



GCSE

Modern Hebrew

8678/SH Paper 1 Speaking Higher Tier

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

As in 2023, there was a very positive response to this specification: another successful year. The mean was similar to last year's mean at 49.5 out of 60 (82.5%). The performance of the paper in the light of students' responses demonstrated that centres continue to have a good understanding of the established specification and its effective implementation.

On the whole, centres coped very well with the requirements of the specification, with many well-conducted tests seen. The format of the normal GCSE Modern Hebrew speaking test continued to allow all students to demonstrate a level of oral proficiency that was commensurate with their ability. In particular, most centres that had used this specification in the past administered and carried out the tasks to a much higher standard this year, which indicated that they had heeded the report provided by AQA based on the conduct of the exams in 2023 and that teacher-examiners had taken on board the advice and suggestions given. While reflecting on this positive aspect, it is also worth noting that in a minority of cases, the specification requirements were not correctly followed, which led to some students being disadvantaged. This report provides an overview of the 2024 GCSE Modern Hebrew speaking test, both in terms of teacher-examiner conduct and student performance.

Tier of Entry

Most students performed at a high standard. However, there were still a small number of students who would have been better suited to Foundation tier. Centres are advised to make judicious entry decisions that will allow students of all abilities to perform confidently and reach their full potential.

Quality of Recording

Generally, tests were well administered by centres with very clear recordings and accurate information given on the attendance record form, all of which contributed to a more efficient marking process. Centres should, however, be aware that it is imperative that the speaking test is conducted at a suitable venue and that a quality recording device is used. Although this was usually the case, there were some instances where external background noise and/or poor-quality recordings affected the audibility of the recordings, all of which made marking a very difficult exercise for the examiners. In a minority of cases, the recordings of students were not clearly audible, the teacher-examiner's voice was much louder than the student's, or there was a lot of background noise, all of which made it extremely difficult for the examiners to work out what the students were saying. When background noise in all its forms (school bell, mobile phones, emails notifications alerts, paper flipping, etc.) became intrusive, this created problems for marking. Centres are reminded to be aware of extraneous noise issues and to avoid this happening again in future years.

Teacher-examiner conduct

It was pleasing to note that there has been an overall improvement in the conduct of the tests compared to the first and second years of this specification, with the vast majority of teacher-examiners adhering closely to the guidelines laid out in the *Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations*. The introductory information for each test was concisely, clearly, and effectively articulated. However, it is worth reminding teacher-examiners that at the start of each student's test, the student's candidate number and name should be announced by the teacher-examiner, and not by the student. There were some cases where the teacher-examiner did not announce each section of the test: Role-play number; Photo card number; Conversation theme 1; Conversation theme 2. Occasionally the candidate number was wrongly given by the teacher-examiner and this caused confusion and delay in the marking process.

The prescribed combination of Role-play, Photo card and General conversation given in the sequence chart was adhered to by the vast majority of teacher-examiners. Unfortunately, there were a small number of instances where the wrong combination of Role-play, Nominated Theme and Photo card was used, resulting in the theme of the Photo card being duplicated in the General conversation, or, at times, only one Theme being covered in the General conversation. In such cases, the maximum mark for Communication that can be awarded is 5 out of a possible 10.

This year it was pleasing to see that the vast majority of teacher-examiners did very clearly indicate the transition from one section to the next in the target language as suggested. Teacher-examiners should be commended for their well-organised test procedures and consistent way of conducting the test for each student. However, in a minority of cases, English was still used to indicate the start of each section of the test. In some cases, there was no transition to indicate the change of theme in the General conversation. Teacher-examiners are reminded that, for the benefit of both students and examiners, they should clearly signal the transition to the second theme of the General conversation in the target language after the discussion of the first (nominated) conversation theme has concluded.

Teacher-examiners are reminded that students' language should not be corrected during the test, nor should they be given any key vocabulary. In such cases, no credit can be given for a student's subsequent response.

