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1

Oral Exam (Épreuve orale)



- 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 select a document or other supporting item.

What makes the Oral Exam easier than the Written Expression exam is that it is more **predictable**. You can **prepare** many popular topics beforehand.

Format



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

- 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.
- 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

- 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.
- Structures** refers to your grammar. Watch out for basics such as 'j'ai 18 ans', 'je suis allé en France', 'je joue au foot'.
- 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'.



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**’; your tongue touches the roof of your mouth. Try saying it again, but this time, 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

Now try these:

**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**.

- **em / en / an:** as in ‘**pendant**’, ‘**décembre**’, ‘**chance**’, ‘**rendre**’.

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

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



Track 03

Now try these:

**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

2

Listening Comprehension (Épreuve aurale)

aims

- To prepare for the aural exam by listening to spoken French.
- To enable you to answer questions on what you have heard.
- To learn the relevant vocabulary for the Listening Comprehension.

exam focus



Percentage = 20%

Marks = 80

Time = 40 minutes

Before the exam:

- Practise listening to French speakers as much as possible. You could also tune in to French radio or watch TV5 and French films.
- Keep a small notebook to jot down vocabulary relating to different topics that appear in the trial CDs used in class during the year. This 'carnet de vocabulaire' would also be useful for the opinion / reaction questions.
- Learn basic vocabulary, e.g. numbers, weather, emotions, occupations and adjectives. A considerable percentage of answers relate to numbers (numbers killed, number of years, prices of goods, etc.).
- Listen to a French film or radio show on the morning of the French exam to attune your ear to the language.

During the exam:

- The supervisor must give you 5 minutes before starting the CD to read the questions and instructions. Use this time fully and sensibly. Avoid the temptation to look around at your classmates. This will make you more nervous!
- Note also the number of times that a section will be played. It's usually three times for Sections I to IV but twice for Section V.
- All students have a tendency to write down answers while the CD is still playing. However, while you're writing, the CD continues and so you won't hear the rest of the text. Instead, write answers during the gaps on the CD.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, at least guess! A blank line earns a zero.
- Always read the questions before listening to the CD. This way, you will know what to expect in terms of vocabulary and content.
- You can write two answers on the same line (unlike in the Reading Comprehension, where they are marked as one).
- If you have to change an answer, make it very clear to the examiner.

Sample listening comprehension 1

Transcripts and solutions are on pp. 179–181 and 189–190.

Section I



Track 20

You will hear a report on an incident concerning a young baby.

1. (i) On what date did this incident occur?

- (ii) What was the exact sentence handed down to Éric Allarousse?

2. (i) At whose house was Éric intending to stop on the way to work?

- (ii) What did he witness on the way?

3. (i) What had Éric forgotten?

- (ii) What does the passage say about the relative body heat of adults and children?

Vocabulary

un accrochage *a fender-bender, bump, collision*

Section II



Track 21

Listen to an interview with Erik Orsenna, writer and member of the French Academy, on the subject of the world's water supply.

1. (i) Mention **two** examples of hardship in certain countries, according to Erik Orsenna.

- (ii) Give **two** causes for the water crisis facing these countries.

- (iii) How does meat production affect the demand for water?

2. According to Erik, how do the supplies of water and oil differ?

3

Reading Comprehension (Compréhension écrite)

aims

- To understand what you are being asked to do for the Reading Comprehension section of the exam.
- To show you how to answer in the required way.
- To give you practice in dealing with a variety of texts in French.

One comprehension is likely to be a **journalistic** passage, with perhaps more modern language.

The other comprehension is usually a **literary** piece, taken from a novel. It is likely to contain the ‘passé simple’, conversations and subjunctives. There is often some descriptive material.



Percentage = 30%

Marks = 120 (2 × 60)

Time = 1 hour (2 × 30 minutes)



IMPROVE YOUR MARKS

- If you have time, **underline** the various question words: e.g. que, qu'est-ce que, quand, depuis combien de temps, pourquoi? (*what, what, when, since when, why?*)

Certain phrases are very common:

Relevez dans la première section ... *Find in the first section ...*

Trouvez dans la deuxième section ... *Find in the second section ...*

Citez dans la troisième section ... *Quote from the third section ...*

Selon / d'après la quatrième section ... *According to the fourth section ...*

la raison pour laquelle ... *the reason why ...*

l'expression qui montre que ... *the expression that shows that ...*

la phrase qui signifie ... *the sentence that means ...*

le mot qui veut dire ... *the word that means ...*

- In the above cases, you are only asked to write down the **relevant** material directly from the text – but **accurately!** Do **not** write a whole sentence or paragraph just because it contains the information that you want.

