



GCSE

Bengali

8638/SH Paper 1 Speaking Higher Tier

Report on the Examination

8638

June 2024

Version: 1.0

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General comments

The Summer 2024 GCSE Bengali Higher Tier speaking test successfully achieved its primary goal; allowing all students to demonstrate oral proficiency at a level consistent with their abilities. Overall, student performance was comparable to previous years, showing appropriate tier entry decisions and enhanced strategies for tackling role-play and photo card tasks. There were 310 students this year. The mean mark was approximately 57 out of 60.

This report provides a detailed overview of the Higher Tier speaking test, covering both teacher conduct and student performance. It highlights best practices and identifies areas for improvement. The content of this report is based on a broad sample of student performances, making it representative of the entire cohort.

Quality of Recordings

Almost all tests were conducted in appropriate settings with high-quality recording equipment. However, in a few cases, external noise and poor-quality recordings negatively impacted the audibility of students' responses.

Test Routine Procedures

The majority of teacher-examiners closely followed the guidelines provided in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations. This adherence facilitated smooth testing, which helps put students at ease and assists examiners later.

Teacher-examiners should be reminded it is essential to introduce each new student by stating the role-play number, photo card letter and nominated general conversation theme. During the test, procedural matters should be briefly announced in Bengali, with suitable wording provided in the Instructions. Announcing a change of theme during the general conversation is particularly important.

Timings

Most students completed the photo card task comfortably within the Higher tier's three-minute time limit. The majority of general conversations met both the minimum and maximum timing requirements. Although it was rare for tests to fall short of the minimum time, there were occasions when the second theme was not covered for the required minimum duration, which affected the Communication mark. Centres should note that the timing for the second general conversation theme begins as soon as the first question on that theme is asked. Any time used before this point is allocated to the first theme. Additionally, teacher-examiners are reminded that any student responses made beyond the maximum time limit will not be considered in the assessment.

Conducting the Role-play Task

Centres are reminded that teachers-examiners must adhere to the prescribed role outlined in the teacher's booklet. When scripts are altered this invalidates any subsequent student responses. In addition it must be noted that the role-play questions may be stated twice only. For two-part questions, especially those requiring an opinion and a reason, it is advisable to elicit each element separately. This approach, is beneficial to students.

Conducting the Photo Card Task

Most teacher-examiners asked the questions as they appeared on the card. While paraphrasing is permitted, any changes in wording must maintain the exact original meaning of the question. In some cases, a key element of a question was repeated, or a key question word was emphasised. Such techniques give an unfair advantage to students, so any response to these questions had to be invalidated.

Teacher-examiners should remember that if a student begins to give an incorrect but incomplete answer, the full question can be re-asked. However, if a complete and incorrect answer is given, any subsequent correct answer to a repeated question will be disregarded in the assessment.

Conducting the General Conversation

Most teacher-examiners asked questions that matched the student's ability. Centres are advised to avoid using a set list of questions without considering the student's ability or interests. Questions were generally asked in a way that allowed students to give and explain opinions, which is necessary for achieving higher communication marks. Students were typically given opportunities to use three-time frames, which is crucial for scoring higher in range and accuracy.

When students misunderstood a question and gave an appropriate but unrelated response, it was important for the teacher-examiner to rephrase the question or ask a new one. Any irrelevant information provided by the student could not be credited and would negatively impact the accuracy score.

Teacher-examiners should use questioning techniques that allow students to demonstrate spontaneity. While some tests were conducted in a way that facilitated this, resulting in authentic-feeling conversations, many performances were dominated by pre-learned responses.

Most teacher-examiners understood the requirement for the student to ask a question during the general conversation. While some students chose to ask the question at a time of their choice, others waited for the teacher's prompt at the end of the test. Unfortunately, in some cases, questions were either asked beyond the maximum time limit or the student was not prompted to ask a question at all. Some students had been trained to ask a question by adding 'আর আপনি?' at the end of their response. This technique is acceptable as long as the question tag corresponds to the preceding response. However, when this was not the case, credit could not be given. There were a few instances where a student asked a question unrelated to either of the two general conversation themes.

Signposted Key Advice for Teacher-Examiners

Role Play

- **Stick to the Script:** Follow the script as outlined in the Teacher's Role. Deviating from it will result in the student receiving a mark of 0 for Communication in that task.
- **Intervene if Necessary:** If a student begins to give an incorrect answer, stop them and repeat the question. Once a student has completed an incorrect answer, they will receive a mark of 0 for Communication for that task, even if they answer correctly after the question is repeated.

