

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCE French (6FR03) Paper 1

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Purpose of the Test

This unit seeks to assess the candidate's ability to discuss a limited number of issues in some depth.

According to the specification, candidates are expected to

- *interact effectively* with the teacher/examiner,
- *defend* their views on a chosen issue and
- *sustain discussion* as the teacher/examiner moves the conversation away from the chosen issue to a further 2 or 3 issues

Centres are reminded that the test is an examination of the candidate's ability to use language spontaneously in largely unpredictable circumstances.

The test should last between 11-13 minutes, from the time the candidate begins to make the opening statement. Many centres start the clock as soon as a candidate's test starts. This means that all the introductory details and preliminary exchanges are included in the overall time. In some circumstances, this can result in a test being judged short and the candidates will receive a lower mark.

The statement of the candidate's stance about the chosen issue should last no longer than one minute. A robust challenge of this position should then be mounted by the examiner and debate should continue for a further four minutes.

Candidates who are allowed to make too long a presentation limit the amount of time left for debate and demonstration of their research. This will have an impact on their mark. Similarly, failure to challenge the candidate robustly to force them to defend their position instead of merely explaining their reasons for adopting the stance will also be reflected in the mark for this element.

At the conclusion of this section, the examiner will signal that the test is now moving to a second phase by making an appropriate remark to that effect. Thereafter, examiner and candidate will discuss a further two or three issues, in some depth, until the conclusion of the test. Some centres fail to observe this stipulation. This can cause confusion for markers. When the first subsequent issue is very close to the initial one, it is not always clear whether the latter is being extended, which will entail penalties or whether a new pathway is being opened up.

Defining terms

It may be helpful to set out what is understood by some of the terms used in the preceding paragraph.

The Issue

An issue is generally a somewhat contentious topic that has a moral or ethical dimension. Very careful attention should be paid to the choice of issue. It needs to be capable of sustained argument from both sides and should contain the seed of possible further issues for discussion, remembering that the

second issue will arise from something touched upon in the initial debate. For example, a debate on abortion may touch upon issues such as women's rights, contraception, sex education, the sanctity of life, any one of which could offer a way into the second part of the test through, say, a discussion of the role of women in society, moving from there to the problem of family breakdown, teenage pregnancy, changing patterns of relationships etc...

Examples of good issues would be:

Je suis pour la légalisation du cannabis / Je suis contre l'IVG / je suis pour la limitation de l'immigration / je suis contre l'euthanasie / je suis pour le mariage homosexuel / je suis contre l'adoption homosexuelle / je suis contre les cartes d'identité / je suis contre la suppression des symboles religieux / je suis pour la peine de mort / je suis contre les concours de beauté / je suis pour la chirurgie esthétique / je suis pour le vote à 16 ans / je suis contre la prison pour les juvéniles / je suis contre la gratuité des frais universitaires / je suis pour le mariage des prêtres catholiques / je suis contre l'expérimentation animale / je suis pour le "don présumé" des organes / je suis contre l'énergie nucléaire / je suis pour la recherche sur les cellules souches / je suis contre les OGM's / je suis pour la prostitution / je pense que l'intégration des immigrés est préférable à leur assimilation / je suis contre la discrimination positive / je pense que les femmes sont responsables du sexisme / je suis pour le droit de vote pour les détenus /

Issues such as these are good because they are contentious, allow both sides to mount good arguments, have enough substance to permit sustained, detailed discussion and suggest possibilities for the first "subsequent" issue.

Less good are ones are:

je suis contre l'influence des magazines adressés aux jeunes filles / je suis pour internet / je suis pour la taille minimum / je suis contre la laïcité en France / je suis contre les JO à Londres / je suis pour les mesures plus draconiennes pour protéger la planète / je suis pour le génie génétique / je suis contre les éoliennes / je suis pour la voiture électrique / je suis contre le don des organes obligatoire.

Issues such as these are not so good because, although they are arguable, their focus is not clear. For example, *je suis pour la laïcité en France* is weak in many ways, not the least of which is that it is one of the corner stones of the French Republic and therefore possibly unarguable but more especially, like many of the others listed in this section, it is not what the candidate really wants to talk about - which is the wearing of religious symbols in public places.