It is also worth noting that no marks are awarded when a teacher-examiner repeats a question after the student has given a complete but incorrect answer. There were also some cases during the Role-play and Photo card tasks in which some teacher-examiners re-phrased an unanswered question many times, even after all the tasks were completed. This is to be discouraged.

Students are expected to use repair strategies, if needed, throughout the test. An aspect of this is to ask for clarification or repetition. Many teachers had taught their students phrases in Modern Hebrew such as 'בבקשה לחזור על השאלה לסליחה'. When students asked in English for a question to be repeated, the subsequent response was credited for Communication, but, in the case of the Role-play and General conversation, it could contribute to a lower mark for language.

At times, while the student was still trying to answer a question, the teacher-examiner moved on to another question and did not allow the student sufficient time to complete their answer. Teacher-examiners need to be a little more patient in allowing the students some thinking time and letting them complete their answers before moving on to the next question. On some occasions, teacher-examiners accidentally skipped a question in the Role-play and/or Photo card sections, which not only confused students but also disadvantaged them by leading to a loss of marks.

It is most important that teacher-examiners thoroughly understand the *Instructions for the conduct of the exams* available on the AQA website and ensure that they are applied correctly.

Timings

Timings were usually appropriate for the tier, but in a significant number of centres this was not the case.

There is no fixed time for the Role-play task. However, most students completed this section within the suggested two minutes for Higher tier. Hesitant delivery and repetition sometimes led to overlong Role-plays. Occasionally, teacher-examiners gave lengthy responses to students' questions, which should be avoided. This also applies to the General conversation section.

Most students completed the Photo card task comfortably within the three minutes time limit. Occasionally teacher-examiners did not strictly adhere to the five questions in the Teacher's Booklet, but instead asked supplementary follow-up questions or re-phrased unanswered questions.

Most teacher-examiners adhered to the minimum and maximum timings for the General conversation. Some failed to reach the minimum time per theme for Higher, ie two and a half minutes. There were also some occasions when the minimum time requirement was not met for both of the themes. This impacted on the mark awarded for Communication. Teacher-examiners are reminded that it is vital to allocate the time for the two themes appropriately. Teacher-examiners are advised to note that the timing of each General conversation theme starts immediately after the first question on that theme has been asked. Anything said by the student beyond the maximum time limit (seven minutes in total for the two themes) is disregarded for assessment purposes.

Conducting the Role-play Task

In the Role-play, the prescribed wording in the Teacher's booklet was adhered to by most teacher-examiners. In a minority of cases, however, teacher-examiners rephrased the script, which invalidated any subsequent response by the student. Centres are reminded that teacher-examiners must adhere precisely to the script. Teacher-examiners may repeat a question, but

they should not rephrase any questions. It was noted that some teacher-examiners repeated questions too many times, or rephrased questions, sometimes even supplying key vocabulary. Other teacher-examiner-examiners waited too long when students were clearly unable to answer. Occasionally teachers inadvertently omitted words from or added words to the script when asking a question. Teacher-examiners are reminded to take extra care when reading out the script in the Teacher's Booklet.

In the case of two-part questions, eg those requiring an opinion and a reason, most students responded very well, using the conjunction word 'כי' to give a justification immediately after expressing an opinion.

Conducting the Photo card Task

The vast majority of students understood that the questions in this section focus on a specific topic and invite students to first describe the content of the photo and then develop their own ideas and opinions. The ability to develop responses is one of the criteria necessary for achieving the upper bands of the mark scheme. Most students were obviously aware of this. There were, however, a few cases where high attaining students did not seem to be aware of the requirement to extend responses and scored poorly in this section.

Overall, this section was well conducted by the vast majority of teacher-examiners. The five prescribed questions were asked in the order given in the Teacher's Booklet. The three-minute maximum time for Higher tier was adhered to, and the time allowance proved ample for students to provide developed answers to all five questions. However, some significant issues occurred in a small number of centres which need to be addressed for the benefit of future students.