- **Repetition:** If a student asks for the question to be repeated or does not answer, you may repeat the question.
- **Handling Two-Part Questions:** In an unprepared task with a two-part question, ask the first part, wait for an answer, and then ask the second part. Failure to do this often leads to the student needing to ask for a repetition.

Photo Card

- **Paraphrasing:** You may paraphrase a question as long as the meaning remains unchanged. Be careful to ensure the meaning is consistent, or the student's response may not be credited.
- **Ask All Questions:** Ensure you ask all five questions listed in the Teacher's Booklet but avoid asking any follow-up questions.
- **Manage Time:** Monitor the timing carefully. If a student's responses are very lengthy, and you may not have time to ask the final question within the two-minute maximum, it may be better to interrupt and move on to the next question.

General Conversation

- **Encourage Variety:** Encourage students to use a wide range of language structures and vocabulary.
- **Opinion Justification:** Train students to provide and justify opinions without necessarily being prompted. This can serve as a basis for different starter activities.
- **Sensitivity to Ability:** Be mindful of the student's ability. For example, a student struggling to describe their town is unlikely to succeed in discussing more complex topics like social and global issues.
- **Tailor Questions:** Try to ask questions that reflect the individual student's interests rather than asking identical questions to all students.
- **Promote Spontaneity:** Foster a more spontaneous conversation by asking follow-up questions based on the student's previous response.
- **Announce Theme Changes:** Announce any change in theme in Bengali.
- **Time Management:** Keep track of the time. If one of the themes is covered in less than 1 minute and 30 seconds, marks will be deducted for Communication. The General Conversation section should not exceed five minutes; anything beyond this will not be marked.
- **Prompt Questions:** Remind the student to ask you a question if they forget to do so. It's better to prompt them to ask about their nominated theme to avoid missing it later.
- **Address Nonsensical Questions:** If the student's first question doesn't make sense, ask them to try again with a different question.

Student Performance

Role-Play Task

Most students were well-prepared to decode the target language bullet points and provided appropriate and concise responses, including a verb. However, some students provided more information than necessary, which should be discouraged.

Students found the transactional role-plays more challenging than the informal scenarios. Some of the students were well-prepared to recognise when a request needed to be made as indicated by the words 'আপানকে কীভাবে সাহায্য করতে পারি?', but many students could not link it properly to the given context in the relevant bullet point. It is essential for students to carefully read each task during preparation time to ensure they provide relevant responses.

Most students were well-trained in recognising the need for past or future time frames and responded appropriately. Many students effectively formed questions from the prompt word(s) provided in the question (?) task, although it was sometimes unsuitable for the prompt words provided.

Most students responded appropriately to the unpredictable (!) task and had been trained to give a brief but relevant answer.

Some students could not fully convey the required message which was two parts. For example, in role-play 7, task 4: 'আজ আপনি কোথায় এবং কার সাথে সকালের নাস্তা করেছিলেন?'. It is crucial for students to carefully read each task during the preparation time and listen to the unprepared questions to ensure their responses are relevant and fully covered.

Specific Higher Tier Role-play Comments

- **Role-play 7**

- Task 4: Some students struggled to establish a communication of both parts of task 'আজ আপনি কোথায় এবং কার সাথে সকালের নাস্তা করেছিলেন?'

- **Role-play 8**

- Task 2: Some students referred to devices rather than social media apps while responding to 'কোন সামাজিক মাধ্যম তুমি বেশি ব্যবহার করো ও কেন?'

- **Role-play 9**

- Task 3: Some students found it difficult to relate what they might need in their room (আপনাদের রুমে আর কী লাগবে?) while staying in a resort in Bangladesh. This could be an information processing issue.

- **Role-play 10**

- Task 5: A significant number of students did not recognise the word 'যানজট' and ended up with irrelevant questions.

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- **Role-play 11**

- Task 3: Many students could not comprehend ‘তোমার কাছে বেতন কতোটুকু গুরুত্বপূর্ণ’ element.

- **Role-play 12**

- Task 5: It was an unprepared question and some of the students’ communication delayed on ‘ট্রিপের জায়গায় উপহারের দোকান থাকলে কী কী সুবিধা হয়?’ element.

Photo Card Task Performance

Most students prepared well-developed responses with at least three clauses for the three seen questions, recognising the importance of giving and explaining opinions. A key skill for success in this part of the test is recognising question words and formulations. Students who lacked this training often misunderstood the task and provided irrelevant information.