The following are examples of poor choices because they are un-arguable:

Les troubles alimentaires ne sont pas causés par les médias / je suis contre le tabac / je suis contre les mannequins trop maigres / je suis contre l'organisation des compétitions de "surf" / je suis contre la pédophilie / je suis contre la participation à la guerre civile, il y a d'autres moyens de défendre la démocratie / je suis contre l'exploitation des ressources naturelles / je suis contre les jeux olympiques / Dieu existe.

Teachers should take care to ensure that candidates define their choice of topic very precisely so as to avoid any confusion and to ensure a clear statement of their position.

Effective interaction

Candidates are deemed to be interacting effectively when they address directly comments/remarks/questions/prompts made by the examiner. Too many times markers draw attention to the fact that exchanges between candidate and examiner proceed as if each were in a separate room. The examiner asks a question, the candidate responds with a rehearsed answer, the examiner moves to the next question for which there is another more or less prepared appropriate answer, and so on. This is poor conduct. Neither candidate, nor examiner, is acknowledging what the other is saying addressing their subsequent remarks to what has just been said. This cannot be construed as effective interaction.

Discourse describes the exchange of opinion and information on an issue between two or more people. Simply put, this means candidates should respond appropriately to the examiner's input whether that be a question, a comment, a remark or a request. Candidates should not assume that by saying something vaguely related to the topic they will be deemed to have fulfilled the criteria for discourse. They should be trained to listen closely to what the other person says and respond appropriately.

Spontaneity is often perceived as a troublesome notion but it need not be. Clearly, candidates who have been properly prepared for the speaking test will have a store of ideas and phrases they can call upon as required. This is not only perfectly reasonable but also very desirable, it is, after all the only sensible way to prepare for an examination. Candidates do not have to produce wholly new utterances in response to unimagined questions. Their spontaneous use of language arises from their manipulation of this stock of language in response to the unpredictable nature of the discussion as it unfolds. This unpredictability arises naturally when the rules of discourse are observed properly. Listening to how the other is interpreting one's remarks forces one to adjust one's position and in so doing requires spontaneous manipulation of language. Tests in which neither candidate nor examiner explore the detail of what one or the other has said cannot be accepted as examples of proper discussion and do not qualify as spontaneous discourse.

Sustaining discussion

This refers to the exploration of each individual subsequent issue which should be done in some depth. It flows from the proper application of the rules of discourse. If candidate and examiner are engaged in exploring each other's thoughts on a particular issue, then they are conducting a discussion. The longer this discussion goes on the more it is sustained. Properly conducted tests will reap the benefit across the Mark Scheme, as sustained discourse has repercussions for every other assessment category - showing greater knowledge and understanding in Reading and Research and Comprehension and Development.

The Mark Scheme

The Mark Scheme embodies the features of the specifications highlighted above. It rewards candidates who:

- have something of substance to say about topical issues, under close examination
- can communicate their thoughts spontaneously and clearly, with no loss of meaning
- display a wide range of appropriate vocabulary and structures.

Response (20 marks)

This box asks the following questions:

- is this spontaneous discourse or rehearsed response – and to what extent
- is the nature of the discussion largely of an abstract nature - i.e. about ideas: discussion as opposed to narration, explanation or description
- how comfortable with this type of discussion is the candidate
- what language resources does the candidate display?

If candidates engage reasonably in useful discussion of abstract issues, they will score in the 9 – 12 box at least. If, however, it is clear that the test is not a genuine discussion but merely a sequence of pre-arranged questions and answers, they will not progress beyond 8.

Quality of language (7 marks)

The central issue here is:

- is this candidate communicating without loss of message?

If there is no loss of message the candidate will score at least 4 - unless the incidence of basic error is so intrusive as to be a distraction.

Reading and Research (7 marks)

This box assesses the candidate's level of awareness and understanding of both general issues and the chosen issue for debate. What is sought is evidence that the candidate has read widely and in some depth.

