



**GCSE**  
**French**

8658/SH Paper 1 Speaking Higher Tier

Report on the Examination

8658  
June 2024

Version: 1.0

---

Further copies of this Report are available from [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

## 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 again for students in this section of the test was 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 or simply read the prompt aloud which could not be credited.

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.

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.

It is suggested that teachers 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 load 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 10**

Task e: a surprising number of students did not score full marks. A large number struggled to give their age correctly. Many said they were six rather than 16 or said *je suis seize ans*.

**Role-play 11**

Task a: some students responded in the present tense. Perhaps they did not recognise *hier*, but it may be that they are more accustomed to speaking about activities involving a computer or laptop in general terms, in which case they normally use the present tense.

Task b: examiners reported no problems with this.

Task d: some students did not state both a preference and a reason.

**Role-play 12**

Tasks a, b and c presented few problems.

Task d: at times, students presented with the teacher's cue which began, *A part aller aux concerts*, ... thought they needed to talk about what they liked doing at concerts rather than other activities.

Task e: generally, this was within the capabilities of Higher tier students.

### **Role-play 13**

Task a: *quoi* proved problematic for some which meant that they could not access full marks.

Tasks b and c were well handled and presented few problems to students.

Task d: was more challenging, in the interests of balancing demand in comparison with other Role-plays. Students dealt well with the *où* aspect but less well with the *depuis* element, as expected.

### **Role-play 14**

Task a: less proficient students tended to express opinions of their school rather than address its advantages and disadvantages.

Task b: effective responses included statements as to what the student would like to see in the future at their school.

Task c: reference to *la pause-déjeuner* was made in the teacher's cue and this appears to have been unrecognised by some since they mentioned activities, but these were not always relevant to lunchtime.

Task d: was well answered.

Task e: in otherwise perfectly acceptable questions, reference to *britanniques* was sometimes omitted, thereby removing the possibility of full marks since an opinion on schools (in general) is not the same as an opinion on schools in this country.

### **Role-play 15**

Task a: students often referred to French specifically rather than languages in general but this was perfectly acceptable, especially as they may only study one language and therefore French is the pertinent item.

Task b: some students could not give two details of an activity / activities which take place during a French class, but this was mostly fairly well answered.

Task c: *résultats* was not always recognised in the teacher's question, which led some teachers to rephrase the question using *notes*. Please remember that the Role-play cues must be delivered as printed. Any variation in these invalidates the student's response.

Task d: although, given the context of the Role-play, students were expected to give details regarding their study or work intentions for the following year, any proposed activities were accepted.

Task e: omission of reference to *Canada* in the student's question meant that full marks were not available.

### **Role-play 16**

Task a: although a wide range of items can be bought in charity shops, some students appeared to be unaware of these and asked for something which would not be available.

Task c: some students struggled to formulate a question. Lack of *Quel* (and its variants) in their repertoire was most likely the problem, but some students asked the question *Vous aimez les heures de travail ?* which worked.

Task e: examiners reported that some students appeared not to know *loisir*.

**Role-play 17**

Few issues were mentioned in relation to this role play. Questions were mostly well answered.

**Role-play 18**

Task a: some students did not understand *billet* in their cue.

Task b: surprisingly at Higher tier, some students could not give a good answer to the question about their age and nationality was not always adequately conveyed, with *Angleterre* being offered rather than *anglais(e)*.

Task e: the notion of food being available on the train was not always understood; this may have hinged on a lack of understanding of *quelque chose* in the student's cue.

**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 very long, detailed, responses. Teachers must ensure that all five questions can be put to the student within the three-minute time frame. In fact, most students finished this section easily within time.

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 J**

All questions were well answered.

### **Photo card K**

Students responded well to the 'seen' questions.

#### Question 4

... *trop de temps* ... was not always addressed in student's answers. Students often gave details of activities in which they engage on their laptop instead.

#### Question 5

The reference to *sur ton ordinateur* was overlooked by some, leading them to describe non-computer-based activities.

### **Photo card L**

#### Question 2

... *en plein air* ... was not always known.

### **Photo card M**

#### Question 3

Some students did not recognise the use of the perfect tense in the question, and some answered in what would appear to be a response to a question beginning *Qu'est-ce que* ... rather than *Est-ce que* .... If examiners could credit the response, they did.

#### Question 4

At times, students answered in a personal way, stating which sports they did rather than responding to the more general question, *Quel(s) sport(s) est-ce qu'on peut pratiquer ...?* Such answers were accepted.

### **Photo card N**

#### Question 2

Although most students began their response with *quand j'étais plus jeune*, many then used the conditional tense, starting with *je voudrais*.

#### Question 5

... *travailler à l'étranger* ... was sometimes understood as referring to overseas travel, leading to inappropriate answers.

### Photo card O

#### Question 2

Despite the inclusion of *A 12 ans*, ... some students interpreted the imperfect tense form in the question as a conditional mood verb.

#### Question 5

... *feras-tu* was not always recognised. At times, *travail* was taken to refer to travel.

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 P, Q and R.

### Photo card P

Examiners reported few issues with this card.

### Photo card Q

#### Question 3

Students did not always grasp that a **social** problem was referenced. In their answers, some referred to global issues such as global warming.

#### Questions 4 and 5

These were designed to require a relatively simple response, in recognition of the difficulty in discussing the theme of social issues.

### Photo card R

#### Question 1 - 3

These were well answered, being based on a popular context.

#### Question 4

The seasons referred to were better known than in previous years.

### 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 high marks were achieved by students demonstrating a successful use of vocabulary and language structures relating to at 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.

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. Correct timings were generally observed.

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 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 ideas.

### **Role-play**

- Do not vary 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 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.
- 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 three-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 most obvious areas to focus on.
- 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 asking about 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 2'30", there is a deduction of two marks in the Communication section.
- The maximum length of the General conversation is seven minutes. Once the student has completed his/her answer to the last question asked before the seven-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.
- 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.