Languages – HSC Beginners

transcript

(Duration: 27 minutes 41 seconds)

Hello and welcome to this languages video which will look at HSC examinations in Beginners courses. As we go through this presentation, examples have been provided in English. You will need to rework these examples into the language you are studying.

Please be aware that this video supports the following Beginners courses – Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek and Spanish. The HSC examination will have 2 parts, the oral examination and the written examination. The oral examination will be held earlier than the written examination – in August or September, on a Saturday. To access the date of your oral examination, search for ‘HSC oral exam timetable’ and this will take you to NESA timetable of all oral examinations for languages.

The oral examination is worth 20 marks and consists of a 5-minute conversation between you and the examiner. The written examination is worth 80 marks and includes sections for listening, reading and writing. HSC examinations are designed to find out how much you know about the subject matter. It's important to see them as your chance to shine. Let's take a closer look at the oral examination.

As mentioned, the oral examination is worth 20 marks and takes the form of a 5-minute conversation. Although, it may help to think of it more as an interview. Think of the examiner as the person interviewing you about yourself. Your role is to respond with as much relevant information as you can. The examiner is not the person who will mark your exam. He or she is only a facilitator to engage you in conversation. You cannot communicate in English. If you don't understand the question, you may say something like “I'm sorry, could you please repeat the question?” This has to be said in the target language.

You will be asked questions about the individual, yourself and your personal world. Your responses will relate to you and your world, so you will find that no 2 examinations are the same. The amount of questions asked is not an indicator of how the examination is going. It all depends on the depth and breadth of your answers, which we will look at a little bit later. The questions you'll be asked will relate to the prescribed syllabus topics from the perspective of your personal world.

Here are some samples for you to consider for each topic: family life, home and neighbourhood, you may be asked questions about your family, your friends, what your house is like, and your daily routines. People, places and communities may include relationships and your local area. For education and work, you may be asked questions about school, school subjects, teachers, wearing a uniform, post HSC education plans and part time work. Friends, recreation and pastime may include free time, activities hard to manage, study and leisure activities with friends, sports and interests such as cooking, fashion or social media. Holidays, travel and tourism could include exchanges, ideal holiday destinations and where you've travelled to. For future plans and aspirations, you may be asked about plans for schoolies or post HSC, travel, study plans and your dream job. Keep your answers anonymous. For example, don't provide full names of people or your school name.

During the oral examination you can expect the examiner to begin with a simple question. This will give you time to adjust. Expect to be questioned on a number of topics within the 5-minute time frame. You may not be questioned on all topics. This is quite normal. Expect to be questioned about events or plans in the past, present and future, as examiners will be scaffolding the conversation to ensure you can show you know how to use these tenses. Finally, expect the level of difficulty for questions to increase from lower order to higher order with a simple question on a particular topic, slowly climbing to questions still on the same topic, that require a more sophisticated response.

Let's take a look. Think of it as a spiral working from a wide base up into a more targeted point. Let's look at an example. We’ll look at this in English, but imagine it in the language you are studying. The examiner might start off with a broad question such as “Which subjects are you studying at school?”. You answer with, “I study French, Japanese history, English and mathematics in the target language”. As you can see, it's a simple question which only requires you to recall information.

Next, the examiner might follow up with a question which narrows in on details, such as, “Why did you choose to learn French and Japanese?”. A sample answer might be “I chose these 2 languages because I was always interested in learning a language”. This follow up question requires you to justify your decision providing a reason for choosing to study 2 languages. You are also using the past tense.

Next, the examiner may ask an even more targeted question, such as “Do you plan to continue studying these languages at university?”. A sample answer could be, “I don't know. It might be difficult for me. Perhaps I'll do one language instead of two”. Question 3 is even more challenging. You need to talk about your plans, including an explanation. This example illustrates how the examiner will move from simpler to more complex questions within any given topic. The idea is to support you in showing how well you can manipulate the language structures and vocabulary you know.

Some students find the D-A-R scaffold helpful when responding to questions, giving a description and action and a reflection. Let's take a look at how it works. The question is “What do you do in your spare time?”. Start with the description, “In my spare time I like to go out with my friends”. Then provide an action, “We go to the movies or we eat at a cafe”. Finally, reflect. For example, “Because I have so many exams this year, I don't have a lot of spare time. I'm looking forward to the holidays after the HSC”.

You might ask yourself, “How can I prepare?”. Remember, the oral examination is about your personal world, so let's look at some things you could consider. These are just examples to get you started. Think about your free time activities, what you like and don't like, who you spend your free time with. Be prepared to talk about your family. Who's in your family? How would you describe each family member and how do you get along? Can you talk about school, for example? Which subjects are you studying and why? Which teachers are your favourite? Do you like to wear uniform? Where do you live? Do you live in a house or a flat in the city or in the country? What do you like about your neighbourhood? Would you prefer to live somewhere else? Do you play sport? Which one do you play? Where do you play?

