

Making the switch to AQA

Key similarities and differences between the exam boards.



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We have outlined the key differences and similarities you will need to make a seamless switch from Pearson Edexcel to AQA for GCSE French, German, and Spanish.

Assessment Objective weighting

Assessment Objectives	% in GCSE
AO1: understand and respond to spoken language in speaking and in writing	35%
AO2: understand and respond to written language in speaking and in writing	45%
AO3: demonstrate understanding and accurate application of the grammar and vocabulary prescribed in the specification	20%
Total	100%

*Figures highlighted below represent differences across boards.

AQA AO	Component weightings				Overall weighting %
	Paper 1: Listening	Paper 2: Speaking	Paper 3: Reading	Paper 4: Writing	
AO1	22.5	12.5			35
AO2		7.5	25	12.5	45
AO3	2.5	5		12.5	20
Overall weighting of components	25	25	25	25	100

Pearson Edexcel AO	Component weightings				Overall weighting %
	Paper 1: Speaking	Paper 2: Listening and understanding	Paper 3: Reading and understanding	Paper 4: Writing	
AO1	15	20			35
AO2	2		25	18	45
AO3	8	5		7	20
Overall weighting of components	25	25	25	25	100

The overall weighting of each Assessment object is the same across AQA and Pearson Edexcel papers.

- AQA allocate 12.5% of AO3 marks to the writing exam and 5% to the speaking exam.
- Pearson Edexcel allocates 7% of AO3 marks to the writing exams and 8% to the speaking exam.
- We've allocated the largest proportion of AO3 marks to Paper 4 (Writing), where learners can reflect on and check the accuracy of their language.

Subject content

Pearson Edexcel has a structure which hinges on thematic contexts rather than clear topic areas, whereas the AQA specification is structured around three main themes, each with three clearly defined topic areas. Our schemes of work mirror this structure for ease of planning and teaching.

When switching from Pearson Edexcel to AQA, you will notice some overlap in content; we have organised our specification into clear themes and topics to help you adapt your existing planning with minimal effort.

The vocabulary and grammar required is an exhaustive list, which can transfer across topics and themes.

The crossover in content, vocabulary and grammar supports a spiral curriculum in which knowledge is revisited to strengthen schema and long-term memory.

We also have developed full KS3 Schemes of Learning which seamlessly flow into the KS4 curriculum. In addition to this, AQA have developed this [suite of resources](#) to aid your students' transition from KS4 to KS5.

AQA curriculum structure

Theme	Topics
Theme 1: People and lifestyle	• Topic 1: Identity and relationships with others • Topic 2: Healthy living and lifestyle • Topic 3: Education and work
Theme 2: Popular culture	• Topic 1: Free-time activities • Topic 2: Customs, festivals and celebrations • Topic 3: Celebrity culture
Theme 3: Communication and the world around us	• Topic 1: Travel and tourism, including places of interest • Topic 2: Media and technology • Topic 3: The environment and where people live

AQA KS3 and KS4 Schemes of Work

[French](#), [German](#), [Spanish](#)

Skill: Listening

Similarities

- All exam rubrics and questions are in English
- All answers are written in English or are non-verbal
- The dictation is played three times

Differences

Feature of exam	AQA Paper 1: Listening	Pearson Edexcel Paper 2: Listening and understanding
Recording format	All passages in Section A played twice, but the passages are short. This approach reduces memory burden and listening fatigue.	Passages played three times.
Recording format	Listening exam is 35 mins (F)/ 45 mins (H) including 5 mins reading time and 2 mins checking time. Keeping this exam duration shorter means that learners can sit the Listening and Reading exam in the same session.	Listening and understanding exam is 45 mins (F)/ 60 mins (H).
Section B Dictation	The AQA dictation is played three times. The second playing is with inbuilt pauses. This aids memory and gives learners the opportunity to check for accurate SSC production for AO1 and conveyance of meaning for AO3.	Each sentence in the dictation is played in full three times.