Centres are reminded that, unlike in the Role-play section, in the Photo card task a question may be paraphrased. When considering any paraphrasing of Photo card questions, the exact original meaning of the question must be preserved. This can be achieved by the substitution of an individual word with a synonym or, in some cases, with the use of a different language structure. However, no additional elements, which aim to clarify the question further, are permitted. During the test, teacher-examiners generally made only minor changes to the script, without altering the meaning, which was acceptable.

Teacher-examiners are reminded to follow the *Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations* and which states: *No supplementary questions must be asked*. Teacher-examiners are also reminded to keep to the appropriate timing: three-minute maximum time for Higher tier.

Conducting the General conversation

In general, this part of the test was far more spontaneous than the other two sections, but also more challenging. It was conducted well by the majority of teacher-examiners in a highly

professional way. Students were provided with sufficient opportunities to show their full potential in responding to questions, including producing at least one question for the teacher-examiner to answer during the General conversation. However, there are some areas which need to be improved and also some good practice which should be commended.

First of all, teacher-examiners are particularly reminded that:

- a) The General conversation section is a dialogue, not a presentation or monologue. Teachers should be aware that a presentation is **not** an acceptable format for this section of the test.
- b) While it is fine to make use of the example questions in the Teacher's Booklet, it is important to make sure that the questions selected belong to the correct theme. For example, if the students is currently being asked questions on Theme 1, then example questions taken from the booklet must also correspond to Theme 1. Occasionally questions were randomly selected by teacher-examiners from a theme other than the one currently being discussed, which confused the students and led to lower marks for Communication.
- c) Teacher-examiners should make sure they give students opportunity to answer questions in present, past and future tense.

At Higher tier, the questioning techniques were generally very good, allowing students to give developed and complex responses and use different time frames. Many teachers-examiner conducted their tests well and asked different questions to different students, tailoring the questions to their students' abilities and interests. Unfortunately, there were some teacher-examiners who had a set list of questions per topic and kept to that list for all students, no matter what their ability. This usually had a negative effect on students' marks, especially for the low attaining students, who could not answer the more demanding questions. When moving from one theme to another, most teacher-examiners did as requested and indicated the change of theme on the recording. This was helpful for the student and also for the examiners.

Timings were usually good. The total timing for the General conversation at Higher tier is between five and seven minutes. However, the time spent on each theme is equally important. If a student spends less than two and a half minutes on one or both themes, there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.

Another area where a deduction of marks was applied was when a student failed to ask the teacher-examiner a clearly understandable question. In such cases, there was a deduction of one mark. The question could be on either of the two themes covered in the General conversation. The teacher-examiner is allowed to prompt the student to ask a question by saying 'יש לך שאלה בשבילי' In some centres the students were not prompted to ask a question, and a penalty of a one-mark deduction was applied for Communication. Teacher-examiners are advised to encourage students to ask a question early on in the conversation to ensure it does not fall outside the time allowed.

With regard to the Range and accuracy of language, high attaining students were able to achieve high marks by demonstrating their ability to incorporate complex structures and a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. A set of utterances that is mainly error-free but very simple will not attract the highest marks. To achieve the higher ranges of the mark scheme at Higher tier successful use of ambitious structures and a wide range of vocabulary are required. Teachers are advised to encourage students of all abilities to use three-time frames in the General conversation in order to score a higher band mark for Range and accuracy of language.

The quality of pronunciation varied greatly. Where poor pronunciation seriously hindered comprehension, this could also have an impact on the Communication mark. In terms of Communication, teachers are reminded that marks are based on the amount of information successfully conveyed by the student. Marks also take into account any ambiguity introduced and reflect how much the student elaborated on their answers. Higher attaining students should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce longer sequences of utterances.

There were some impressive, spontaneous conversations from the highest attaining students, but some responses sounded heavily pre-learned. At Higher tier in particular, this resulted in some higher attaining students being awarded a comparatively low mark for Spontaneity and fluency.

