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1

Oral Exam (Épreuve orale)

aims

- To learn all the relevant vocabulary to approach the Oral Exam with confidence.
- To brush up on grammar and tenses and practise communicating in French.
- To help you to select a document or other supporting item.

What makes the oral exam comparatively easier than the written exam is that it is more **predictable**. You can **prepare** many popular topics beforehand.

exam focus

Percentage = 25% of total exam
Marks = 100
Time = 12 minutes

Format

- The oral exam lasts **12 minutes**.
- It takes the form of **straightforward questions** put to the student in a fairly direct way.
- The discussion will be about the student's **general interests and life**, e.g. area of residence, school, hobbies, sports, career plans and so on.
- Students may also choose to bring a **document, such as a picture, project or other stimulus item** into the oral exam. The article should **not** be from a textbook and does **not** have to relate to France. This will be marked as part of the general conversation.

Preparing for the oral exam

1. You are marked on **communication**, which means that you can keep the conversation going without long gaps of silence and that you understand the examiner's questions.
2. **Structures** refers to your grammar. Watch out for basics such as 'j'**ai** 18 ans', 'je **suis** allé en France', 'je joue **au** foot'.
3. You will need a broad **vocabulary** for this level. Pay particular attention to the words, phrases and verbs relating to the topics mentioned below. Few marks will be awarded to a student when asked to describe their area, if all he or she can say is 'C'est bon'.

exam focus

The examiner will mark the conversation under four categories:

- Communication: 30 marks.
- Structures (i.e. grammar): 30 marks.
- Vocabulary: 20 marks.
- Pronunciation: 20 marks.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation (20 marks) will be examined as you speak. The following are the main aspects of pronunciation to be targeted.

The Nasal Vowels

- **in/im:** as in 'pain', 'imperméable', 'principal', 'vingt', 'coincé'. Also in words ending in '**-ien**', '**-ain**': américain, bien, ancien.

To achieve this vowel, say the word 'an'. As above, your tongue touches the roof of your mouth. Repeat the word 'an', but don't allow your tongue to touch the roof of the mouth:

Matin, instant, impoli, je viens, le terrain de foot, Africain, le lapin, le coin, un dindon, italien.



Track 02

Tiens, voilà les Américains au coin.
Les Canadiens aiment bien le lapin, le vin et le pain.
Le train vient à dix heures vingt.
Un instant, je viens de prendre mon bain.
C'est impossible ! Fumer, ce n'est pas sain. Tu m'inquiètes !

However, if the word is in its **feminine** form, you should let your tongue reach the top of your mouth: **américaine, africaine, certaine**.

- **en/an:** as in 'pendant', 'décembre', 'chance', 'rendre'.

To say this vowel, pronounce the English word 'on' again. Repeat, but don't allow your tongue to touch the roof of your mouth. That is the sound of the French '**en/an**':

Il semble, enfant, maintenant, agent, elle ment, les gens, dans, novembre, le temps, sans, sa tante, allemand, l'an.



Track 03

Maintenant, tu mens ! La pendule est en panne.
En France, les gens mangent de la viande.
L'étudiant allemand habite à Nantes pendant le printemps.
Je prends le train en Normandie en novembre.
L'an dernier, sa tante se sentait mieux.

- **on/om:** as in 'bonbon', 'ton', 'nom'.

This vowel sound is achieved by saying the English word 'on' and adapting it. You will notice that your tongue touches the roof of your mouth. Now say 'on' again, but don't let your tongue touch the upper part of your mouth. Round your lips a little more and you have now got the French sound '**on**':

Prénom, liaison, font, sont, thon, raison, le pont d'Avignon, Besançon, son, donjon, façon, Dijon, vont, ont, longtemps.



Track 04

Le garçon donne un cadeau à son oncle.
Non, mon oncle est fonctionnaire.
Bonjour, est-ce qu'on a des bonbons ?
Le Pont d'Avignon est une chanson, non ?
Pardon, on a besoin de conseils sur ce micro-onde.

Le sport

● Vous pratiquez du sport ?/Êtes-vous sportif/sportive ?