Section B Dictation	AQA's dictation is always 4 (F)/5(H) full sentences across a range of topics. This allows students to access a wider range of knowledge.	Pearson Edexcel's dictation format is from a specified context.
Marking of the dictation task	AQA dictation is marked for AO1 and AO3. AQA award a mark for AO1 for 'communication of meaning' as well as a mark for AO3 for 'transcription and grammatical accuracy'. This flexible approach allows for an accessible dictation task.	Pearson Edexcel dictation is marked for AO3 only.



Skill: Speaking

Similarities

- The overall timings of the speaking exam are the same for both boards:
 - 7–9 mins (F)/ 10–12 mins (H).
- All rubrics and bullet points are in English.
- Each exam contains a role play, a read aloud, and a photo description task.
- There's no longer an unpredictable element in the role play task.

Differences

Feature of exam	AQA Paper 2: Speaking	Pearson Edexcel Paper 1: Speaking
Allocation of cards	AQA uses a sequence chart to allocate role play, read aloud and photo card. The chart to follow is printed in the teacher booklet. One line per student – a very simple way to allocate cards.	Teachers use an online sequencing tool prior to exams, which allocates cards and thematic contexts.
Preparation time	Learners are given 15-minutes' preparation time to make unlimited notes of any kind, which may be used throughout the exam. AQA provide a student preparation booklet to help learners organise their notes.	Learners are given 14 minutes of preparation with an invigilator and 1 minute of recorded preparation in the exam room.

Role play	Task 1: Exam starts with the role play which gives learners a confident start to their exam, since everything can be prepared and there's no unpredictable element. AQA role plays are always conversations between friends, using informal register, ensuring accessibility for all students from all backgrounds. Students keep their card until the end of the test.	Task 2: All role plays are transactional. The role play card must be handed in at the end of the task.
Reading aloud of the text	Task 2: AQA allow learners to self-correct throughout the task, and the final attempt is marked.	Task 2: Students have one minute to practice in the exam room. This is recorded.
Reading aloud – short conversation	Task 2: There are four compulsory questions following the reading aloud of the text. Learners can refer to their card and even lift words from it to use in their answers. Learners keep the reading aloud card until the end of the exam.	Task 1: There are two compulsory questions following the reading aloud of the text. The reading aloud card must be handed in before the follow-on questions.

Response to the content of the photos	Task 3: Both photos are described and at least one thing must be said about each photo. All photos are in black and white, but learners have the freedom to refer to appropriate colours if they wish. There's no prescribed content, any plausible content is credited and multiple verbs are not required..	Task 3: Learners describe one photo. All photos are in colour. Pearson Edexcel's task is more prescriptive, requiring students to refer to people, location, and activity.
Photo card unprepared conversation	There are no compulsory questions. All questions are at the discretion of the teacher within the theme. This allows teachers to tailor their questions to the interests and ability level of the individual learner. While credited as part of AO3, AQA doesn't stipulate use of any specific tenses. There's flexibility to allow learners to demonstrate their language knowledge in a variety of ways.	Following the photo description task, there are two compulsory questions on the teacher's card. The remainder of the unprepared conversation continues after this, based on the thematic context chosen. The Pearson Edexcel task requires accurate use of past, present, and future time frames in the unprepared conversation.

Skill: Reading

Similarities

- Papers from both exam boards are the same length: 45 (F)/ 60 (H)
- The same number of marks are available for both tiers and for both boards (50 marks)
- All exam rubrics and questions are in English
- All answers are written in English or are non-verbal
- Both boards contain a multiple-choice inference task

Differences

Feature of exam	AQA Paper 3: Reading	Pearson Edexcel Paper 3: Reading and understanding
Translation	Translation in sentences rather than a passage for accessibility and readability at both Foundation and Higher tiers.	Pearson Edexcel translation is as sentences at Foundation and as a paragraph at Higher tier.



