



GCSE
French

8658/SF Paper 1 Speaking Foundation Tier

Report on the Examination

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General comments

Changes were made to the 2024 papers to reflect the removal of the regulatory requirement to test vocabulary outside of the published vocabulary list.

The majority of the tests were well-administered and the *Instructions for the conduct of the examinations* observed.

Teacher-examiners are encouraged to remind themselves of good practice in the administration of Speaking tests so that, during the teaching year, they can reiterate details to their students at appropriate points and prepare them well for what to expect in the examination. Some points are highlighted in this report, along with comments on specific parts of the 2024 tests.

Digital recordings have improved the sound quality of speaking tests, but volume levels can still present problems. Examiners reported difficulty in hearing some tests and AQA had to resort to attempting to enhance the volume level in order that assessment could take place. Teachers' voices tend to carry further so the volume level should not be set according to the teacher's production. It is recommended that a sound check be carried out with both teacher-examiner and a student, although not necessarily one who is about to take their test, seated for the exam in their expected positions. A brief recording should be made of normal speech, and this replayed to ensure that a listener who is not used to these voices will be able to hear clearly what is said. Extraneous noise, whether caused by participants moving items on the desk, for example a microphone once the Role-play has been started, teachers shuffling papers or other students on corridors near the examination room are also a challenge. It must be understood that, if the examiner cannot hear the student's response, it cannot be credited. In respect of the shuffling of papers, teachers generally do this in the intervals between sections of the test but problems can occur, for example, in the General conversation when the student is speaking and a teacher consults pages of notes for a new batch of questions, perhaps on a further topic within a theme.

This year a large number of tests were delayed in reaching examiners as centres had not uploaded them properly to the AQA portal. Requests to correct this situation seemingly went unactioned. Centres are advised that such delays may jeopardize the timely publication of their students' results.

A copy of the Speaking Score Sheet used by examiners can be found at the back of the 2024 mark scheme.

Teacher-examiner Tester Performance records (TTPRs)

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. The feedback is provided on the basis of need only and will not be necessary in the case of every centre.

A breakdown of marks for each section of the speaking test for each student in your centre is available free of charge in ERA (Enhanced Results Analysis). ERA is accessed via Centre Services.

Role-plays

The biggest challenge for students in this section of the test was once again dealing with interrogatives. If their understanding of these was poor, students struggled to formulate a question when required and sometimes to respond appropriately in other tasks, especially, but not only, in the unprepared task.

In the question task, students sometimes asked a question which was totally unrelated to the prompt although the practice of simply reading the prompt aloud was less in evidence this year.

Examiners generally reported that students were better equipped to respond to the ! bullet point than to the ? bullet point.

Teacher-examiners must ensure they adhere to their script in the Role-play. Any variation from this is likely to result in a student's response to a particular task being discounted.

Teachers are reminded that, at Foundation tier, students are only required to use the present tense in the Role-plays. Where a reasonable interpretation of a task leads a student to use an appropriate past or future tense verb form, this is also accepted.

Once again, a lack of focus sometimes caused students to fail to score marks, for example when they did not address the points raised in the task but gave extraneous information instead.

Teachers are asked to discourage students from giving unnecessarily lengthy responses and developing answers well beyond what is required by the task. It is in the student's interest to address the task but no more. Unnecessary elaboration in the Role-play can lead to a lack of focus as students attempt to introduce material with which they feel confident in the sometimes mistaken belief that it will be rewarded. It can also lead to the necessary detail which is required being overlooked.

Where the teacher-examiner was required to ask a two-part unprepared question, it was helpful for the majority of students if the two parts were asked separately. Please note that this is perfectly permissible and is indeed advised since it reduces the demand on students. Should students successfully volunteer a response to the second part before it has been asked, for example where an opinion is requested in the first part and the second part requires a reason for this opinion, the teacher does not need to put the second question to the student as the task has been fully accomplished.

Please see the published detailed mark scheme for suggested responses for all Role-play tasks and the marks these would attract. Additional comments on individual Role-plays are provided below.

Role-play 1

Task a: somewhat surprisingly, some students struggled to give their age accurately.

Task b: this was well answered.

Task c: students found no problem here.

Task d: the activity was sometimes stated in a tense other than the present. In the context of the student's cue, a future or past activity was an acceptable response.

Task e: some students could not formulate an accurate question.

Role-play 2

Task a: some students requested an item which would not be found in an IT shop.

Task b: the unprepared item was generally well answered.