For example, if you are asked to find the **number** of people that a business employs in this sentence:

Aujourd’hui, il emploie vingt-cinq personnes et réalise vingt millions de chiffre d’affaires par an.

only give the **precise** answer: Il emploie vingt-cinq personnes.

Phrases like ‘Trouvez une phrase, des mots ou des expressions qui montrent que ...’ are common.

‘Une phrase’ is a sentence, and that is what you are required to find.

‘Mots / expressions’ are words and expressions; you do not need to write a sentence.

3

Don’t repeat the **question construction** in your answer:

Pourquoi Antoine voulait-il voir Daniel ... ?

Antoine voulait-**il** voir Daniel parce qu’il ... (Wrong!)

Instead, the **correct** way is: Antoine **voulait** voir Daniel parce qu’il ...

4

Another type of question concerns finding examples of **grammar points**, for example:

Trouvez un exemple d’un verbe au passé composé.

5

You may be required to **alter** the ‘person’ of the verb. For example, you may have to change ‘j’ai balayé le plancher et j’ai rangé la cuisine’ to ‘**il a** balayé ... et **il a** rangé ...’

The task is likely to be a simple one, nothing too complex.

6

The last question is expressed and answered in **English**. You are examined on details concerning the author’s **style, character** descriptions or **events** in the text.

7

Beware of losing marks from basic errors like ‘parce **que il est**’.

8

Don’t worry about the 50 words requirement in Question 6. It doesn’t matter if you go over the limit – the examiner doesn’t actually count the words. However, a very short answer may reveal a lack of understanding of the text.



The best preparation for these comprehension questions is **practice** and plenty of reading, i.e. short novels or short stories.

Note the vocabulary in the sample passages, as this may be useful for the oral or written exam.

Sample journalistic comprehension questions

Solutions can be found on pp. 193–197.

Journalistic comprehension 1

- 1.** « Llibertat ! Llibertat ! » scandent des milliers de jeunes sur la place de l’Université, en plein centre de Barcelone. Ils réclament en catalan la libération de huit anciens ministres catalans, placés en détention provisoire pour avoir déclaré l’indépendance de la 27 octobre dernier. Une indépendance symbolique puisque l’Espagne a immédiatement repris le contrôle de toutes les institutions régionales. Longs cheveux blonds, bracelet aux couleurs du drapeau catalan, Anna, 19 ans, a participé à toutes les manifestations organisées par les séparatistes.
 « L’Espagne ne nous respecte pas, estime-t-elle, elle ne respecte pas notre culture, notre différence ». Dans un bruyant café à deux pas des arènes de Barcelone, où se sont déroulées des corridas durant des décennies, elle argumente : « La Catalogne a interdit la corrida il y a plusieurs années, car nous trouvons cela barbare, ce n’est pas dans notre manière de vivre, et il y a d’autres choses que nous aimerais faire différemment, comme avoir plus de lois pour protéger les plus pauvres, ou favoriser l’égalité entre les hommes et les femmes, mais ce n’est pas possible tant que nous restons en Espagne. »
- 2.** Pour son ami Pau, le problème est le refus systématique de dialogue de Madrid. Il a 18 ans, et est plus réservé. « Ces dernières années, la Catalogne a essayé de négocier un nouveau statut d’autonomie, un nouveau régime fiscal, de nouvelles conditions au sein de l’Espagne, mais à chaque fois le gouvernement espagnol a dit non, non et non. » Depuis la fin de la dictature franquiste (1939–1975) et le rétablissement de la démocratie à

LA CATALOGNE

QUE VEULENT LES JEUNES CATALANS ?

la fin des années 1970, la Catalogne jouit d’une autonomie très forte, qu’elle a négociée à l’époque avec le gouvernement espagnol. Elle peut gérer sa propre police, les *Mossos d’Esquadra*, son système de santé et son système éducatif. Jusqu’au bac et parfois à l’université, les cours sont donnés en catalan. Les jeunes d’aujourd’hui ont donc suivi toute leur scolarité en catalan. Et possèdent un fort sentiment d’appartenance à la nation catalane. Selon un récent sondage, 60 % des moins de 30 ans sont en faveur de l’indépendance, par rapport à 45 % des Catalans en général.

- 3.** Marc, 19 ans et allure décontractée, ne partage pas ce sentiment indépendantiste. Il a fallu convaincre cet ami d’enfance d’Anna et Pau de les rejoindre dans ce café pour participer à l’interview. « Beaucoup de jeunes pensent qu’une Catalogne indépendante leur assurera un meilleur avenir, qu’il y aura plus de travail par exemple car l’Espagne prend de mauvaises décisions économiques, mais je trouve que ce n’est pas réaliste. » La région, qui est l’une des plus riches d’Espagne, estime qu’elle paie trop d’impôts à l’État et réclame une meilleure autonomie fiscale. Face au refus de Madrid, beaucoup pensent que l’indépendance est devenue la seule issue. « Ce n’est pas que nous ne voulons pas être solidaires avec les autres régions, se défend Anna, mais nous voulons gérer nous-mêmes notre argent, et prendre en main notre propre avenir en tant que l’État catalan, d’égal à égal avec les autres pays ».

