HSC examinations in Beginners language courses – advice for students

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# Context

Note: This document provides generic advice only. It is the responsibility of individual teachers to ensure their students are adequately prepared for the HSC examinations.

The advice applies to modern languages only and is current as of June 2020.

Where you see [language], replace this with the language you are studying, for example, French or Japanese.

The Beginners syllabus document is referenced in this advice – you can access the syllabus for your language from the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-languages). Familiarise yourself with the themes and topics.

# How to approach the oral examination

## General information

The oral examinations take place in August or September each year. All languages oral examinations (except for Modern Hebrew) are held on a Saturday. Specific information about your examination will be made available to you approximately 3 weeks before the examination date. You can access the HSC languages oral examinations timetable on the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/key-dates-exam-timetables/hsc-languages-oral-examinations).

The Languages Oral Online Examination Scheduling Function allows your school to schedule the time and venue for your HSC oral examinations. Once you have been scheduled, your school will be able to print a copy of your confirmation sheet from Schools Online. You should also download your confirmation sheet and relevant venue location maps through [Students Online](https://studentsonline.nesa.nsw.edu.au/go/login/).

## Examination specifications

The oral examination is worth 20 marks.

The oral examination will be relating to Objective 1 of the syllabus.

| Objective | Outcomes |
| --- | --- |
| Interacting | A student:  1.1 establishes and maintains communication in [language]  1.2 manipulates linguistic structures to express ideas effectively in [language]  1.3 sequences ideas and information |

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The oral examination will take approximately 5 minutes.

The oral examination is designed to assess your knowledge and skill in using spoken [language] relating to the prescribed syllabus topics from the perspective of **The Personal World**.

The oral examination will take the form of a general, unrehearsed conversation in [language] between yourself and an examiner. The examiner will not be your own teacher.

For most students, the oral examination will be conducted face-to-face with an examiner. However, for some students (for example, those in some rural areas), the oral examination may be conducted via an online platform.

You may not use dictionaries in this section.

## Criteria for assessing performance

In your answers, you will be assessed on how well you:

* understand the questions being asked
* respond accurately, using a variety of strategies to maintain the conversation
* maintain the conversation, without significant pauses or errors
* use an appropriate level of language for context, purpose and audience
* use correct pronunciation and intonation
* demonstrate a range and variety of vocabulary and language structures, expanding your answers beyond simple responses
* use a range of tenses appropriately
* structure, sequence and (where necessary) develop ideas and opinions.

## Preparing for the examination

The best way to prepare for the oral examination is to listen to and speak [language] as much as possible. Practise as much as you can with your teacher and, if possible, your fellow students and [language]-speaking friends.

You can access sample questions for most Beginners language courses on the [department’s website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/languages/s6) to help you practise your skills across a range of topics.

Get into the habit of recording your practice conversations. By doing this, you will become more comfortable with having your speech recorded. Listen to yourself to see which aspects of your speaking skills require further attention, for example, intonation, sentence structure or variety of vocabulary.

Make a summary of key words and phrases for each syllabus topic and sub-topic. Revise these lists regularly and try to incorporate some of the words and phrases into your responses.

Make sure you know how to seek clarification in [language] if you do not understand a question, and how to ask the examiner to repeat a question more slowly.

Visit [NESA’s advice page](https://studentsonline.nesa.nsw.edu.au/go/boardlinks/hscorallanguages/) for more information.

## During the examination

The oral examination is your chance to display your full range of vocabulary and knowledge of [language] structures. You need to be able to adapt this knowledge to different situations.

During the exam, the examiner will not be marking you. Your recorded conversation will be marked at a later date by a team of markers.

You may not use a dictionary or refer to written notes in the oral examination.

It is best to use formal, polite language when addressing the examiner.

You will be asked questions on the prescribed syllabus topics as they relate to the perspective of **The Personal World**.

The number of questions asked is not fixed. If you are able to expand and elaborate on your responses, fewer questions may be asked. The level of difficulty is likely to increase from lower order to higher order within each topic discussed.