You'll be asked about things that have happened, so you can use the past tense, for example: Where have you travelled to? What did you do there? You'll also be asked about your future plans, so make sure you can express yourself in the future tense. You may also be asked about having a job or pocket money and what you spend your money on. Think about what you are all about, what you do, what you like, what you don't like, what your plans are, and so on. Then plan for the vocabulary and grammatical structures you need to express these in the target language. Learn to use a range of tenses so you can describe past, current and future experiences. Learn the vocabulary that applies to your life experiences and personal world and build your own personal sentences. Prepare descriptions, preferences, opinions and justifications for all possible scenarios. Plan thoroughly and make note of and practice the structures and vocabulary you might use. Keep a checklist to ensure you are using a broad range of language skills without being too repetitive.

On the screen is an example of a simple planner you might like to use to brainstorm and then add language such as grammar, opinions, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and sentence starters to check you are covering a variety of language structures and vocabulary. Practise responding to questions from different people’s perspectives. For example, in the third person, “My mum thinks that I will be a great musician”. In your responses, showcase your range of accurate vocabulary and structures. Shine with simple yet effective sentence structures. Know your vocabulary and how to pronounce it. Link your sentences with a variety of conjunctions. For example, “I like to play tennis, but I prefer jogging”. Respond with a high level of grammatical accuracy. Sequence your responses with time markers. For example, ‘yesterday’, ‘next year’ and ‘then’. Show your skills with verb tenses. The examination is designed to test how well you manipulate language. In other words, it's about how well you respond on the spot by putting the sentences together spontaneously. This means you will not be able to rote learn slabs of information. If you do, the examiner will divert you from what you have prepared and change the course of the conversation. However, this does not mean you can't prepare. Prepare vocabulary on the topics and practice manipulating sentences so that you can use them in different scenarios.

In your answers, include both depth and breadth. Let's take a look at the difference. Depth. Depth is when your response explores the how, the why, and to what extent. How do you add depth? To add depth to your responses, provide explanations and justifications of ideas, opinions and preferences. Breadth. Breadth means talking about specific examples in greater detail. How do you add breadth? In your answers, avoid listing. Instead, explore further aspects of a particular event, idea, or situation, such as what happened, where it happened, when it happened, and who was involved. A further comment on how you feel or how the people feel about the situation is a good way to add greater breadth. We looked at the spiral approach to questions earlier, exploring depth and breadth will support you to succeed with this approach.

To develop confidence and fluency, speak the language you are learning as much as possible with your classmates and your teacher. Expose yourself to the language. Watch movies on SBS or listen to the news. Give yourself a question and record a spontaneous one-minute answer to it. Listen to the recording to identify areas you can develop, such as pronunciation, fluency, and content. Ask your teacher for feedback. Find a partner to have a 5-minute conversation with once or twice a week. Ask each other spontaneous questions and provide detailed answers. This will help you think on the spot in the target language. Give each other feedback on your responses. You must use the language. You must make mistakes and learn from them. Even in English we make mistakes. The goal is not perfection, but being able to communicate as best you can.

Some final words of advice in preparing for your oral examination. Before the exam, plan, learn and practise the language you will need and ensure you have a good night sleep the night before and a healthy breakfast on the day. During the exam, don't worry if you make mistakes, just keep going like you would in a normal conversation. And don't forget to ask for clarification in the target language if necessary.

Let's move on to listening, which is the first section in the written examination. It is worth 30 marks. Time management is essential. Allow approximately 40 minutes to complete this section and then move on to the next section. This is very important because no one will come to tell you that it's time to move on to Section 2, and if you don't do this, you will start eating into the time that you need for the reading and writing sections. In the listening section, there will be approximately 7 to 10 questions phrased in English. Read the questions carefully in advance so you know what to listen for. You will hear each text twice. Listen for the gist and main ideas, and don't worry about a word you don't understand. Usually, the meaning of the whole text is not dependent on a single word. There will be a pause after the first reading, take notes. You must learn the art of note taking and to listen for key information used. The right-hand margin, it's there for you and what you write there will not be marked. Listen to the second reading and answer the question. There will be another longer pause before the next question is read out. Transfer all the relevant information from the margin into the answer space, otherwise it will not be counted.

You are allowed a dictionary in the written examination, including the listening section. Use it wisely. Only look up words which are essential to your response if you need to. Answer all the questions. There will be at least one question worth 5 marks and this type of question is more challenging. However, all candidates should be able to gain some marks. Even if you are unsure, make an intelligent guess based upon your understanding of the text as a whole. Avoid leaving any blanks. Persevere, answer all questions to the best of your ability.