1. (i) Selon la première section, pourquoi est-ce que les jeunes se manifestent ?

(ii) Pourquoi est-ce qu'Anna critique l'Espagne ?

2. Dans la première section, pourquoi est-ce que La Catalogne a aboli la *corrida* (*bullfighting*) ?

3. Mentionnez deux choses (première section) que les Catalans feraient différemment s'ils avaient l'indépendance.

4. Selon la deuxième section, depuis les années soixante-dix, les Catalans jouissent d'une certaine indépendance. Donnez deux exemples.

5. (i) Trouvez un exemple d'adjectif singulier au féminin dans la deuxième section.

(ii) Selon la troisième section, citez deux choses pour lesquelles Marc n'est pas optimiste.

6. Do you think that Catalonia would be any different if it achieved independence? Give two reasons from the text. (50 words)

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.

The written section is arguably the most difficult part of the whole Leaving Certificate exam, and students generally score lower marks in it than in the written comprehension, oral and aural. Comprehension is easier because the main skill involved is recognition; in written expression, you must recall vocabulary and expressions, and then create grammatically correct French sentences.

Format

- In this section of the exam, 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 the **two** questions within Question 1.
- Questions 2, 3 and 4 offer you a choice of two assignments each. You must complete **one** assignment from each of **two** sections.
- Question 2 includes **two** of the following:
 - diary entry
 - informal letter or email
 - formal letter.

exam focus

Percentage = 25%

Marks = 100 (40 + 30 + 30)

Time = 90 minutes

(30 + 25 + 25 + 10-minute check)



- Question 3 asks you to give your reaction to (your opinion on):
 - (a) a quotation by a young person; or
 - (b) an illustration, e.g. a graph / chart.

- Question 4 requires you to react to one of the following:
 - (a) a short prose article; or
 - (b) a chart; or
 - (c) information in tables; or
 - (d) a photo or picture.

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% 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 (addresses, date, etc.): 3 marks

Opening (e.g. '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 Expression 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).

(c) Be careful to use the appropriate verb endings:

ma famille / mon équipe / tout le monde – 'il' ending.

mes amis et moi / ma famille et moi – 'nous' ending.

les gens / les Français / la plupart – 'ils' ending.

- Did you use the correct **auxiliary verb** (avoir / être) in the 'passé composé'?

j'ai rencontré, je suis allé, il s'est dépêché.

- Check that your **articles** are correct: le, la, l', les; un, une, des.

- Do your **adjectives** agree in **number** and **gender**?

les **vieilles** maisons, des histoires **amusantes**.

- Also check your **prepositions**: à l'école, en France, aux États-Unis, au Royaume-Uni, au cinéma, à la plage, de Paris, à Paul.

- Did you put in the correct **accents**, e.g. 'chère, j'espère, je suis allé, problème, à'? In the Leaving Cert, it is a serious error to omit an accent that actually changes the meaning of a word, e.g. Ou (**or**) / où (**where**); a (**has**) / à (**to, at**).

There are also verbs that **change their accents**, e.g. 'espérer – j'espère'.

- If you are **including yourself in a group**, the subject becomes 'we':

Moi et mes amis nous **rencontrons** à la piscine.

Mes frères et moi **avons** joué au golf ce matin.

- Do you know when to use the 'passé composé' or the 'imparfait'?

If the action **happened**, use the 'passé composé':

je **suis allé** au cinéma.

If the action **was happening**, then use the 'imparfait':

le soleil **brillait**.

- How do you express the common phrase 'I'll be going / doing / leaving'? It is certainly **not** 'je serai aller'!

To say 'I'll be doing', use 'aller' + infinitive:

Je **vais** aller en ville plus tard. *I'll be going into town later (I'm going to go).*

There are **two English** variations of the **present tense**: 'I go' and 'I am going'.

There is only **one in French**: je vais.

Never translate the 'am, are, is' in the English present tense.



