
SCHOLAR Study Guide

CfE Advanced Higher French Advice

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Topic 1

Advice on listening

The external listening exam is worth 15% of the final award. It is marked out of 30 and is combined with the discursive writing (essay) exam. The paper lasts for 1 hour 20 minutes. It is suggested that you spend 30 minutes on the listening and 50 minutes on the writing. You will hear two passages (Part A - a monologue and Part B - a dialogue) twice and answer questions in English on them.

The procedure is as follows:

You have one minute to study the questions before you hear Passage A. You should only look at the questions for the first passage at this time.

You will then hear Part A twice with an interval of 1 minute between the playings. You will be given a minute to study the questions for the second passage, before you hear Part B twice, again with an interval of 1 minute between the recordings.

You are allowed the use of a dictionary and you may make notes at any time during the recordings.

The listening tips are essentially the same as for your previous studies. You might find it helpful to read the following notes.

1. You have been given time to study the questions before the recording is started. Use this time wisely! Look at the introduction to the questions first - this will give you a good idea of what the passages are about and what you can expect to hear. Then look at the question words - How long? What? Why? Where? Who? What sort of? How much? How many? These are there to get you to anticipate the kind of information you are going to hear and help you think about possible vocabulary.
2. Try to block out any distractions while the recording is being played. Aim to focus your full attention on the dialogue. Follow the questions closely as you listen, to give you something to concentrate on and guide you through the passage.
3. Take notes while the recording is being played. There are no set guidelines as to how you should do this, but you could take notes in French and/or English. Draw a vertical line one third of the way across the page, and put your notes to the left of that, ready to transfer when you are writing your answers. Don't panic about having missed a bit - you can home in on that when you hear the passage for a second time. Accept that you will not grasp everything on the first hearing. You should use the first hearing to make sense of the passage and also to listen for where each answer appears. It is usually clearly laid out in the recording when the speaker is moving on to the next question.
4. Use the minute between the hearings to check the information you have and to look again at the questions for which you still need information. If you jotted down a word you did not know, you can check it after the second hearing. If you suddenly remember something, write it down now beside the notes you already have as you will still be going through the first hearing in your head. Do not write out your answer yet - you have plenty of time at the end.
5. When the second hearing begins, use this to focus on what you did not catch during the first hearing. Take notes in the same way as you did first time round, slotting in the extra information beside what you already have. This will enable you to put together full answers after the second hearing.
6. You now have 3 minutes before Part B. If you do not manage to write out full answers, make detailed notes so that you can do this later. Remember to draw a line through the notes when you have finished.

7. Treat Part B the same way as Part A.

Now take a few minutes to answer the questions in English for both parts as fully as possible. You now have time to look up any words you jotted down that you do not know.

Topic 2

Advice on talking

1. This will take the form of discussion with the visiting examiner, which will last for approximately 20 minutes and cover both Language and your Specialist Study/Portfolio.

The discussion will be recorded, but the recording is only used for control purposes by the SQA. The examiner will assess your performance from the discussion.

2. Try to build up a bank of material you can use for talking. Remember to learn good phrases and idioms from your reading and coursework throughout the year and also to use materials from essays. Learn phrases and structures to express opinions and use general discussion techniques. On-going preparation is the key to success.

Try to develop good pronunciation and intonation in French by listening carefully to your teacher or tutor and any listening materials used in class. (Your teacher or tutor could probably provide materials for you to listen to at home and there is a host of materials available on the web. Films and TV programmes are also good for developing your listening and talking skills).

Try to use complex sentences.

Practise speaking aloud in French as much as possible, so that you become used to hearing your voice. You could practise with your teacher (or assistant) or tutor, fellow students, members of your family or on your own.

It is also useful to record yourself speaking. These recordings can be helpful if you are trying to memorise material.

3. You will have to complete a form for the Visiting Examiner in which you give details of topics you have studied during the year. When listing the topics, it makes sense to write down the ones you are happiest talking about. This form is sent to the Visiting Examiner well before the test.

If you study a new topic after you have completed the form, you can still use it for the talking assessment, although it does not appear on the original form. Try to decide the order in which you would like to use the topics for the test. Normally the examiner will start with a gentle set of general questions, before moving onto the Specialist Study and Portfolio and then the Language Units.

It is useful to have some on-going discussions with your teacher in French about your progress with and evaluation of the Specialist Study, as well as your work on the Portfolio piece. This will help you have material prepared for your discussion with the Visiting Examiner. Be prepared to use and adapt other learned material to fit in with the flow of the discussion.

Your class teacher or another teacher or tutor should also give you a practice talking test.

4. The tests usually take place between mid-February and the end of March. You will be given a time for your test by the school, after the Visiting Examiner has arranged a suitable date.