Listen to the questions carefully and provide an answer that is relevant to that question. Speak confidently, clearly and at a steady pace.

Try to sound convincing by using appropriate intonation, emphasis and correct pronunciation.

There is no need to panic if you do not understand what the examiner is saying. If you let the examiner know that you do not understand, they will repeat or rephrase the question for you. If you are still having difficulty, the examiner will move onto another topic.

If you make a mistake, just correct yourself and move on. Minor errors are part of natural conversation.

Answer the question directly first to show that you understand it, then expand your response.

Do not learn prepared answers by heart and recite them, regardless of the question of the examiner, otherwise, your response will sound unnatural and forced.

You do not need to tell the truth about your personal world.

# How to approach *Section I – Listening* of the written examination

## Examination specifications

The listening section of the exam is worth 30 marks and takes approximately 40 minutes. It is the first part of the written exam and is designed to assess your knowledge and skill in analysing information from spoken texts.

There will be approximately 10 questions phrased in English relating to Objective 2 of the syllabus.

You may use dictionaries in this section of the exam.

| Objective | Outcomes |
| --- | --- |
| Understanding texts | A student:  2.1 understands and interprets information in texts using a range of strategies  2.2 conveys the gist of and identifies specific information in texts  2.3 summarises the main points of a text  2.4 draws conclusions from or justifies an opinion about a text  2.5 identifies the purpose, context and audience of a text |

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Each question will be based on a spoken text in [language], covering a range of text types, for example, an announcement, a dialogue, a news item, and so on. The texts will relate to the themes and topics prescribed in the syllabus.

The texts will vary in length. You will hear each text twice. There will be a pause between the first and second readings, during which you may make notes. You will be provided time at the end of the second reading to complete your responses.

In your answers, you will be expected to demonstrate understanding of general and specific information from the texts. You may be required to identify information related to the context, purpose and audience of the text, that is, what the text is about, what it is for, and to whom it is aimed.

There will be a range of question types such as short-answer questions that require a response in English or the completion of a table, list or form and objective response questions.

You may use dictionaries in this section of the exam. However, be aware that the pauses provided between the first and second readings and between items are brief.

## Criteria for assessing performance

Markers will use the listening and responding exam to assess how well you identify, analyse, process and respond to spoken [language].

You will be expected to:

* identify general information, main points and specific details
* accurately summarise, draw conclusions, justify an opinion and identify the purpose, context and audience of a text – this requires more than retelling or translating. You may be required to refer to language techniques (with examples), provide evidence to support your answer, draw a conclusion and/or make judgements, with reference to the texts.

## Preparing for the examination

The best way to prepare for the examination is to practise. Take every opportunity to listen to [language] in a variety of contexts, for example audio texts which accompany textbooks, past HSC examinations, news, films and so on. You can access sample listening activities for most languages on the [department’s website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/languages/s6) to help you practise your skills across a range of topics.

Listen actively. Get into the habit of listening for both gist and specific information. Learn to identify the main idea before concentrating on details and learn to recognise how the language is used in different contexts. Practise making notes while listening.

Work through [past HSC examination papers](https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/resources/hsc-exam-papers) for your language.

Develop a list of key words and phrases for each topic and revise regularly.

Finally, practise using your dictionary so that you can look up words quickly.

## During the examination

* Before each text is spoken, read the question for each item and take notice of any key words to try and predict what might be said.
* During the second reading try to identify any details you missed the first time. Jot down any words you do not know and need to understand to answer a question.
* Take notes in the space provided on the exam paper.
* In the time provided after the second reading, process all the information and write your answer clearly. Include all relevant details required to answer the question asked.
* Proofread your answers – make sure that what you write does not contradict anything you have written earlier, check that your answer makes sense and avoid ambiguity in your answers.
* For each question, lines will be provided for you to write your answer. This will give you an idea about how much information you need to give in your answer.
* Whilst 5-6 mark questions may be more challenging, all students should be able to gain some marks.
* Do not be put off if you do not understand an aspect of one of the texts – keep moving and do not let it distract you.
* Make sure you transfer all your notes to the appropriate answer space, as the notes will not be marked.
* If you have any spare time you can go back to an earlier question, for example, to look up essential, unknown words in the dictionary. However, do not dwell on it or you may miss the beginning of the next item.
* Use the dictionary to your advantage. Use it sparingly and only look up words that are vital to your understanding of the passage and/or that will help you answer a question.
* At the end of the exam you can fill in any missing details and make any changes. Do not leave out any questions. You cannot be given marks for blank spaces.
* Make sure that you write legibly. If you need to make changes, cross out words – avoid using correction tape or fluid as it wastes valuable time.