Oui, je suis sportif/sportive. J'aime les activités de plein air. Je fais du cyclisme toute l'année. Je me passionne aussi pour l'athlétisme.

Don't give one-word answers like 'oui', 'non' or 'le foot' because you're putting pressure on the examiner to come up with more questions. You will lose out on vocabulary marks. Expand as shown here.

● Quels sont les sports les plus populaires dans votre école ?

Ce sont le rugby, le badminton et le tennis. Le rugby est le plus populaire des trois.

● Pourquoi est-ce qu'on préfère en général les sports d'équipe ?

Être membre d'une équipe, ça donne du plaisir. Il faut travailler en harmonie avec ses co-équipiers. On se fait beaucoup d'amis. On fait partie d'un groupe.

● Que fait-on à l'entraînement de rugby/foot/hockey ?

On court, on saute, on fait des tractions et de la gymnastique. C'est dur et on est épuisé après l'entraînement. Mais on s'amuse !

● Combien d'heures par semaine passez-vous à faire du sport ?

Hélas, la saison de rugby/foot/hockey est terminée. En ce moment j'étudie pour mon bac. Alors, je n'ai pas le temps pour le sport. Pendant la saison dernière, je me suis entraîné trois fois par semaine, avec un match chaque week-end.

● Aimez-vous regarder le sport à la télé ?

Oui, je regarde la Coupe du Monde, les Jeux Olympiques, les courses de chevaux et ainsi de suite.

● Êtes-vous membre d'un club de golf ?

Oui, je suis membre du club de Skerries. Qui plus est, je fais partie de l'équipe de l'école. Cependant, je suis en Terminale et je dois me consacrer à mes études.

● À quoi bon le sport ?

C'est bon pour la santé, pour se tenir en forme. Quand on fait du sport, on ne s'ennuie pas. C'est important pour former le caractère. Certains pensent que le sport contribue au développement personnel. C'est aussi une période de décontraction.

● À quoi sert l'exercice physique alors ?

Ça sert à maintenir une vie équilibrée. Il faut prendre de l'exercice. Ça vous tient en forme.

● Croyez-vous qu'on attache trop d'importance au sport dans votre école ?

Non, mais l'éducation physique est obligatoire pour tout le monde. Si on fait partie de la première équipe de rugby/foot/hockey, on prend le sport au sérieux. C'est entendu. Pour le reste, on peut participer au sport si on veut. Ça me convient.

Vocabulary

Je suis sportif/sportive. *I am interested in sport.*

ses co-équipiers *his team-mates*

On fait des tractions. *We do press-ups.*

ainsi de suite *and so on*

se consacrer à *to devote yourself to*

se tenir en forme *to keep fit*

la décontraction *relaxation*

Ça me convient. *It suits me.*

Qui plus est *What's more; moreover*

4

Written Expression (Production écrite)

aims

- To prepare for the Written Expression section of the exam by understanding what each of the different writing tasks entails.
- To learn the important phrases you will need.
- To practise writing clear, correct French.

Format

- This section deals with the written assignments, where you must **produce your own ideas** in French.
- You must answer **three** questions – Question 1 (which is compulsory) and **two** of Questions 2, 3 and 4.
- For Question 1, you are expected to write about **90 words**. The other two questions require about **75 words** each.
- Question 1 relates to the Journalistic and Literary Comprehensions. You are most likely to be asked to write an opinion based on the theme of the Comprehension that you just answered, but **relating to your own experience**.
- You must answer **one** of **two** questions within Question 1.
- Questions 2, 3 and 4 offer you a choice of two assignments each. You must answer **one** from each of **two** sections.
- Question 2 includes **two** of the following:
 - (a) diary entry
 - (b) fax/email/note
 - (c) letter (formal/informal).
- Question 3 asks you to give your reaction to (your opinion on):
 - (a) a quotation by a young person
 - (b) an illustration, e.g. a graph/chart.
- Question 4 requires you to react to:
 - (a) a short prose article
 - (b) a chart
 - (c) tables
 - (d) a photo or picture.

exam
focus



Percentage = 25%
Marks = 100 (40 + 30 + 30)
Time = 90 minutes
(30 + 25 + 25 + 10 minute check)

Question 2

Each of the points asked **must be dealt with**. Some development is required, but not all the points have to be developed to the same extent.