An open-ended question such as "ספר לי איך חגגת את יום ההולדת שלך?" enabled higher attaining students at this tier to give an extended response by narrating sequences of events. Closed Yes/No questions are often of very limited usefulness.

In their questions, some teacher-examiners strayed beyond the theme being discussed. Teacher-examiners are advised to check which sub-topics fall within each theme in order to avoid this. As mentioned above in this report, where only one theme is covered in the General conversation, or where the same theme is discussed both in the Photo card task and in the General conversation, a maximum of five marks only could be awarded for Communication.

Teacher-examiners are reminded that whilst students are permitted to nominate the first theme of the General conversation, they are **not** permitted, according to the *Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations*, to nominate a topic or sub-topic within this nominated Theme. For example, a student may choose 'Theme 1 Identity and Culture' as a nominated Theme, but may not choose the topic 'Free-time Activities' or the sub-topic 'Music'.

Student Performance

Students mostly coped well with the requirements of the specification and much good language use was in evidence. At times, where poor pronunciation and tones resulted in an unclear message, credit could not be given for a particular response.

Student Performance in the Role-play task

It was pleasing to note that most students were able to access the bullet points and formulate an appropriate and succinct response. Sometimes students did not address the tasks, but offered other, unrelated information, or did not answer the questions in a straightforward way, which showed that they were relying solely on pre-learnt responses.

The unprepared question, indicated by '!', proved difficult for some students, even though it only required one detail. Even more challenging was the '?' question, which required students to ask the teacher a question by using the information given. The weaknesses in this area indicated the need for more practice in asking different types of questions. It is worth noting that for the ? Task in the Role-play and in the General conversation, an elliptical question using "ואתה?" is acceptable, but only when there is an obvious context, so that the meaning is clearly understandable from the previous sentence.

A significant number of students did not take on board the scene-setting statement explaining where the Role-play was taking place, eg Role-play7 'at a cinema. Students need to understand the importance of carefully reading the Role-play scenario at the start of their preparation time in order to correctly respond to transactional Role-plays.

On some occasions, students gave far more information than was necessary to accomplish the task, which is to be discouraged for Role-play tasks.

Specific comments on Role-plays

In terms of Knowledge and use of language (KUL) for the Role-play overall, the lack of use of the correct tense resulted in marks deducted on Knowledge and use of language.

Role-play 7

Task 4

Any answer which described a known person was accepted. שחקן או שחקנית קולנוע מפורסם-שני פרטים

Role-play 8

Task 1

a straightforward answer giving what present and to whom was required. Some students did not seem to understand and responded incorrectly. "מתנה מה ולמי"

Role-play 10

Task 1

Some students gave their opinion on school uniform instead of describing their school uniform. תלבושת אחידה-שני פרטים

Student Performance in the Photo card Task

Generally, students seemed well prepared for this part of the test. Most students were able to give a reasonably well-developed response to the first prepared question 'תארוי מה אתלה רואה בתמונה

Almost all students were able to give personal opinions and reasons. There were a small number of cases where students spoke only briefly about the content of the photo before giving a personalised response that was irrelevant to the question. Understandably, responses to the three prepared questions were usually more developed than those to the two unseen questions. At Higher tier, however, many students successfully attempted to give developed responses to all five questions and were able to access the 13-15 band.

Specific comments on the Photo cards

In order to score in the top band, students needed to answer all the questions clearly and develop at least three ('most') answers by using at least three clauses, including at least one opinion and one justification. There was no extra credit given in this question for complex language, as this question is marked in terms of Communication only. Accuracy and pronunciation, however, are important factors in achieving clarity. Lower marks were mainly caused by: students misunderstanding the questions, giving short answers, providing no response or an inappropriate response, lacking knowledge of vocabulary or linguistic structures, missing out an opinion and/or justification.