Before the exam:

- 1 Carefully read and **reread** any useful **sample answers** from your school notes, so that the necessary material will sink in.
- 2 You are going to need **fundamental verbs** like 'pouvoir, vouloir, faire, devoir, aller, avoir, essayer de' and 'espérer', so learn them! These **verbs are followed by an infinitive**. They are useful for all aspects of the French Leaving Cert, especially the **oral**.
On devrait faire face à ce problème.
Les jeunes veulent travailler à temps partiel pendant la Terminale.
J'espère recevoir de bonnes notes à mon bac.
- 3 Be aware of **important topics in the news**, e.g. the wearing of religious symbols, the environment, the internet.
Many themes relate to **young people's concerns**, e.g. voting, mobile phones, relationships, equality, families, education. Study these topics.

During the exam:

- 4 Don't overload your answer with the usual. However, do have a good repertoire of **expressions** that you can call upon for most topical issues. Such phrases **develop fluency** and impress the examiner. (Many examples are given in this text. See below and pp. 84–85 and 139).
- 5 In the reaction question (i.e. Q.3 and Q.4) you must write around 75 words. **Begin by stating what the article is about, then give your views and conclude**: a beginning, a middle and an end.
 - For example, on **opening** your response, you could say the following:
En ce qui concerne le problème des drogues ... *As far as the problem of drugs is concerned ...*
Dans le domaine du dopage en sport ... *In the area of drugs in sport ...*
Ce qui nous préoccupe ici, c'est ... *What we're dealing with here is ...*
Cette rubrique se rapporte à ... *This column refers to ...*

- Then, to **continue**:

Il s'agit d'honnêteté. *It's a question of / has to do with honesty.*

Il y a ceux qui croient que ... *There are those who think that ...*

Le fléau de la drogue est devenu plus répandu. *The scourge of drugs has become more widespread.*

Je doute que ce soit vrai. *I doubt that that is true.*

- In **conclusion**:

Pour conclure ... *To conclude ...*

Tout compte fait, je doute que cela se produise. *All things considered, I doubt that it will happen.*

Il faut que les pouvoirs publics fassent quelque chose. *The authorities must do something.*



Writing tips

- It is a good idea to answer the comprehension questions first. These questions carry a significant percentage of the marks (30% of the total). As you are required to recognise text and understand the general meaning of it, it is not too difficult to locate the relevant areas where you may find the answers. By leaving the difficult written section until last, you should then feel a lot less pressure when answering it.
- Another advantage of answering the comprehension section first is that, by reading so much French, your mind will be 'switched on' to the language. Vocabulary and phrases should be easier to recall.
- There is nothing wrong with using some material that you have learned off by heart – provided it is used properly – but you should avoid learning long passages off by heart. These are obvious to the examiner, and do not earn many marks. Moreover, it is unlikely that the exact title or theme that you have learned by heart will appear on the exam paper.
- Decide what you want to say before you start writing. What is your view? Then try to remember the necessary vocabulary to help you argue your point.
- Don't overcomplicate your vocabulary or sentence structures, as you are more likely to make mistakes.
- Keep your sentences – and answers – short. There is no penalty for writing more than seventy-five words, but you are likely to make more mistakes the more you write.

This section is difficult for two main reasons:

- You are thinking in English and translating your thoughts into French.
- Finding words is hard enough, but you must also know how to convert them into the style, idiom and grammar of French.

aims

- To revise your basic knowledge of adjectives and adverbs and how to make them agree.
- To know the different verb tenses and endings.
- To have a good knowledge of nouns, pronouns and prepositions.
- To practise what you have learned through a variety of revision exercises.

Terminology

There is always a grammar question in each of the comprehensions. You are usually asked to give an example of a **verb**, **pronoun** or **adjective**. It's important to know the French terms for them.

Nouns, adjectives and pronouns

- **Le nom, le substantif** (noun; thing, place or person):
Le **stylo**, la **fille**, la **voiture**.
- **L'adjectif** (adjective – word which describes a noun):
Le ciel **bleu**, une ville **surpeuplée**, une rue **étroite**.
- **L'adjectif possessif** (possessive adjective – 'my, your', etc.):
Mon frère, **tes** livres.
- **L'adjectif interrogatif** (interrogative adjective):
Quels romans lisez-vous ? *What novels do you read?*
- **Le pronom personnel** (personal pronoun):
Il parle allemand. *He speaks German.*
- **Le pronom interrogatif** (interrogative pronoun):
Qui a téléphoné ? *Who phoned?*
- **Le pronom relatif** (relative pronoun, e.g. 'that, which'):
Où est la valise **que** j'ai laissée ici ? *Where is the suitcase that I left here?*
- **Le pronom réfléchi** (reflexive pronoun, e.g. 'herself', when an action is done to oneself):
Elle **se** dépêche, je **me** lave, nous **nous** amusons.
- **Le pronom démonstratif** (demonstrative pronoun – made up of the demonstrative adjective '**ce**' + a noun):
Celle que vous voyez. *The one which you see.*
Ceux qui me connaissent. *Those who know me.*