Task c: weaker students sometimes did not produce an accurate verb in their answer, thereby limiting the mark available to one.

Task e: the key item in the question was often pronounced as in English.

Role-play 3

Task a: reference to *où* was frequently overlooked with students often stating the number of people rather than a location.

Task c: most students produced an acceptable question.

Task d: *choix* was not always known.

Task e: many responses referred to the food being the reason for the visit. This was perfectly acceptable.

Role-play 4

Task a: was easily accessible to students.

Task b: many students did not understand *combien (par jour) ?* and so their responses were often inaccurate.

Task c: once again *où* was often unrecognised and this led to a lack of success in this task.

Task e: some students struggled to formulate a question. A simple use of *il y a ... ?* would have yielded two marks.

Role-play 5

Task a: frequently students' responses were based on material they may have prepared for a general conversation. They offered a wealth of information but generally overlooked the specific area required, focused on *où*. As a result, examiners often found there was nothing they could reward.

Task b: this was well answered.

Task c: the requirement to address *quoi* was frequently omitted. An opportunity to provide details easily within the student's repertoire was lost by a failure to interpret the interrogative.

Task d: generally well done.

Task e: generally well done.

Role-play 6

Task a: *quoi* proved problematic as students did not interpret it; their responses were therefore at times inadmissible.

Task b: was well answered by those who listened carefully as the vocabulary items are likely to be known by students.

Task c: many students confused the *collègue* in the question with *collège*.

Task d: students were mostly successful here.

Task e: this tended to be well answered apart from when students believed *travail* referred to travel.

Role-play 7

Task a: *nom* was sometimes unknown, and it was relatively rare to hear a nationality quoted successfully; names of countries were often given instead.

Task b: the mention of *combien* may have been the main stumbling block but it is possible that *bagages* was not widely known.

Task c: lack of recognition of *qui* meant that some students could not score.

Task d: this tends to be an area which students have prepared, perhaps for a general conversation, and was well answered.

Task e: this task was more challenging as the other tasks in the Role-play were designed to be fairly straightforward and so the demand should balance out overall. *A quelle heure ... ?* would appear not to be well practised as an interrogative.

Role-play 8

Generally, this Role-play was well answered.

Task a: occasionally students asked for non-food items, ignoring the reference to *manger*.

Task c: ... *avec qui ?* was often not interpreted correctly.

Role-play 9

Task a: very straightforward for those who knew *bénévole*, which turned out to be most students allocated this Role play.

Task b: the formulation *magasins de charité* was chosen deliberately to assist students as it is likely to be more readily recognised than other options when only available aurally. However, students tended to do poorly on an otherwise straightforward question. Examiners believed this was because *combien de* was not widely recognised.

Task c: many students did not address the *donner quoi* requested in the cue and spoke about other things.

Task d: students easily formulated an appropriate question, with *Tu aimes le shopping ?* frequently produced.

Task e: a number of students did not score full marks, which was surprising since the cue was quite straightforward.

Photo cards

Students found ample material to describe in the photos presented. Centres are reminded that responses to the first question must be rooted in the photograph. On occasions, students mentioned things which were not in the photo or gave details which were unrelated to the visual they had. These utterances were discounted. Personalisation of the photo is similarly inappropriate in this task. For example, students should not refer to any individuals depicted as *mon père* or *mon cousin* etc. Equally, reference to an opinion of the photo and a reason why are discounted. For example, some students include in their response opinions such as, *J'aime la photo car il fait beau*.

Teacher conduct was good and generally consistent. Centres are reminded to adhere to the timings and interrupt long answers, particularly on the first question, where some students produced responses over one minute long. This negatively impacted the likelihood that all five questions could be asked within the two-minute time frame.

A greater degree of precision in their responses would assist students to communicate their ideas. Some students used *il* or *elle* without clarifying which individual featured they were speaking about. Students sometimes tried to express their ideas in a present continuous tense, reflecting English usage, for example, *ils sont regardant* or *ils sont regarder* (sic). Practice in describing common actions featured in pictures or photos would be beneficial so that students become accustomed to generating sentences using common verbs such as: *il/ils (etc) parle/parlent; mange/mangent; regarde/regardent la télé; étudie/étudient*.

In the other four questions too, students' responses must be relevant to the question asked. Unrelated material is discounted; therefore, teachers are advised to discourage their students from introducing material which has a very loose, or no connection to the information requested in the question.

Teachers are advised to read carefully the guidance on paraphrasing questions: some did this well whilst others, in their quest to assist students, did not convey the meaning of the original question or added to it such that they gave additional assistance, often via interpretation or explanation of the question.

