

## A Guide to the Leaving Cert French Oral Exam

### Exam Structure and Strategy

This exam takes the form of an informal conversation between the examiner and you. It normally lasts between 12-15 minutes. The examiner usually addresses the students as a group and explains the format of the test. This is done through French and English.

On entering the examiner's office you will be asked to sign the roll opposite your name and examination number. This is then read into the tape and the test begins. All candidates are recorded.

There is no set pattern to the questions asked. The first few are simple basic requests designed to put you at ease. (The examiner decides, based on an indication of ability given by your teacher, the range and type of questions to be asked.)

You can be guaranteed questions using **present, past and future tenses**. You have the option of choosing to bring a document (in French) a photo or a project in with you. If you do so you will be asked some questions about it. Your performance is assessed under four headings:

Pronunciation (20%)

Vocabulary (20%)

Structure (30%)

Communication (30%)

## Exam Tips

1. Always greet the examiner warmly: "**Bonjour Monsieur / Madame**", it helps to break the ice and put you at ease before you begin.
2. Remember all questions will be phrased in the "**Vous**" form.
3. Avoid monosyllabic answers (**Oui / Non**) as these lead directly to another question or topic.
4. Listen carefully to the tense the examiner uses, the answer will usually be given in the same tense.
5. Take a few seconds to formulate your reply and give the fullest answer possible.
6. If you make a mistake don't be afraid to correct it – "**j'ai allé(e)**" instead of "**je suis allé(e)**", or "**mon**" in place of "**ma**" for famille.
7. If you don't understand a question, or if you don't hear it correctly say so: "**Je ne comprends pas Monsieur / Madame**" or "**Voulez-vous répéter s'il vous plait?**" The examiner will repeat or rephrase it for you.
8. You could be asked a question about a topic in which you have no interest or which find too difficult. If this happens just say "**Ca ne m'intéresse pas**" or "**La politique ne m'intéresse pas Monsieur / Madame**".

The examiner usually indicates the end of the exam by saying : "**Bon, merci Paul / Paula, c'est fini / c'estterminé / vous avez bien parlé**".

Topics: See Chapters in *Bien dit*

## Examiners' Comments

It is always very useful to heed the observations of examiners, as they provide an insight to the marking scheme and priorities. Below is a summary of the main points.

## Pronunciation

Accurate pronunciation and a good accent are essential if you are to obtain a high grade. If the examiner has difficulty in understanding your poor pronunciation, this will be reflected in the mark awarded for communication. Here are some of the most common pronunciation mistakes.

- ❖ Consonants at the end of words such as: *Ils, et, temps, pied, on, nous, petit.*
- ❖ The third person plural ending of the present tense: *regardent, pensent, jouent,* where the '**nt**' is silent.
- The sound **ch**: *chimie, architecture.*
- The difference between *les gens / les jeunes.*
- The difference between *-ier* and *-ière.*
- The sound **qu-** : *qualifié, qui, quand..*
- The pronunciation of words such as *pression, ss* must be heard as an **s**.
- The **h** at the beginning of a word: *en haut, un homme, un hôtel...*
- The **t** at the end of a noun. The **t** must be heard as an **s**: *attention, communication...*
- The **e** at the end of an adjective or noun is not pronounced, it only stresses the last letter: *petite, grise...*

## Vocabulary

You should have all the topics which interest you well prepared. In this way you should be

familiar with all the possible vocabulary that may arise in questions. Make a list of all the types of questions you may be asked. Your teacher will help you with these. Prepare the predictable questions such as what you intend to do after school and any time spent abroad - especially in France!

- Examiners have reported basic problems with words connected with school life: **Niveau ordinaire, Niveau supérieur, Pause-déjeuner, École primaire, Instituteur/Institutrice, Enseigner / Enseignant, Renseignements, Cours, Emploi du temps** Words connected with career or third-level studies were often unavailable: **Formation, Stage, Diplôme, Licence**
- Most candidates did not realise that a **collège** is a junior cycle second-level school and is not pronounced "collage".
- There was confusion between the words **matière** and **métier**.
- A lot of students also forget that the meaning of the verb **attendre** in French is "to wait for" and not "to attend" which would be translated by **aller** (to attend school) or **assister à** (to attend classes).
- Stuck for a word? Ask the examiner: **Je m'excuse, mais je ne me rappelle plus comment on dit / J'oublie le mot** Providing this facility is not abused, the examiner will help.

## Structures

Top grades are awarded to those showing a very good grasp of grammar and the structures necessary for accurate and efficient oral communication. All candidates will be asked questions in the **present, passé composé** and **futur** tenses so have them well rehearsed and be able

to change from one to the other with ease. Only practice will make this possible and it's never too late to start:

- *"Qu'est-ce que vous faites le weekend?"*  
*"Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait le weekend dernier?"*  
*"Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire ce weekend?"*

## Common mistakes

However, even among the best candidates, some common mistakes have been identified:

- *J'ai allé* instead of *je suis allé*, *Je suis 18 ans* instead of *j'ai 18 ans*.
- The use of *pour*, *pendant* and *depuis*. *Pour* should be used for the following verbs only: *partir*, *s'en aller*, *venir*. *Pendant* used for duration of an action which is limited in time. *Depuis* is used for an action which is still going on.
- Examiners also noted what some call the "echo response", e.g.,  
*"Qu'est-ce que vous achetez? J'achetez...."* Students often copy the verb given in the question instead of answering correctly, *J'achète*.
- Incorrect use of prepositions:  
e.g. (à) France » **en** France  
e.g. (en) Dublin » **à** Dublin  
e.g. (à le) cinéma » **au** cinéma  
e.g. (sur le) lundi » **le** lundi  
e.g. (dans le weekend/ a le weekend) » le weekend  
e.g. (très) beaucoup » **beaucoup**

e.g. (dans) l'été » **en** été

e.g. (dans le) matin » **le** matin

- Students often confuse gender, e.g., Saying **ma père** and **mon mère** is quite a common mistake, so be careful and make sure you get it right **mon père - ma mère, mon frère - ma sœur**. Incorrect partitive article, e.g., **beaucoup des (jeunes)** is a very common mistake and you should always say **beaucoup de** even if the noun that follows is plural.
- Using prepositions with the following verbs: **regarder à, écouter à, chercher pour, attendre pour.**
- General failure to use object pronouns.
- Incorrect past participles.
- Incorrect use of **Il y a, C'est, Il est.**
- Confusion between **Jouer à** and **Jouer de.**

## Communication

- The mark awarded for communication is closely related to those of the three previous skills. Having good grammar does not necessarily mean you are a good communicator, but it helps!

- Candidates who managed to keep the conversation going and to convey a lot of information despite some grammar problems scored a higher grade in communication than grammar. You do not have to be brilliant or exceptional to do well.
- Remember a conversation means that you look at the person you are talking to, smile, and try to relax. It is a conversation not an interrogation, even though you may be led to think so. Answer the examiner's questions and in doing so, do not recite off some passage that you have learned off by heart.

**Take your time and be yourself!**