the interviewer did not ask questions directed to this stimulus, instead asked where she could purchase a ski suit and what size of ski suit could suit her. These questions were not relevant to the chosen picture. All such inappropriate questions from interviewers may have led to lower marks.

4. A number of centres did not enclose the chosen stimuli with the signed coversheets to their allocated examiners, which caused enormous inconvenience and time wastage for the examiners who were required to chase up the missing stimuli. Please note that if no chosen stimuli are enclosed by centres this could lead to no credit being granted to the presentation to those candidates. It is the centres' responsibility to ensure all stimuli and signed cover sheets are enclosed and sent to their allocated examiners.

5. Time management is very important for this speaking exam. Having mentioned the time required for each section above, it is the responsibility of the interviewer to control and manage the time of each section. Some centres or interviewers failed to control the timings of each section - often it was too short; for example, with presentation times being less than 1 minute, or conversation times being less than 3 minutes, resulting in a deduction of marks.

6. Centres should receive confirmation that their interviewers can speak the correct language/dialect prior to issuing a contract to their interviewers. Some interviewers may only speak a single language/dialect but assume candidates can speak and understand the same; this can be detrimental to the rights of their candidates and also affects the quality of their speaking assessment. For example, one interviewer could only speak Mandarin, but the candidates were Cantonese speakers. They were not able to fully understand all questions in Mandarin, and responded in Cantonese by guessing the meaning of questions; as a result, the quality of their answers had been affected, and their marks may have been downgraded.

7. It is the centres' and interviewers' responsibility to study all the requirements of this speaking examination prior to conducting the actual assessment. The specification of this exam is published on Pearson Edexcel's official website, containing all requirements of the examination. Candidates should receive support or revision lessons for their International GCSE exams. This year, some native speaker candidates did not provide their presentation to their chosen stimulus because their interviewer did not conduct this part in Section A. Unfortunately those candidates' marks were deducted.

Further issues included the following:

a number of interviewers missed out on conducting one or two parts of the oral exam;

some interviewers used English terms or words within their questions, this is unacceptable for this speaking examination.

Knowledge and application of language (5 marks)

Candidates would have received a high mark if they could demonstrate good language ability, such as by using a wide range vocabulary or complex sentence structures.

Accuracy (5 marks)

Candidates would have also been awarded a high mark if they could show consistent strong evidence of word order and correct intonation and pronunciation.

Assessment: Section B (conversation 1 and conversation 2)

In this section, two conversations should have been in different topic areas and they are assessed globally.

Communication, interaction and fluency (10 marks)

Candidates did better in Section B than in Section A, overall, this year.

Candidates were granted high marks if they could communicate smoothly with their interviewers, showing no difficulties in response to a wide range of questions as well as confidently expressing personal opinions to them.

Interviewers should follow the exam instructions for the conduct of examinations on page 39 of the International GCSE Chinese Specification (Issue 3).

However, some typical issues let the candidates down which centres and interviewers must understand clearly for future exams. Some interviewers did not organise their questions systematically and structurally well for the conversations in this section. Their questions were both long and complicated, which not only confused their candidates, but also took away the opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their speaking abilities in answering the questions, resulting in their scores being lowered.

In some cases, the interviewers' proficiency level (including pronunciation) in Chinese was not adequate and was delivered with significant difficulties; they took a long time and only managed to ask a few questions (some of them with great grammatical errors) and as a result, candidates found it difficult to understand the questions and their chance to perform well in the exam may have been reduced, thus affecting candidates' marks. Centres must assess the language ability of their appointed interviewers prior to conducting this exam.

A number of centres recorded the two conversations of Section B separately, which has caused huge difficulties to examiners as well as being a breach of one of the rules. The two conversations in section B must stay together and they need to be marked together. Centres and interviewers are strongly advised that two sections of this examination should be recorded together in order to avoid cases of malpractice.

Knowledge and application of language (5 marks)

Candidates would have received a high mark if they could demonstrate their language ability well, such as by using a wide range vocabulary or complex sentence structures.

Accuracy (5 marks)

Candidates would also have been scored highly if they could show strong evidence of word order, agreement, intonation and pronunciation which seldom interfered with comprehensibility.

Administration

Candidate coversheet:

Both interviewer and candidate must sign the declaration of authentication on the candidate coversheet. Some centres continued to use the old forms without both signatures for this speaking exam. A copy of the new coversheet can be found on page 47 of the International GCSE Chinese Specification (Issue 3).

Medias:

Centres should ensure all speaking scripts are correctly recorded on CDs or USBs before sending out to examiners. Please also ensure all CDs are fully protected in packages to avoid any damage caused during transit in the post. All CDs and USBs must be clearly labeled. It is essential that centres keep back-up files of the speaking scripts in the event of loss of originals or damages.

There were instances of empty CDs and unopened CDs being received by examiners this year. Some recordings were in such bad quality which resulted in a lowering of these candidates' marks.

Please also note that audio cassettes will no longer be accepted for assessment after September 2014.

If submitting work on CDs, centres must ensure these are well protected in order to avoid damage in the post and subsequent delays to the marking process.

Centres and interviewers:

All centres need to be clear on the requirements of the assessment for this speaking examination as set out on page 7 of the specification (Issue 3). Candidates of those centres which have prepared well for this speaking assessment would have achieved a good result.

It needs to be reiterated that all interviewers play an important part in this examination. All interviewers should study the instructions for the conduct of examinations on page 39 of the specification (Issue 3) prior to the examination. Clear, structured, appropriate and logical questions are helpful for candidates to achieve their highest potential.

Please note that this speaking examination is assessed externally. Centres' teachers/ interviewers should not need to mark this paper.

Centres with a large cohort of candidates should arrange for a sufficient number of interviewers to conduct the examination in order to avoid the following: missing parts of the two sections; cutting conversation times; and more importantly, interviewer fatigue which can cause more issues in this examination.

Unfortunately, this year, one centre did not read through the requirements from the specification and did not conduct the speaking examination for its candidates because they assumed speaking materials would be sent to them. Please note that no examination materials will be provided by Pearson Edexcel for this speaking unit. All candidates must prepare their own stimulus for their presentation. Interviewer(s) should ask direct questions in response to this stimulus, indirect questions and extension questions of the topic in Section A; and should also prepare questions for two different topics - conversations in Section B.

Final Remarks

The International GCSE Chinese speaking examination provides an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their speaking and understanding abilities from a wide range of choices. In order for centres to support their candidates in achieving their highest quality of performance, centres should offer adequate and suitable practical exercises for them prior to their actual speaking examination. They should also ensure interviewers, in particular external interviewers, fully understand and comply with the requirements and procedures set for this speaking assessment as outlined in the specification.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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