

Examiners' Report /
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

International GCSE French (4FR0)
Paper 03

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Examiner Report

Section A

The vast majority of candidates had clearly worked hard to ensure success in producing a coherent presentation. Their attention to detail in this respect allowed them to settle with confidence in anticipation of the remainder of the speaking test. This meant that hesitation was unlikely to impede performance. Centres have clearly encouraged their candidates to perform as well as possible in this first section, as being at one's ease for the other components usually depends upon such a confident start. Following on from a successful presentation, interviewers were then able to base the ensuing conversation on what arose naturally from the initial monologue. This effective transition often ensures a truly spontaneous interaction between interviewer and candidate.

Whereas candidates choose from an extensive range of images to support their presentation, the choice of image tends to impact on how well they perform during the presentation but even more so during the ensuing discussion. There is strong evidence, based on several series, that candidates who offer photographs of family members and friends are very likely to present the image with a degree of confidence. They often deal equally well with issues arising from their initial presentation. This may be explained by the candidate's sense of ease and comfort with the initial subject matter, as he/she perceives some "ownership" of the conversation. Many centres did however offer excellent presentations/discussions based upon more abstract and complex themes, as some candidates are able to deal with complexities arising from such topic areas. But in cases where candidates were clearly less confident, interviewers had thankfully guided candidates to present an image from within their individual comfort zone. For example, pictures of family celebrations or of groups of friends on an excursion tended to work well, across the ability range.

Less confident candidates tended to find it difficult to deal with pictures where there were multiple activities taking place, especially where the candidate had no personal involvement with the image.

Questioning techniques tended to be excellent, reflecting outstanding practice on the part of interviewers. There were just a small number of occasions where candidates were asked to provide information they had already conveyed during the presentation. Questions based upon the picture tended to allow candidates every opportunity to deploy a broad range of linguistic structures, with interviewers clearly steering away from closed questions. It was only in a few instances that candidates were asked questions well beyond their linguistic ability.

This series, there was a slight increase in cases where interviewers continually interrupted candidates in mid response. This can have quite a limiting effect on performance. For example, there were cases where candidates were prevented from using subordinate clauses and other strategies. Naturally, in cases where an interviewer's question was misinterpreted by a candidate, it was good practice to guide the candidate to the correct theme. This was nearly always done

sympathetically and professionally, ensuring that the candidate targeted a more correct response, without any loss of confidence.

Section B

There are specimen questions within the specification which can be used where appropriate. However, there is absolutely no need to adhere to these questions. Indeed, those few interviewers who merely asked questions from the published list were unlikely to elicit the best performances from their candidates. In the vast majority of cases, the specimen questions were consulted as a guidance tool and therefore supported the best interests of candidates. An appropriate range of question styles was accessed in most cases, allowing candidates to utilise a much more comprehensive range of structures and vocabulary.

Candidates need the opportunity to develop responses, express and clarify opinions and to show a degree of initiative. This is much easier to achieve when the question is targeted at the individual candidate rather than at the whole group. Nearly all interviewers were successful in eliciting this result. Asking more individual questions equally ensured that the questions matched the linguistic ability of the individual.

It was clear that most interviewers were aware of their candidates' strengths, as they skilfully drew less confident individuals into the conversations via straightforward questions, gradually progressing towards subjects requiring a little more reflection and development. Essentially, interviewers facilitated optimum performance from candidates from a whole range of abilities. Where candidates seemed to experience difficulty and falter, interviewers worked hard to draw candidates back into the conversation, using several tactics to steer individuals back onto an appropriate level of response. Candidates who clearly needed some clarification from the interviewer were gently eased back into the conversation, by clever rephrasing of questions.

Conduct of Examination

Centres are to be commended for being careful to adhere to the prescribed time limits, as per specification. Utterances which take place beyond the prescribed time limits cannot be credited. There were a small number of cases where conversations were far too short, meaning that candidates did not achieve their optimum result. Where an interviewer realises that the first conversation was too long, this should never be compensated by making the others too brief, given that each conversation is timed and assessed independently. In the case of the presentation, there were a number of instances where the maximum time limit was exceeded by a significant margin.

Most interviewers were mindful of the need to adhere to the time limits, but succeeded in doing so by means other than an obtrusive bleep. The transition between two conversations was nearly always clear.

Interviewers promoted even better responses from candidates where they were genuinely interested in what candidates had to say. This was most productive, as the candidates were pleased to share their experiences and views. In such instances, they were much more likely to expand upon what they say, both in terms of content and the range of structures/vocabulary included.

Administrative Matters

As in previous series, the overall excellent standard of administration during this series was much appreciated.

The vast majority of CDs/USBs/cassettes were correctly labelled. Other essential documentation was equally presented with a high degree of care. In just a few cases, centre documentation was not sent to the examiner. The current International GCSE French specification includes the appropriate guidelines on pages 39-42, helpful for interviewers who are using this specification for the first time.

A very high percentage of recordings were clearly audible. However, some recordings were too “quiet” or rendered virtually inaudible due to obtrusive background noise. Interviewers should check the quality of each recording, particularly the first they conduct. This means that any changes to recording procedures can be implemented before continuing. The placing of the microphone tends to be even more important than the choice of recording equipment. There are still occasions where the microphone seems to have been placed much closer to the interviewer than to the candidate.

The microphone should always be placed in such a position that it favours the candidate rather than the interviewer.

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