Comprehension and development (16 marks)

What is being assessed here is the ability to:

- decipher the sounds of the language correctly
- decode the meaning accurately
- exploit the issue under discussion by developing it further, independently

The word "form" in the grid is misleading and centres should concentrate on the idea of the degree of difficulty required to respond to the examiner's prompt rather than structures used to express the question. Questions generally only become complex and challenging by the responses they require. Taking an extreme case, by way of illustration, a candidate faced with the following question:

Q: "Diriez-vous que monsieur Sarkhozy ait eu raison de renvoyer les Rome dans leur pays d'origine quelque fût leur période de séjour en France?"

could well reply

A: Oui

Thus, teacher/examiners should think in terms of what a question will require a candidate to do rather than what it demands in terms of understanding.

Candidates can do well in this area. If they display no problems understanding they will obviously be awarded a high mark for that element, which may or may not be maintained depending on how well they are able to develop the discussion, by offering further pathways for investigation.

Candidate performance

It is very pleasing to report that very many candidates were able to discuss issues easily. Indeed, some examiners, visiting in particular, expressed huge admiration for the ability of many candidates to discuss as freely in French as in their native language. Centres are to be congratulated on their achievement in helping pupils reach such a level of competence.

Where tests were conducted correctly, candidates could engage in productive discussion of their chosen and other issues. However, the outcome for many still reflects the fact that tests were conducted in a manner that did not meet the requirements of the specifications either in respect of spontaneous discourse or demonstrating awareness of an issue through sustained discussion – or both.

The importance of the proper conduct of the test in achieving a good outcome cannot be overemphasised. Centres should ensure that not only are their candidates well prepared but also their examiners.

Response

Many candidates still experience difficulty conducting a spontaneous discussion on a limited number of issues. Virtually all were able to provide a generally appropriate initial response to a comment or prompt but it was clear that for many that was the extent to which they were prepared, or had been prepared, to go. This is not a "question and answer" test. Candidates must show initiative and a willingness, as well as an ability, to pursue an issue without further prompting, whilst examiners must ensure that the development is not merely regurgitation.

Candidates should be trained to structure their contributions along the following lines: -

- declaring an understanding of the examiner's remarks
- acknowledging what truth they see in it
- indicating where they might be at odds with it
- stating why

- substantiating their own view with examples or reference to some recognised authority
- conceding that not everyone may share their opinion
- offering further pathways on the same issue for the examiner to explore

For example, language such as follows would be appropriate:

J'accepte votre point de vue lorsque vous dites que et je reconnais qu'il y a une part de vérité dans votre argument concernant ... notamment quand vous dites que ... mais, sauf votre respect, je pense que vous vous trompez quand vous dites que ... car à mon sens ... et je ne suis pas le seul à penser de la sorte car Monsieur Untel du Monde a dit que ... j'accepte qu'il n'a peut-être pas entièrement raison mais ... etc..

This is not being suggested as a model for every response, as not all issues or approaches to issues will allow a response of this nature. The point being made is that candidates need to learn to think in terms of at least two, preferably three, phase responses, rather than just the one. In this way they will be seen to be using the language of discussion and debate in a spontaneous, capable and sustained manner and this will be reflected in the marks for both Response and Comprehension.

Range of lexis and structures

An assumption is made that language comprises different parts of speech and that correct usage involves adhering to a set of rules.

Most candidates understand that:

- there is something variously called gender and number
but frequently display infelicitous application of these notions
- nouns need to be supported by articles etc
but many extend this to proper nouns – as in le Paris whilst simultaneously refraining from doing so with names of countries – i.e. France a besoin de... and plural nouns are very often unsupported
- the usual place of the adjective is after the noun and the adverb after the verb but too many still resort to English syntactical order as in: - *le seulement problème ... la financière crise ... un change très grande ... nous rarement mangeons en famille ... nous toujours avons des cartes d'identité ... ces télévision cameras ...*
- clauses should contain a verb
although some do contrive to produce "sentences" containing no verb at all, however statements such as "et c'est pourquoi je contre le clonage" are mercifully rare
- verbs should be conjugated
This rule is too often observed in the breach, especially when subordinate clauses are involved. Examples of verb error:

main clause verb not conjugated – les hommes sentir que ... si les femmes rester à la maison les hommes continuer à travailler – beaucoup de jeunes rester à la maison ...