# How to approach *Section II – Reading* of the written examination

## Examination specifications

The reading section of the examination is worth 30 marks.

This section is designed to assess your knowledge and skill in analysing information from written texts and in analysing and exchanging information in response to a text. The texts will be related to the themes and topics prescribed in the syllabus.

You may use dictionaries in this section of the exam.

| Objective | Outcomes |
| --- | --- |
| Understanding texts | A student:  2.1 understands and interprets information in texts using a range of strategies  2.2 conveys the gist of and identifies specific information in texts  2.3 summarises the main points of a text  2.4 draws conclusions from or justifies an opinion about a text  2.5 identifies the purpose, context and audience of a text |

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You will be required to read approximately 5 texts in [language] with a combined word count of approximately:

* 750 words in French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Modern Greek and Spanish
* 800 characters in Chinese
* 1500 *ji* in Japanese
* 1600 *ja* in Korean.

You will be required to demonstrate understanding of written texts. You may have to extract, summarise and/or evaluate information from texts.

Questions will be in English, for responses in English.

## Criteria for assessing performance

In the reading section you will be assessed on your ability to understand written [language]. You will be expected to:

* identify and convey gist
* identify and convey main points
* identify and convey supporting points
* identify and convey specific details
* accurately summarise, interpret and evaluate the information
* provide appropriate information from the text.

## Preparing for the examination

The best way to prepare for this section is to read a wide range of texts and text types from a number of different sources, for example online articles and blogs, newspapers, magazines, brochures and advertisements.

You can access sample reading activities for most languages on the [department’s website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/languages/s6) to help you practise your skills across a range of topics.

Work through [past HSC examination papers](https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/resources/hsc-exam-papers) for your language.

The texts in the exam will be related to the topics prescribed in the syllabus so make sure you are familiar with topic-specific vocabulary.

Being able to use the dictionary will be very useful. Practise looking up words in the dictionary – the faster, the better. Remember to cross-reference words in both sections of the dictionary, as words can have more than one meaning. For example, if you look up how to say a particular word/phrase in [language], then double-check it by looking it up in English (or your first language) too.

## During the examination

* Take note of any heading and illustrations accompanying the text. These often help in gaining an overall sense of the text.
* Read the questions before reading the text. The questions will help you focus on the most relevant information.
* Read the text more than once – the first time you read the text, try to gain a general idea of the content. When you read the text for the second time, mark the section of the text from where you think the answers come.
* Answer the questions fully and provide all relevant information.
* No 2 questions should require the same information.
* Make sure your writing is legible and that your answers make sense.
* Make sure that your answers are relevant to the questions asked. Underlining key words in the questions may help you do this. Commonly occurring words in questions include:
  + analyse
  + comment on
  + compare
  + contrast
  + describe
  + explain
  + give examples
  + how
  + what
  + who
  + why
* The mark allocation and the number of lines provided will give you an idea about how much information you need to give in your answer.
* Try to read for overall understanding before consulting a dictionary. If you have any spare time only look up essential, unknown words in the dictionary.

# How to approach *Section III – Writing in [language]* of the written examination

## Examination specifications

The writing in [language] section of the exam is worth 20 marks and relates to Objective 3 of the syllabus.