Skill: Writing

Similarities

- All exam rubrics are in English
- Foundation tier translation is in sentences

Differences

Feature of Foundation tier exam	AQA Paper 4: Writing	Pearson Edexcel Paper 4: Writing
Length of exam	Foundation tier – 1 hour 10 minutes.	Foundation tier – 1 hour 15 minutes.
Photo description	Question 1: A black and white photo, which means colours can be presumed.	Question 1: A colour photo, meaning colours need to be accurate.
Short essay	Question 2: The AQA task is 50 words across 5 bullet points, allowing learners to plan and structure a well-balanced response. Learners are only required to write in the present time frame.	Question 2: The Pearson Edexcel task is 40–50 words across three bullet points. Learners are required to give an opinion, present facts, and use present and future time frames.
Grammar task	Question 3: The AQA Foundation tier paper contains a straightforward multiple-choice grammar activity worth 5 marks for AO3.	X



	This may alleviate pressure on a learner who finds extended writing in target language challenging.	
Translation	Question 4: Same format (in sentences).	Question 4: Same format (in sentences).
Overlap question	Question 5: 90 words across 3 bullet points, allowing learners to plan and structure a well-balanced response.	Question 3: 80–90 words across 4 bullet points.

Feature of Higher tier exam	AQA Paper 4: Writing	Pearson Edexcel Paper 4: Writing
Length of exam	Higher tier – 1 hour 15 minutes.	Higher tier – 1 hour 20 minutes.
Translation into TL	Question 1: AQA begin with the translation into target language.	Question 3: Final task in the writing exam.
Overlap question	Question 2: 90 words across 3 bullet points, allowing learners to plan and structure a well-balanced response.	Question 1: 80-90 words across 4 bullet points.
Longer essay	Question 3: 150 words across 2 bullet points. One bullet point will elicit either a past or future time frame. This creates flexibility in the task and scope for the student to explore their ideas freely.	Question 2: 130-150 words across 4 bullet points. Requires use of three-time frames.

Vocabulary requirements

Similarities

- Each board has a vocabulary list of 1,200 words at Foundation tier, plus an additional 500 words at Higher tier.
- The vocabulary lists have to include at least 85% of words from the top 2,000 most frequently used words according to a recognised corpus.
- No prior knowledge is assumed.
- 30 multi-word phrases (MWP) and 20 cultural items are included in addition to the 1,200/1,700 words.
- All exam tasks can be answered using the defined vocabulary for each tier, with equal credit given for any language used beyond the defined content, but that fulfils the task requirements.
- There's no testing of words in exam tasks outside of the prescribed vocabulary list, apart from in Paper 1 dictation task and Paper 3 inference tasks.



Differences

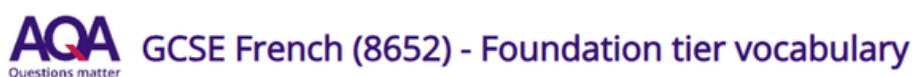
- Although AQA and Pearson Edexcel's vocabulary lists are not identical, there's overlap due to DfE required Subject Content. We have created an easy-to-follow guide to highlight any differences and to provide any AQA-specific content your learners will need.

AQA practical vocabulary guide

Interactive vocabulary lists

AQA have a fully interactive vocabulary tool, which can be filtered by theme, topic, and part of speech. This is also printable, so a practical tool which can be used not only to aid lesson planning but also to support home learning tasks.

- French: [here](#).
- German: [here](#).
- Spanish: [here](#).



Example

Here we have filtered:
adjectives for Foundation tier,
Theme 1: People & lifestyle,
Topic 1: Education and work.

The list produced can be copied and pasted into your own resources:

Part of speech	Headword	English equivalent
adj	affreux	dreadful, awful, horrible (m)
adj	capable	able, capable (m, f)
adj	difficile	difficult (m, f)
adj	dur*	hard (m)
adj	égal	equal (m)
adj	ennuyeux	boring (m)

Filterable sound banks

As a companion to the interactive vocabulary list, AQA also have an exclusive sound bank of every word as a sound file. These are downloadable and even mobile device friendly to make learning on the go simple and straightforward.