subordinate verb not conjugated – les gens voient les immigrés qui venir dans leur pays – les jeunes qui commettre ces crimes – il faut que le gouvernement améliorer – tout le monde qui vivre ... les idées qui conflit...

subject / verb agreement – les femmes a besoin ... les patients veut rester dans sa maison ... le gouvernement devrions faire quelque chose ... ils fait ce qu'ils veut ... les musulimes qui a fait les attentats pour montre notre société ... il est vrai que les états qui maintenu la peine de mort l'a aboli ... les gens doit...

wrong choice of tense – de nos jours l'euthanasie a été un sujet de contraverse ... dans le passé les parents est plus strictes ... il y a 6 mois je cherche ... l'autre jour je parle à un ami qui me dit que ... si le gouvernement fait cela les terroristes viennent plus dans notre pays ...

In addition, most understand the notions of:

- **agreement** – article / noun : noun / adjective : personal pronoun / verb
although for many this is an evanescent notion

examples of incorrect gender /agreement – tous les communautés ... le peine de mort ... le taille zero ... le mère ... la père ... je pense que les femmes, ils n'ont pas l'égalité ... une bébé ... tous les personnes ... un société ...

- **tense** – predominantly the Present and the Conditional - with infrequent excursions into the Perfect, Imperfect and Future as the dictates of the discussion require.

- **negation**

*although too many still experience difficulty applying a negative to a Passé Composé, especially when an object pronoun is involved and constructions such as **ils ne pas l'ont aimé ça** are not infrequent*

further examples would be - je d'accord pas avec vous ... je ne suis d'accord ... n'ont aucun d'argent ... n'aucune personne n'a pensé que ... les immigrés ne veulent travailler ... il ne pas vrai ... ils ne jamais pas disent ... personne n'a pas dit que ... ce n'est juste pas ... les enfants pas pensent que ... ni personne doivent aller en prison ... il n'y a pas des raisons ...

- **comparison**

- **representation** through object pronouns when part of the verb group but not when used disjunctively (i.e. moi etc especially lui and eux)
- **ownership** through personal adjectives – mon/ton/son etc – but not when used disjunctively (i.e - le mien etc)
- **designation** with demonstrative adjectives ce/cette/ces - but not when used pronominally (i.e. celui/celle etc)

Subordination

The notion that phrases / clauses have to be linked in French and cannot be merely collocated as in English, continues to bedevil many candidates.

Qui and Que are interchangeable for too many still. Whilst, in general, they remember to include que when it is part of their initial response, often a stock phrase – as in *je pense que* beyond that point the relative tends to disappear as in ... *et je sais les parents veulent contrôler quoi leurs enfants faire*

Use of *ce qui* and *ce que*; *dont*, *lequel* etc is reserved to the better candidates, although encouragingly *en ce qui (me) concerne* is quite widely used.

Verbs in subordinate clauses are frequently in an approximate form, somewhere between the finite and the infinitive (see above).

Dependent infinitives are generally acknowledged, although it is often a lottery as to whether a preposition will be used and, in the event, which one. Examples of *incorrect use*: *c'est difficile d'accepte ... le gouvernement ne doit pas les permit ... on doit considère que ... on doit règle ... les medias presser les jeunes paraît très beaux ... quand je vois des gens fumant ... après avoir être ... ils sont très efficaces de notre (sic) protéger ... doivent être punir ... je voudrais plus sure ...*

Reflexive verbs are generally only used correctly in stock phrases such as *il s'appelle ...* or *je m'entends bien avec mes parents* Attempts to use them in the past or with a negative usually fail.

The subjunctive is used frequently but again mostly in stock phrases such as *je ne crois pas que ... / il est important que / il faut que* and the famous *autant que je sache*

Most candidates who observe the rule in these circumstances would fail to do so when using *"je voudrais que ... / je n'aime pas que .../ il est possible que ...*

The passive voice is not required in the productive mode, which is perhaps just as well.