If you leave out any of the points, your marks for communication and language will be reduced proportionately. For example, if you leave out one of four points asked, then you automatically lose 25 per cent of the marks for that question.

Marks

Diary entry

Communication: 15 marks.

Language: 15 marks.

Letter

Layout: 6 marks.

Fulfilling communicative tasks: 12 marks.

Language: 12 marks.

Letter layout

Top of page (i.e. addresses, date, etc.): 3 marks.

Opening ('Monsieur') and signing off: 3 marks.

Questions 3 and 4 (a) and (b)

Communication: 15 marks.

Language: 15 marks.



The following are accepted for the letter opening:

- Monsieur le Directeur
- Madame
- Madame la Directrice
- Monsieur/Madame

Checklist for the written section

This point cannot be stressed enough – allow a **few minutes** at the end of the exam to **check your answers**, particularly the written section. We all make mistakes when writing in our mother tongue, English, so why not in French?

For your written work to be as good as it can be, use the checklist below.

- Have you **planned your ideas** and divided them into paragraphs?
- Do your answers clearly **reflect the question**?
- Have you used **phrases/idioms** where relevant?
- Are your verbs in the **correct tenses**?
- Did you check that you wrote the right **endings** for the **verbs**?
 - (a) There is **never** a 't' at the end of a verb with 'je'; there is never an 's' after 'il/elle/on'.
 - (b) Note the **only four verbs** that take '-ont' instead of '-ent' in the 'ils/elles' forms in the present tense: ils/elles vont (aller)/ont (avoir)/sont (être)/font (faire).

Leaving Cert 2005

Question 1 (a)

L'auteur suggère qu'on n'est jamais content, qu'on considère que la vie est meilleure autre part. Et vous, pensez-vous que « l'herbe est plus verte ailleurs » ?

Sample answer

Another way of agreeing with a statement.

Rather than starting a sentence with 'Beaucoup de gens', say it better as 'There are people who ...'

J'adhère totalement à l'opinion de l'auteur. Il y a beaucoup de gens qui croient que l'herbe est plus verte ailleurs. Personne n'est jamais heureux de sa vie. Nous

When 'nobody' is the **subject** of a sentence, 'personne ne' goes **before** the verb. When 'nobody' is the **object**, split them: 'ne' (verb) 'personne'.

habitons dans un monde qui est très matérialiste, où tout le monde veut quelque chose qu'il n'a pas.

The English 'haven't got' is translated only by 'avoir'.

On désire de plus en plus de biens. On n'atteint jamais le bonheur. Donc, on cherche

atteindre (to reach, attain); 'gn' appears in 'nous, vous, ils/elles': nous atteignons, vous atteignez, ils atteignent.

Subjunctive 'soit' after 'don't think that ...'

Example of 'si' + imperfect + conditional: si on prenait conscience ... on serait ... (if people realised ... they would be ...).

ailleurs. Pour ma part, je ne pense pas que l'herbe soit plus verte ailleurs. Si on prenait conscience qu'on a déjà beaucoup, on serait content.

Si nous avons des familles, des amis, une bonne santé, un logement et des valeurs morales, alors nous avons de la chance. Nous avons tout.

Another example of 'si' + imperfect + conditional: si on avait le choix ... on choisirait ... (if people had the choice ... they'd choose ...).

À mon avis, si on avait le choix entre une augmentation de salaire et de bons amis, je crois qu'on choisirait les amis.

(environ 135 mots)

Translation

I agree totally with the author. Many people believe that the grass is greener on the other side. Nobody is ever happy with their life. We live in a world that is very materialistic, where everyone wants something that they haven't got.

People want more and more goods. They never attain happiness. So, they look elsewhere. In my view, I don't think that the grass is greener elsewhere. If people realised that they already have a lot, they would be happy.

If we have families, good friends, good health, housing and good moral values, then we are lucky. We have everything.

In my opinion, if people had the choice between an increase in salary or good friends, I think that they would choose friends.