Furthermore, teachers are reminded that it is inappropriate for them to introduce their own, additional questions in this part of the test. They are discounted and any response from the student is not credited.

As in the Role-play, teacher-examiners may, in a two-part unprepared question, separate the two parts and this is often to the benefit of students. Should students successfully volunteer a response to the second part before it has been asked, for example where an opinion is requested in the first part and the second part asks for a reason for this opinion, the teacher does not need to put the second question to the student.

Below are some specific points relating to this year's photo cards.

Photo card A

Question 5

Students often answered without reference to their friends. This tended to mean that only part of their response was appropriate.

Photo card B

Question 2

Combien d'heures was widely ignored or not recognised. Many students spoke about their phone but without being precise.

Question 4

Some responses were based on an opinion of social media rather than expressing an activity.

Photo card C

Question 3

Students often referred to mobile phones in response to ... *distractions* ... When phrased appropriately and linked to the question, this was accepted although it was not the expected area for students to discuss.

Photo card D

Question 2

Students often had limited vocabulary and therefore could not give as full an answer as may have been expected to this question.

Question 3

Some students did not pay attention to the tense of the verb form or *hier* and so their responses were not entirely appropriate.

Photo card E

Question 1

A good response was possible if, for example, students stated how many people were shown in the photo and then referred to a couple of professions represented or the clothes worn. Students often found other routes to reward-worthy descriptions. Only partial credit could be given to those students who, in attempting to describe the clothes worn, used constructions such as *il / elle est porté*

Question 4

It is thought that *seul(e)* was not widely recognised but *en groupe* assisted students to offer an appropriate response.

Question 5

Some struggled with this item but a simple reference to a job currently held or one which the student would like would have sufficed.

Photo card F

Question 2

Although the intended area for exploration was that of studying or looking for an apprenticeship or employment, many students referred to holidays and this was accepted.

Question 5

... *la fin des examens* was not known by some students and, so, it was difficult to provide a valid response.

The popularity of Theme 2 as the student's nominated theme in the general conversation means that the Photo cards based on Theme 2 are allocated less than those for the other two themes. In 2024, these were cards G, H and I.

Photo card G

Students generally found all questions straightforward.

Photo card H

Question 2

... *on peut donner* was not dealt with well. It may have been that students did not understand *on peut*, but *donner* certainly appeared to be unknown by many.

Question 3

Some students did not refer to a friend in their answer, responding for themselves instead. Teachers are advised that, in addition to the first question for each photo card, a further third-person question will appear in the set each time.

Photo card I

All questions were generally answered well.

General conversation

Mostly, examiners reported a balance of time given to the exploration of the nominated theme and that of the second theme.

In their questions, some teachers strayed beyond the theme which was being discussed. Teachers are reminded to check which sub-topics fall into each theme to avoid this.

Teachers are advised to prepare and use a range of questions rather than a restricted bank of these. When the very same questions are used with all or nearly all students, it can suggest that students are aware of the questions they will be asked and such practice is inappropriate.

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. High attaining students should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce longer utterances. This can be achieved by students being encouraged to develop responses of three or more clauses when possible.

It is beneficial for all students if questions are tailored to their interests and ability level; individual accounts are more impressive than those that appear to have been generated by a 'template' approach. Similarly, a standard set of questions is unlikely to elicit the best performance of the whole ability range.

Teachers are advised that there is no need to cover every topic within a theme. Indeed, such an approach can lead to a very disjointed exercise which in no way resembles a conversation and potentially puts students at a disadvantage as there is no flow to the questions put to them.

The attention of teachers is drawn to questioning technique. Closed questions are of very limited usefulness. They may be employed, for example, to re-focus a student who is struggling before the teacher reverts to open questions, but students cannot score marks if they do not demonstrate use of the language themselves.

With regard to the Range and accuracy of language strand, high marks were achieved by students demonstrating a successful use of vocabulary and structures referring to least one time frame other than the present.

The quality of pronunciation varied greatly. Where poor pronunciation seriously hindered comprehension, this could also have an impact on the Communication mark. Clear pronunciation was frequently undermined where students attempted to present language with which they were generally unfamiliar and, as such, resorted to reciting rather than delivering with any understanding.

In order to give students an opportunity to demonstrate an ability to respond spontaneously in the test, it is recommended that teachers incorporate simple queries or requests for further detail in their general classroom exchanges so that students learn to expect this approach. There were examples in the tests heard this year where teachers engaged in this practice superbly and to great effect.