Hypothetical language – using "si" – nearly always produces error and correct usage is found in the performances of only the best candidates. *Examples of error - sometimes the verb in the "si" clause is wrongly chosen – si les femmes pourraient but generally it is the second verb that is wrong... si les problèmes a une incidence les jeunes suiveraient ... si le gouvernement fait cela les gens dire que ... à l'avenir si le gens recycleront, la planète est sauve*

Modals confuse many candidates who seem to feel that "devoir" contains the verb "être" or "avoir" and so do not use it, as in il devrait une loi or they confuse the conditional of "être" with "pourrait" as in il serait être une loi

- Pronunciation and Intonation – most candidates have a tolerably good accent but loss of message still occurs as a result of poor pronunciation, which can also be the feature that decides whether a 3 or a 4 for Accuracy is awarded.

All the features highlighted in previous reports are present in this year's cohort:

- o final consonants – ilz, lez, nouz, danz le casse où, passer le tempes, disposer de son corpse, il est treize petite, bioucoupe etc
- o nasal vowels – innetérésstant, symepathétique, mennesonge, il est mort de femme(!), la faim est l'égal de l'homme le pain de mort (seems harsh on the baker!)
- o semi-vowels – les gense qui résident dans cet paille
- o poor middle vowels – often one is never clear whether one is hearing about the young, the people – les jeunes , les gens
- o opposition [y] / [u] –

Other frequently noted errors

- Confusion over il y a or il est (avoir / être)- *je pense qu'il n'est pas assez de jeunes ... je pense que vous ne devez pas avoir le droite de vote quand vous êtes 16 ans ... il ne sera pas un parti avec la majorité ... il n'a jamais été des preuves ... je pense qu'ils sont très peur ... ils ont (sont) destabillise(s) il a des gens comme moi ... i l est des lois qui ...*
- Confusion over Connaitre and Savoir
Je connais qu'il est difficile ... Je sais quelqu'un qui ...
- Anglicised syntax – largely restricted to phrases of two types as illustrated
c'est important pour les parents prohiber leurs enfants regardant les films violents ... les professeurs doivent enseigner les étudiants quoi est nécessaire ...
- Quantity - *there are frequent examples of - beaucoup des gens, plusieurs de personnes, milliers étudiants, plus et plus personnes,*

These areas have been highlighted to help centres see where they may best apply their efforts.

The fact that the Present and Conditional tenses are the most commonly used should come as no surprise since they allow candidates to say what they think, how they see things around them and what they think should happen in order to bring about any necessary change or improvement. This is, after all, what the examination requires them to do – talk about things that are problematic and propose solutions. If they show little knowledge of other tenses, it may not be that they do not know them but rather that it is the examining technique that is at fault, in that opportunities to use these tenses were not offered to them.

Nevertheless, it is disappointing to see that such a key feature of French as subordination is not done well, in the main.

Reading and Research

Colleagues report that, in the great majority of cases, candidates continue to be well prepared for the initial debate and that there was ample evidence of serious research having been done. Good to very good marks were frequently recorded for this aspect of the grid.

Assessment of wider reading was not so positive. The feeling is that this is probably more to do with the style of examining adopted by some centres than a real weakness in candidates themselves. Centres are reminded that in the second part of the examination, care should be taken not to try and show a candidate's broad knowledge of the issues but rather their understanding of some of them. This means proper in-depth discussion of the subsequent issues, rather than one-line question and answer exchanges.

Comprehension and Development

The oral test is now used to assess candidates' understanding of the spoken language. If they show that they can make sense of the sounds they are hearing by responding in a way that demonstrates understanding of meaning, they will score highly.

If, in so doing, they can promote further discussion of the issue by offering avenues for development, they will reinforce their Comprehension mark.

Last year we reported:

"Very few candidates had difficulty understanding what was being said to them. However, for whatever reason, lack of ability, lack of knowledge, lack of confidence or poor examining technique many failed to sustain discussion."

This is still an area that centres should address and experience shows that examining technique is the most prominent feature in determining the final mark for this aspect of the test.