- French: [GCSE French 8652 | Soundbank | AQA](#)
- German: [GCSE German 8662 | Soundbank | AQA](#)
- Spanish: [GCSE Spanish 8692 | Soundbank | AQA](#)

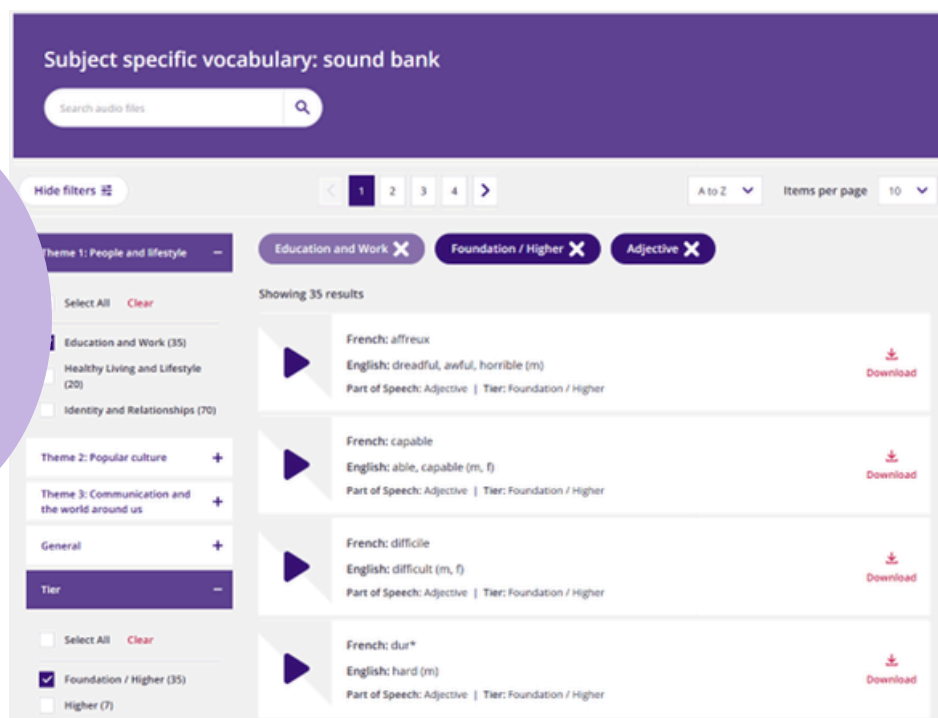
This means you can print a vocabulary list and link it to the same files in the sound bank for home learning. This can be used as a tool to improve dictation skills as well as for vocabulary quizzes, reading aloud practice and translation in and out of the target language.

Use the sound bank to filter the same words and download these sound files/link to share with students.

Example

We have filtered: adjectives for Foundation tier, Theme 1: People & lifestyle, Topic 1: Education and work.

The same words show on the page, in the same order as the vocabulary results.



Multilingprofiler

If you have texts you wish to use, and want to check how closely they align with the AQA vocabulary list or with what your learners know already, you may wish to use www.Multilingprofiler.net

You can profile a text based on an exam board's vocabulary list and select the tier. Any words not in a board's vocabulary list will be highlighted in orange, and these words could be glossed to aid comprehension.

Resources

We've put handy links to the resources you need all in one place:

Resource	Link to document
Centre Services – sign in here to access the second and third set of Sample Assessment Materials as well as additional practice questions, answers and examiner commentaries:	Sign in to your AQA account
Book a face-to-face Teams call with us using our Free@3 link:	Free@3 - Book in with the AQA Languages Subject Support team
The best place to access live/on-demand training, marking activities and T&L ideas is our Course Finder, these courses can be downloaded here:	AQA Professional Development Course Finder
We've made some short videos to help guide teachers through the whole process for the GCSE speaking exams. They might also be beneficial to students, as it gives them an insight into the process and may help reduce stress. You can view them here:	GCSE MFL Paper 2 Speaking exam guidance
Instructions for the GCSE Conduct of Exams:	Instructions for the conduct of exams (ICE)
Top tips posters for exam success:	(A4) Top tips for exam success A4 (A3) Top tips for exam success A3 poster v2
You can access our tiering guide document here:	GCSE MFL Tiering guide
We also have a quick reference poster here:	Tiering guide: quick reference poster