The Visiting Examiner normally meets all the candidates and their teacher or tutor before the tests begin. During this short meeting, the examiner will briefly go over the conduct of the test and answer any questions you may have. The examiner may also speak a little in the foreign language with your teacher or tutor, so that you can hear his/her accent. Remember that the examiners are usually practising teachers or university lecturers, who are familiar with carrying out talking assessments.

The examiner will use 'vous', the formal (polite) form of 'you' in the test and you

are expected to do so too.

When you come to take the test, the examiner will start the recording. Normally he/she will talk for about 30 seconds in French and then ask you about some personal matters to allow you time to settle. It is helpful to have prepared some material about what you have been studying at school during the year, what you hope to do when you leave school and about your hobbies and interests. This is a warm-up, before you start discussing the topics you have studied.

Remember that you are expected to engage in a discussion with the Visiting Examiner, not make a presentation to him/her. If it looks like you are making a presentation, the examiner will interrupt your flow and ask questions.

The examiner will then ask you which texts you have been studying and which one(s) you have found most interesting. They will then start a discussion on these texts.

It is a good idea to have prepared a short opening presentation where you indicate the aspects of the specialist study which have interested you and the discussion should flow from there.

The examiner is not testing your knowledge of the specialist study as such, but your ability to sustain a discussion in French. Absolute excellence is not required. You should communicate readily and fairly correctly, with a reasonable amount of idiom and variety of structure, and be prepared to take the initiative. About halfway through the test, the examiner will change the discussion to the other area. The test will end after approximately 20 minutes.

REMEMBER...

- Preparation for the talking assessment is on-going throughout the course. Be as well prepared as possible.
- You are encouraged to use learned material, but be prepared to adapt it.
- The examiner is there to take part in a discussion.
- Use 'vous', the formal (polite) form of 'you' in discussion.
- They will try to put you at your ease and be as encouraging as possible.
- If you realise you have made a mistake, it is perfectly alright for you to correct yourself.
- If you forget a word, ask the examiner for help, provided you ask in French.
- If you 'blank' completely, it will be obvious to the examiner, who will use his/her experience to try to continue the conversation, perhaps asking some easier questions, so that you regain your confidence, or by changing to another topic.
- It is perfectly all right for you to ask the examiner questions and about his/her opinions.

Topic 3

Advice on the discursive essay

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The difference in demand between the essays you had to do at Higher and the discursive essay at Advanced Higher is without doubt one of the most challenging aspects of AH.

In the external examination paper *Listening and Discursive Writing* you are required to write an essay of about 250-300 words on one of four topics, which are selected from the four contexts, one each. The topics relate to the themes studied at AH but of course each theme is fairly wide-ranging, so it would **not** be a good idea to concentrate on one theme only in preparing for this paper.

The advice on the Advanced Higher Listening and Discursive Writing paper is that you should spend 30 minutes on the Listening and 50 minutes on the Discursive Writing.

Bear this in mind when you are practising Discursive Writing. There are 40 marks for Discursive Writing. The marks awarded are "pegged" which in this case means you can be awarded the marks as shown in the table below.

The criteria shown in the table give some clue as to exactly what the examiners are looking for.

3.1 Grammatical accuracy

- In the first instance think **verbs verbs verbs**. Even at Higher, that was necessary in order to achieve an award of Satisfactory, but if your verbs are still letting you down, you **must** work on them!
- Within the context of verbs, **endings** are important, otherwise the essay will not gain a good mark.
- Use your dictionary to check **genders of nouns** and try to get your **adjective endings** correct.
- Get used to working with your dictionary open at the verb pages, so you are constantly checking the accuracy of your verbs.

3.2 Idiomatic command and sense of style

This is looking for:

- a **good range** of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to AH.
- an essay which shows **control** of language, and which 'flows'.
- a mastery of complex sentences - not just the odd *parce que* clause!
- **good** use of pre-learned material. It will increase your self-confidence if you have pre-learned some expressions for each topic area, but they **must** be relevant to the title of the essay!
- As far as possible, try to **think in French** as you write your essay; this will improve the flow of your writing.

3.3 A planned and orderly expression of ideas

- As in all subjects, your essay should have an introduction, stating the points you intend to develop, a middle section expanding your arguments, and a conclusion summing up your opinion.
- You are allowed to say you don't have a definite opinion so long as you have set out the arguments on both sides.

3.4 Relevance to the subject set

- You **must** study the title of your essay carefully and keep making sure that you are addressing **this** question, and not one which was relevant to an essay you prepared earlier.
- With this in mind, take the time to study **all** the essay topics before choosing the most suitable one.

3.5 A good system to use is a formal argumentative essay

That means an introduction, in which you rephrase the title and say what you are going to look at: this should be about 40 to 50 words long. Follow this up with three paragraphs of 60 words or so each with an argument and counterargument on the topic. Finally, a conclusion of another 40 to 50 words, which follows on from the argument you have given and restates the topic.

Write the plan out in note form (preferably in French) before you start your essay, so you always know where you are going! If you are running out of time, miss out one of the arguments but make sure you get the conclusion written!