Timing

Candidates should not be allowed to go beyond 1 minute when presenting their stance. To do so would take time from the ensuing debate and limit candidates' ability to demonstrate depth of research and ability to marshal arguments. This will inevitably be reflected in the Reading and Research mark.

Nor should they be allowed to extend the initial issue beyond 5 minutes. The more time spent on a familiar well-rehearsed topic, the less remains for candidates to demonstrate their ability to deal satisfactorily with unpredictable issues. Again this will be reflected in the Reading and Research mark but also in the Response mark. Candidates who are allowed to discuss their chosen issue for the whole test, as occurs in some centres, will not be demonstrating wide reading nor can they be considered to be reacting to unpredictable situations. In such cases, candidates' marks for Response will be restricted to the 5 – 8 box and will not rise above 3 / 4 for Reading and Research.

Adhering to the full span of time allotted to the exam is also very important as short tests mean that candidates' marks for Response and Comprehension and Development will be moved down to the box below the one they would have been put in if the exam had been of the right length.

It should be observed that the test is timed from the moment candidates

begin their presentation and not from when they are greeted and announced on the tape/CD track.

Debate/Discussion

Colleagues report that this section is not well done by centres. Too many teacher/examiners do not discuss issues with candidates. They ask for opinions but do not seek to delve into the reasons for these opinions being held, moving quickly on to the next issue where the same procedure is observed. The result is a selection of superficial "question and answer" exchanges with no exploration of candidates' knowledge and understanding. Concerns have been expressed by colleagues that many tests resemble "good GCSE" exams in which identical topics are addressed – i.e. manger sain / garder la forme / la pratique d'un sport / les loisirs etc. This is not an appropriate level for the A2 examination.

The effects of such an approach will be seen in lower marks for Reading and Research and Comprehension and Development as candidates will not have been afforded an opportunity to display detail on the one hand nor the ability to expand the issue under discussion on the other.

Centre Administration

Colleagues have asked me to draw centres' attention to the following shortcomings which, whilst not general, occur often enough to constitute an irritation.

Recording

- noisy equipment / machine hum / clunky microphones
- faint recording
- outside noise
- colleagues intruding on the test – in person or via electronic means
- recording at the wrong speed
- failure to record candidates
- failure to announce candidates – i.e. name / number / Issue
- candidate order not specified on CD's
- CD's not formatted for play on multiple players

Administration

- poor labelling- or no labelling - of cassette or CD (most often)
- oral forms not filled in correctly by students
- oral forms not included
- out-of-date oral forms used
- issues expressed in English
- registers not submitted
- poor packaging – resulting in broken cassettes

Marking guidance

Tests that are too short

A test is too short if it is less than 10 minutes 30 seconds. Candidates are allowed a 30 second tolerance.

Drop down one mark band to the corresponding mark in the band below, across the following assessment grids:

- Response
- Comprehension and Development

e.g.

5-8	Limited incidence of spontaneous discourse; limited range of lexis and structures; very little evidence of abstract language.
9-12	Satisfactory incidence of spontaneous discourse; range of lexis and structures adequate with some ability to handle language of abstract concepts.
13-16	Frequent examples of spontaneous discourse; good range of lexis and structures; good use of abstract concepts.

If a candidate would have scored 12, they should be given 8; if they would have scored 9, they should be given 5. This adjustment should not be applied to 'Quality of language' or 'Reading and research' grids.

Tests that are too long

Once the 13 minute mark has passed, the examiner should stop listening at the end of the next sentence.

Tests that do not move away from initial input

e.g. spontaneous discussion is not initiated/further unpredictable areas of discussion are not covered.

Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score. Please see the grids.

Response	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only one unpredictable area discussed
No more than 8 marks	No more than 12 marks

Reading and research	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only one unpredictable area discussed
No more than 3 marks	No more than 4 marks

Comprehension and development	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only one unpredictable area discussed
No more than 7 marks	No more than 10 marks

Tests that are pre-learnt

Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score for response. Please see 'Response' grid.

- Response - cannot score more than 8, irrespective of use of lexis/structure/abstract language.

Grade Boundaries

The modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, but the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across these specifications are comparable at specification level.

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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