Teachers are advised that there is no need to announce the full title of themes in the general conversation. Indeed, this reduces the overall time available and limits the opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability.

It was pleasing to note that some teachers have changed their approach and invited students to ask a question during their exploration of the first theme. As this is the theme the student has chosen, they have the opportunity to be better prepared. It also means that the student's question does not run the risk of coming out-of-time, as can happen when it is requested at the end of the discussion of the second theme.

Advice to teacher-examiners

General

- Carry out a short test recording before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity, preferably with a second participant who should sit in the seat students will use.
- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly but remember that teachers tend to be accustomed to projecting their voices, so position the microphone closer to the student, who is likely to be more softly spoken.
- The *Instructions for the conduct of examinations* document is on the AQA public website and should be reviewed every year by teachers conducting speaking tests to ensure they conduct the tests in accordance with the instructions.
- In the document mentioned above, there are instructions on how to introduce each student in English. You must include these details at the start of the recording for every student:

GCSE French examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, candidate number ____, candidate name ____. Role-play number ____, Photo card letter ____, General conversation theme chosen by student Theme (1, 2 or 3).

- Everything said by both the teacher-examiner and student must be clearly audible. Examiners will refer instances of whispering to AQA.
- Once you have introduced the student and the specific details of the elements to be covered in his/her test, use French throughout the exam itself. Not only is this good practice, it will deter students from reverting to English in any exchanges with you.
- Respond positively to what students say, even if it is not accurate or effective French. It will encourage them for the rest of the test.

- Practise pronunciation as often as possible. Mispronunciation of basic sounds can lead to a failure to communicate.

Role-play

- Do not change the script set out in the Teacher’s Role. Adapting this to your own version will mean that the student’s response will receive a mark of 0 for Communication in that task.
- If you believe that a student is starting to give the wrong answer to your question, stop him/her and repeat the question. Once the student completes 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 given subsequently.
- If a student asks for repetition of your question or if there is no answer, you may repeat the question.
- If there is a two-part question in an unpredictable task, it is advisable to ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. It is acceptable to ask both questions together but, by splitting them, a possible overload on the student can be avoided.

Photo card

- Ask all five questions in the Teacher’s Booklet, but do not ask any other questions of your own.
- You may paraphrase a question, provided the same meaning is maintained. However, be certain that this is the case and that you have not given any additional assistance to the student or the student’s reply will not be credited.
- If there is a two-part unseen question, it is advisable to ask the first part, wait for an answer, and then ask the second part. It is acceptable to ask both questions together but, by splitting them, a possible overload on the student can be avoided.
- Monitor timing. If a student’s replies are very long and it appears that you may not be able to ask the final question in the two-minute maximum time, it may be better to interrupt an answer and move to the next one.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible. Opinions and adjectives are the simplest and most obvious areas to focus on with Foundation tier students.
- Train students to give and justify opinions without necessarily being asked to do so. This can form the basis of different starter activities.
- Be sensitive to the ability of the students – someone who struggles to describe his/her town is unlikely to be successful discussing more challenging aspects of the topic, for example the impact of global warming.
- Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests. Do not ask all students identical questions.

- In order to achieve a greater sense of spontaneity in the conversation, follow up a student's response by enquiring about an aspect of what they have just told you.
- Announce the change of theme in French: *On va changer de thème et on va parler au sujet du thème numéro ...* etc.
- Monitor the time. If one of the themes lasts for less than 1'30", there is a deduction of two marks in the Communication section.
- The maximum length of the General conversation is five minutes. Once the student has completed his/her answer to the last question asked before the five-minute point, nothing else will be credited.
- Remember to prompt students to ask you a question if they do not do this of their own accord. It is perhaps advisable for them to ask you a question in their nominated theme. It is not a good idea to leave this until late in the conversation as time may run out before this point.
- Ensure that the student's question **is** a question and not an instruction or an invitation, such as *Décris-moi ... / Parle-moi de ...*
- If the first question the student asks you does not make sense, ask for another.

Advice to students

- Use the 12 minutes' 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 prepared 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.
- Ensure that your responses are relevant to the questions asked. Be careful not to include material you feel confident of, but which does not really relate to the question.
- In the unprepared questions in the Role-play and Photo card sections, listen carefully to the questions that your teacher asks you. Do this for all of the questions in the General conversation too.
- Make sure you know common question words.
- You can ask for repetition of a question in any part of the test, but ask in French if you possibly can.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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