The best way to prepare for the listening section of the examination is through practice. Listen to past HSC papers and attempt the questions. This can be found on the NESA website with audio files and answers, so you can correct them yourself. Looking through past papers will help you learn how to listen for the key information that each question requires. Becoming an efficient note taker helps you with your timing for the exam. Attempt practice questions from the department's website. You'll need to navigate to your language and then to the Beginners course. Transcripts and answers are provided for you. Immerse yourself in the language when watching films, news and so on. Note vocabulary that is new. Look it up later or you may be able to get the meaning from the subtitles. Practice with note taking and dictionary use, [they] will be useful skills during the exam. Keep a vocabulary list for each of the topics. Add to your list regularly and refer to it when needed, learn it. Learn verb conjugations, and revise them often. Use the verbs in context as many times as possible.

Section 2, Reading. We will now explore the [reading] part of the examination which is worth 30 marks. The reading section will have approximately 5 texts written in the language you are learning. You will be required to answer questions based on these texts. All questions must be answered in English. There will be at least one question worth 5 marks where you will have to show global understanding as well as details. Answer as clearly and as fully as you can. You will be required to demonstrate how well you understand the written text. Remember, the greater the value of the question, the greater the level of difficulty. Again, the level of difficulty will increase and you will find that the first comprehension is easier than the next. Look for key words. What is the question asking you to do? Do you need to justify? Do you need to contrast? At the start, read the title of each text and read the questions. Then read the text. By having read the title and the questions you will already have some idea what the text is about. Use a highlighter to underline keywords in each question. Get the gist of the text only using a dictionary if needed. Be guided by the mark allocation for each question. Make sure you look at the value of the question and manage your time accordingly. Don't spend too much time on a question that is worth one mark and remember the greater the value of the question, the greater the level of difficulty. You are not awarded marks for how well you express your response in English. As long as your response is clear and includes all the relevant information, you will receive the allocated marks.

When writing your responses, keep in mind that the questions, particularly the earlier ones, often follow the order of the text. Different questions should not be answered by the same information. If you find yourself repeating the same information in another question, it is most likely that you have overlooked or missed other important information. The amount of space provided for you to write is a guide to the length of your response. Remember to expand your responses where required. For example, give reasons to justify your opinion and support your answers by clearly linking your response to evidence from the text. Finally, attempt every question. Look for keywords in the question. What is the question asking? Is it asking me “How?”, Is it asking me “What?”. Why is it asking me to summarise? Always read the question carefully.

And now let's look at the last section of the examination, the writing section, which is worth 20 marks. The writing section contains Part A and Part B. 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. The first question is worth 4 marks and the second question is worth 6 marks. The questions will be phrased in English and will require a response in the target language. You can see the length of the required responses on the screen for your language. Each question will specify an audience, purpose and context for the response. Part B is worth 10 marks and requires a reflective, persuasive or evaluative response in the target 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 the target language and English, for a response in the target language. Once again, you can see the length of the required response on the screen for your language. And the question will once again specify audience, purpose and context. Markers assess your writing according to strict marking guidelines, such as how well you write a text, which is appropriate to context, purpose and audience. Demonstrate the relevance of your information and ideas. Structure and sequence your information and ideas. Demonstrate control of a range of language structures and vocabulary in the language you are studying.

To prepare for this section of the examination. Ask for your teacher’s help to select some of the writing tasks. Practise planning. Planning is an essential part of writing. It allows you to sequence your ideas and to address the question. Regular planning will also give you confidence in your ability to produce a cohesive [response] and plan text. Write and submit your task to your teacher for feedback. Rewrite your task, taking into account the feedback. Writing improves with repetition. Do not leave it too late to gain the required confidence.

Before we finish, I'd like to draw your attention to 2 of the websites I've mentioned. Firstly, the Department of Education has a dedicated website section for Stage 6 languages. You will find information and resources for a range of Beginners courses, including advice on approaching the HSC, sample speaking questions and simple listening, reading and writing practice tasks. Secondly, the NESA website includes your syllabus and exam packs for your course, including past HSC examinations, marking criteria which will help you get a sense of what markers are looking for and what is required of you, HSC markers feedback from previous exams. This feedback is designed to guide preparation for future examinations. Feedback includes an overview of the qualities of better responses. With a little bit of effort and practice each day, you can build your language skills for success in the HSC. Seek help from your teacher. Build support networks with your peers and reward yourself for your progress and achievement! On behalf of the Languages and Culture team at the New South Wales Department of Education, I wish you all the best for your HSC and your future!

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