Some students gave overly long responses, where a lack of clarity affected their marks. Teachers are advised to carefully review the published mark scheme and familiarise themselves with the level of clear development required to access the top band.

Most students could give a simple three-clause response to the first prepared question, ‘ছবিতে কী কী দেখছে?’. Many mentioned the setting, the number of people, descriptions of the people, and the weather. Occasionally, students inferred the mood of a person based on facial expressions. Students should remember the requirement of a reference to at least three things in this task and it is good to include an opinion and justification here. Some students gave more detailed descriptions, though not always with the clarity required for the top band. Overly detailed descriptions often lacked focus or clarity and could affect pronunciation and fluency.

When answering the second and third questions, students generally offered clear opinions and reasons, though some relied on overly long or pre-prepared responses. In cases where students attempted to give a more natural response, they often found it easier to respond spontaneously to the fourth and fifth questions.

Most students recognised the need to use different tenses following the questions' style.

Specific Higher Tier Photo Card Comments

The following Photo card tasks were particularly challenging for students:

- **Photo card G**

- Task 2: Some students needed to rephrase the element on task 2 that required a description on ‘প্রিয় বন্ধুর সাথে কীভাবে বন্ধুত্ব হয়েছিলো?’.

- **Photo card H**

- Task 5: Some students were hesitant to refer to a type of TV programme and eventually mentioned the name of a show or a programme when asked ‘কী ধরনের টেলিভিশন প্রোগ্রাম দেখতে তোমার ভালো লাগে ও কেন?’ and the teacher-examiners had to remind or emphasise this part of the element.

- **Photo card I**

- Task 1: The photo used on this card was found to be comparatively difficult for some of the students to go into further details required in this question.

- **Photo card J**

- Task 5: A few students needed a reminder about responding to this task properly as in some instances they were missing out on the emphasis of ‘each year’ in this element ‘প্রতি বছর ছুটিতে কোথাও যাওয়ার ব্যাপারে তোমার মতামত কী?’.

- **Photo card K**

- Task 2: Some of the students did not comply with the required tense (past tense) in this task where the element states ‘ছোটবেলায় তোমার স্কুলে কী কী ভালো লাগতো?’.

- **Photo card L**

- Task 3: With the element ‘তোমার বন্ধুরা কলেজ বা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে কোন বিষয়ে পড়াশোনা করার কথা ভাবছে?’, a significant number of students rather than extending their answers with justification on the thoughts of their friend’s chosen subject at the college/university, referred only to the subjects they would study.

The Higher-tier General conversation

Most students were well-prepared for this section of the test and provided detailed responses, especially to prepared questions from the selected theme. They frequently expressed opinions and provided justifications. However, it is important to note that to achieve the highest marks, responses must be clearly developed. Frequent lapses in clarity can negatively affect the communication score. At times, clarity is compromised when students attempt to recall overly lengthy responses.

Compared to students at the Foundation tier, most students at this level attempted a broader range of language structures and vocabulary. Accurately constructed sentence styles were common, though sometimes overused. Many students utilised modal verb forms, while the best performances included a wider variety of subordinating conjunctions and relative clauses. Generally, students demonstrated the ability to form tenses accurately.

Pronunciation standards were inconsistent, often due to anglicised pronunciations of cognates. Some students delivered pre-learned responses with a lack of authentic intonation, which affected their scores in this category.

While many students were fluent, this fluency was not always authentic, as pre-learned material was often recited at a reasonable pace. The best performances combined the ability to extend responses with shorter, more natural answers to follow-up questions.

Advice for Students

- **Use Preparation Time Wisely:** Make the most of the 12 minutes of preparation time.
- **Prepare Your Responses:** You can write down exactly what you plan to say for the Role-play tasks and the three questions on the Photo card.
- **Photo Card Responses:** Aim to prepare answers of at least three sentences, each containing a verb, for the Photo card questions.
- **Listen Carefully:** Pay close attention to the questions your teacher-examiner asks during the unprepared Role-play and Photo card questions, as well as all questions in the General Conversation.
- **Learn Common Question Words:** Familiarise yourself with common question words.
- **Request Repetition in Bengali:** You can ask for a question to be repeated at any point in the test but ensure you do so in Bengali. For example, you can say ‘প্রশ্নটি আবার করুন/দয়া করে আবার বলুন’.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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