It is worth noting that when responding to the first question 'Describe what you see in the photo?', student responses must be rooted in the content of the photo. Merely saying 'I like the photo' without any justification would not constitute, on its own, an answer to the first question because it does not relate to the content of the photo. Remember students must only describe what is in the photo, not what is not. Conjecture, however, is appropriate, eg 'they are very happy because they are smiling. נראה לי שהם שמחים כי הם מחייכים

Photo card G

Question 5

The question 'מה אתלה עושה כאשר משעמם לך?' was not answered very well by some students who spoke on activities that bore them and not what do they do when they are bored.

Student Performance in the General conversation

It was pleasing to note that almost all students were able to use the target language to ask for a question to be repeated and to say they did not understand. Most students were also able to ask the teacher-examiner a question as required by this section of the test. Many students performed well, including reference to three-time frames and a range of accurate complex language, which enabled them to achieve the top band for Range and accuracy of language.

There was a wide range in the quality of responses in the General conversation, but the vast majority were able to score at least some marks. As in 2023, there was a pre-learnt feel to some of the conversations, but by and large some spontaneity was maintained.

Specific comments on the General conversation

Generally, most students were well prepared for this part of the test and gave developed answers, particularly in response to prepared questions from the nominated theme. Opinions and justifications were regularly conveyed. On occasion, there was a large discrepancy between the responses conveyed on the nominated theme and those for the second prescribed theme. When this occurred, it inevitably impacted on the overall mark for Communication. Many performances were fluent, but not necessarily in an authentic way, suggesting that the material had been pre-learnt. The quality of pronunciation varied greatly. Where poor pronunciation seriously hindered comprehension, this could also impact on the Communication mark. With regard to Range and accuracy of language, high marks were achieved by higher attaining students, demonstrating their ability to incorporate more complex structures and a wider range of appropriate vocabulary in their responses. Many students successfully demonstrated the use of three-time frames.

In terms of the mark for Communication, the required length of the General conversation is between five and seven minutes. Each theme must last for a minimum of two and a half minutes and, if one or both are under that time, there is a penalty of two marks for Communication. Such being the case, students should be encouraged to develop their responses by conveying additional information in order to meet the minimum time requirement.

It is also a requirement for students to ask the teacher-examiner a clearly understandable question, and this can occur at any time during this section of the test. If no question is asked, there is a deduction of one mark for Communication. Correct timings were generally observed, but many teacher-examiners only invited the student to ask a question at the very end of the General conversation. By the time the student had responded, they were often out of time and hence incurred a one mark deduction in line with the mark scheme. Given this potential risk, it is recommended that students try to ask a question earlier in the test. Students in some centres should be commended for asking a question during the first (nominated) theme of the General conversation, or even at the very beginning of this section.

Some students were able to deliver a reasonably fluent performance using rehearsed responses. However, balanced against this, was the lack of ability to interact spontaneously, meaning that the top mark of 5 in the category of Spontaneity and fluency could not be awarded to this level of performance.

Advice to teachers

Teacher-examiner Tester Performance records (TTPRs)

A *Teacher-examiner tester performance record* (TTPR) will be sent to some centres following the marking of the speaking tests. The information provided on the TTPR is intended to provide teacher-examiners with feedback on the conduct of the speaking tests, to inform the conduct of future tests. It is not possible to provide more detailed feedback than the information on the TTPR form. Feedback is provided on the basis of need only and not for every teacher-examiner. Teacher-examiners who receive TTPRs are advised to read them carefully. If one is not received, it is still a very good idea for teachers to take a look at the blank TTPR sheet (available via the AQA website) to help them prepare for future tests.