GCSE French (8652) Specification:	GCSE French 8652 Specification AQA
GCSE French (8652) Specification:	GCSE German 8662 Specification AQA
GCSE French (8652) Specification:	GCSE Spanish 8692 Specification AQA
Grammar guides:	French: Teaching guide: Grammar guide German: Teaching guide: Grammar guide Spanish: Teaching guide: Grammar guide
Interactive vocabulary lists are filterable by part of speech, themes and topics, and by tier. The lists are printable and can be copied and pasted into other documents for use in lessons/home learning.	French, German, and Spanish Interactive vocabulary lists
GCSE Soundbanks are filterable by theme, topic, tier and part of speech: Audio files can be played through the mobile friendly web page or downloaded for use in lessons. Upload audio to virtual learning environments for independent learning.	French: GCSE French 8652 Soundbank AQA German: GCSE German 8662 Soundbank AQA Spanish: GCSE Spanish 8692 Soundbank AQA
GCSE sample lessons: There are six editable lessons and student workbooks per language.	GCSE French 8652 Teaching Resources AQA GCSE German 8662 Teaching Resources AQA GCSE Spanish 8692 Teaching Resources AQA

GCSE Schemes of work:	GCSE French 8652 Teaching Resources AQA GCSE German 8662 Teaching Resources AQA GCSE Spanish 8692 Teaching Resources AQA
Grade boundary guidance:	Notes and guidance: Grade boundary guidance
Sample assessment materials (Set 1 and Set 2):	GCSE French 8652 Assessment Resources AQA
Bridging the Gap materials for learners going into KS5:	Bridging the gap
Switch to AQA:	Switch to AQA now AQA

Meet the team

Subject Lead

Rosanne Thompson

I have over 20 years' experience teaching Spanish at GCSE and A level, including time as a Head of Modern Foreign Languages. I'm passionate about helping learners succeed and encouraging more young people to continue with languages.

Now, I support teachers by providing practical guidance on AQA specifications and assessment, helping to build confidence and achieve strong outcomes. I believe great language teaching opens doors, and I'm committed to supporting teachers in helping their students reach their full potential.

Whether you have a quick question or would like more in-depth support, I'd be delighted to hear from you. You can also book a call directly, I'm here to help.



Subject Support Manager

Chloe Burrows

I've always loved languages because they help us develop new ways of thinking and connecting with different cultures and people.

Having spent eight years as a classroom teacher of French and Spanish, I'm committed to using my experience to help schools and colleges bring out the best in their students and feel confident delivering our qualifications through practical, easy to follow advice and support.

If you have any questions, big or small, book a call with me and I'll be happy to help.



Subject Support Manager

Rachel Livingstone

I have 14 years' experience teaching French and German, including roles as Head of Modern Foreign Languages and Second in Department. I'm passionate about championing language learning and supporting Modern Foreign Languages teachers and learners across the country. I now support teachers with AQA specifications and assessment, offering practical guidance to build confidence.

I'm always happy to help so feel free to get in touch.



Subject Support Manager

Sadaf Najib

I have extensive experience in language education, including in previous roles as Head of Department and National Lead Practitioner, supporting teachers across multiple schools in their languages teaching. I am incredibly passionate about language education and want to help ensure language learning thrives in the classrooms across the country. I'm here to help, so get in touch.

Contact the team here:

Email: mfl@aqa.org.uk

Tel: 01483 477 756

If you're considering making the switch to AQA, visit our website today for more information and personalised support. Speak to our team who will guide you through the process and always be on hand to answer any queries.

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