You may use dictionaries in this section of the exam.

| Objectives | Outcomes |
| --- | --- |
| Producing texts | A student:  3.1 produces texts appropriate to audience, purpose and context  3.2 structures and sequences ideas and information  3.3 applies knowledge of diverse linguistic structures to convey information and express original ideas in [language]  3.4 applies knowledge of the culture of [language]-speaking communities to the production of texts. |

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This section is designed to assess your ability to express ideas and/or present information and/or opinions through the production of original written texts in [language].

This section consists of 2 parts.

Part A (10 marks)

In Part A, you will be required to respond to 2 short-answer questions. Each question will specify the audience, purpose and context of the response. They are worth 4 marks and 6 marks. They will be phrased in English, and will require a response in [language].

There will be no choice. In total, the length of your 2 responses must be approximately:

* 125 words in French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Modern Greek and Spanish
* 150 characters in Chinese
* 250 *ji* in Japanese
* 300 *ja* in Korean.

Part B (10 marks)

Part B is worth 10 marks and requires a reflective, persuasive or evaluative response in [language]. There will be 2 alternatives from which to choose, both requiring an extended response in the same text type. The questions will be phrased in [language] and English for a response in [language] and will be related to the themes and topics prescribed in the syllabus.

Your response must be approximately:

* 125 words in French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Modern Greek and Spanish
* 150 characters in Chinese
* 250 *ji* in Japanese
* 300 *ja* in Korean.

You may use dictionaries in this section of the exam.

## Criteria for assessing performance

You will be marked on the following criteria, which apply to both writing questions. Remember that in the second question you may need to explain or justify a point of view.

* Content – information and ideas relevant to task.
* Accuracy – knowledge and correct use of grammar and language structures.
* Range of appropriate vocabulary related to the task or topic.
* Range of grammatical structures.
* Ability to follow conventions of text type.
* Ability to structure and sequence ideas logically and coherently.
* Level of language appropriate to content, purpose and audience.
* Fluency – your answer should flow naturally.

## Preparing for the examination

To prepare for this section of the exam you should:

* **Read widely in [language]** – note down interesting phrases, new vocabulary and facts that you will later be able to incorporate into your writing. As you read a wide range of texts and text types you will notice the different features of these text types. Make yourself familiar with the features that distinguish a text type.
* **Learn from your mistakes** – carefully go over work reviewed by your teacher, reading and reflecting on the feedback. If you do not understand something, clarify with your teacher. Keep all your work in a folder and read over earlier pieces to see how much progress you have made. Check that you are not still making the same mistakes.
* **Practise regularly** – write in [language] as much as you can. Get into the habit of always planning your work and putting effort into it. Practise writing under exam conditions by giving yourself a time limit in which to complete a task. Work through [past HSC examination papers](https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/resources/hsc-exam-papers) for your language.
* **Practise your dictionary skills** – be selective in your use of the dictionary. It is always better to use a word or phrase which you are familiar with rather than looking up a new one. Practise using your dictionary so that, if you need to, you can look up words quickly. Remember to crosscheck any words/phrases you look up, as words can have more than one meaning.

## During the examination

* Read the questions carefully and, for the 10-mark question, select the one for which you are best prepared.
* Jot down a rough plan of each response. This will help give your writing direction and structure.
* Try to include a variety of appropriate and relevant phrases. Avoid regurgitating irrelevant phrases that you have memorised and intend to use, regardless of the question.
* Try to make your language as accurate and authentic as possible. Stick to phrases that you have gone over with your teacher. This will help prevent word for word translation from English which sometimes does not convey the same meaning in [language].
* Avoid copying sections from the reading and responding section of the paper – markers will notice.
* Make your cultural references authentic.
* Crosscheck any words/phrases you look up in the dictionary.
* Keep within the suggested word limit for each question. If you greatly exceed the suggested length, you risk the chance of making more mistakes and/or becoming repetitive. You will also use time that could be better spent on another section of the paper.
* Check through your answer at the end. Ensure that you have been consistent with tense and that your language is appropriate for the context, purpose and audience. Have you used correct word order? Could you use synonyms to avoid repetition? Have you used an appropriate level of language?