General

- Do a short test recording before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity.
- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly.
- Make sure that your own and the students' mobile phones are switched off (not just on silent) before the recording begins. Students should not have access to their mobile phones during the preparation time or during the exam, in accordance with examination regulations.
- Do not shuffle papers or move items around on the desk during the test. Such distracting practices can be unsettling to the student. With regard to recordings, any extraneous noise produced can obscure utterances.
- The Instructions for the conduct of examinations document is available via the AQA website. It is *essential* that you follow the instructions in that document.
- In the Instructions document, you are told how to introduce each student in English. This is what you should say at the start of the recording for every student:
GCSE Modern Hebrew examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, Candidate number ____, Candidate name ____. Role-play number ____, Photo card letter ____, General conversation theme chosen by candidate Theme (1, 2 or 3).
- Everything said by the teacher-examiner must be clearly audible. Instances of whispering will be referred to AQA.
- After you have introduced each student, their Role-play, Photo card, and nominated theme *in English* (as detailed above), then use Modern Hebrew throughout the rest of the exam.
- Please use an appropriate Modern Hebrew translation for English terms eg Role-play card: משחק תפקידים; Photo card: כרטיס תמונה; theme: נושא;
- Respond positively to what students say, even if it is not very good. It will encourage them during the rest of the test.

Role-play

- Keep to your script as laid out in the Teacher’s Booklet. Not doing so will mean that the student’s response will receive a mark of 0 for Communication for that task.
- If you see that a student is starting to give the wrong answer to your question, stop him/her immediately and repeat the question. Once the student has completed an incorrect answer, a mark of 0 for Communication is given for that task, even if you repeat the question and a correct answer is subsequently given.
- If a student asks you to repeat a question, you may do so. If a student provides no answer, you may also repeat the question before moving on.
- Do not repeat unanswered questions too many times when students are clearly unable to answer.
- Your reply to the question asked by the student should be clear and concise.

Photo card

- You may paraphrase a question, provided the meaning of the original question is maintained. However, be careful to ensure that this is the case or the student’s reply will not be credited.
- Ask all five questions in the Teacher’s Booklet, but do not ask any additional questions.
- Keep an eye on the timing. If a student’s replies are very long and it looks as though you may not be able to ask the final question within the three-minute maximum time, it may be better to interrupt a student’s answer and move on to the next question.
- In a two-part question in an unprepared task, ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. Failure to do so in the unprepared task almost invariably leads to the student having to ask for the question to be repeated.
- Do not re-phrase unanswered questions too many times, as this will interrupt the flow of the conversation.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible, including a range of opinion words, adjectives, time expressions, verbs, modal verbs, conjunctions, and the like to enhance communication skills and enrich conversation content.
- Train students to give and justify opinions without necessarily being asked to do so. This can form the basis of different starter activities in classroom settings.
- Be sensitive to the ability of the students – someone who struggles to describe his/her town is not going to be successful at discussing more challenging aspects of the topic, for example the impact of global warming.
- Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests. Avoid asking all students identical questions.
- In order to achieve a greater sense of spontaneity in the conversation, follow up a student’s response by asking about what they have just told you.

- Keep a close eye on the time. If one of the themes lasts for less than 2'30", there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.
- The maximum length of the General conversation is seven minutes. Everything after that will **not** be marked.
- Remember to prompt the student to ask you a question if they do not do so without being asked. It is better to get them to ask you the question during their nominated theme so that you don't forget to do it later on. Alternatively, encourage students to ask the question early on during the General conversation, to ensure that it does not fall outside the time allowed.
- If the first question the student asks you makes no sense, get them to ask you another one.
- Keep your reply to the question asked by the student as concise as possible, not too long.

Advice to students

- Use the 12-minute preparation time wisely. You can write down exactly what you are going to say in the Role-play tasks and in response to the three questions on the Photo card.
- For the Photo card questions, try to prepare answers of at least three sentences, using a verb in each one, and including opinions and justifications.
- Listen carefully to the questions that your teacher-examiner asks you for the unprepared questions in the Role-play and Photo card sections, as well as to all questions in the General conversation.
- You can ask for a question to be repeated in any part of the test, but make sure you ask in Modern Hebrew "בבקשה לחזור", for example.
- Remember to ask your teacher-examiner a question related to one of the themes during the General conversation to avoid the loss of one mark for Communication.

Closing remarks

Teachers and centres are thanked for their hard work and effort this summer, providing their students with a positive experience and the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability in this component.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.