Conducting and marking HSC-style oral examinations – advice for Beginners and Continuers

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**Note: Text shown in *italics* would be in [language].**

# Accessing the latest information

To access the latest information, visit <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/covid-19/coronavirus-advice>

Contact the COVID-19 support team at [covid19support@nesa.nsw.edu.au](mailto:covid19support@nesa.nsw.edu.au) or on   
1300 138 323.

# Background

For 2021, teachers will provide marks for their HSC students’ oral language exams.

The oral mark you provide can be:

* your students’ **trial** oral exam mark, if your school has run or is planning to run a trial
* based on an **estimate** – this estimate can be predicative (using your professional judgement), if your students have not sat an oral assessment recently
* from an **HSC-style oral exam**, if this best meets the needs of your students and your school’s context.

Teachers may have their students sit the exam by phone, online or at school (where permitted) in line with NSW Health advice, at a time that suits their local needs.

# Conducting an HSC-style oral exam

The oral exam is a conversation in the style of an interview. The exam is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability to talk about a broad range of topics with varying degrees of depth and breadth, in a conversational manner.

Questions must only refer to the syllabus content in relation to syllabus topics and syllabus outcomes. They must be clear and unambiguous.

Your role as the ‘examiner’ is to conduct a valid and reliable exam.

A **valid** exam assesses what it is designed to assess – a student’s ability to integrate knowledge, understanding and skills in spoken language which relates to the prescribed syllabus topics from the perspective of the personal world.

A **reliable** exam measures learning consistently – in other words, the results would be reproduced if the exam were repeated under the same conditions.

Your exam should also:

* be free from bias
* provide evidence that accurately represents a student's knowledge, understanding and skills
* be inclusive of and accessible for all students.

## Before the exam

As you plan for the exam, remember that the HSC oral exam assesses the outcomes listed below. If you are conducting an HSC-style oral exam, it is important your students have the opportunity to demonstrate their achievement against these outcomes.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Beginners outcomes | Continuers outcomes |
| 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 | 1.1 uses a range of strategies to maintain communication  1.2 conveys information appropriate to context, purpose and audience  1.3 exchanges and justifies opinions and ideas  1.4 reflects on aspects of past, present and future experience |

Make sure you are familiar with the marking guidelines for your course, including the terminology used, within the context of an oral exam:

* [Beginners marking guidelines](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-languages/beginners/marking-guidelines)
* [Continuers marking guidelines](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-languages/continuers/marking-guidelines).

(Note that ‘features to enhance communication’ may also include pronunciation and tones.)

Before the exam, prepare:

* introductory questions for each topic
* a range of questions covering each syllabus topic as a guide to direct the flow of the conversation, ensuring questions:
  + are open-ended
  + vary in length and sophistication
  + explore grammatical forms relevant to the syllabus, including a range of tenses
  + bring in different perspectives.

## During the exam

Use your pre-prepared questions as a guide only. Let the student’s response guide your next question.

Allow opportunities for students to:

* respond to a variety of topics that relate to the student and other people
* manipulate the language, going beyond listing and basic information
* explore a topic for depth and breadth so they can showcase what they have learned – this does not mean allowing student to repeat chunks of rote-learned language
* express and justify opinions
* use a range of tenses.

Consider a spiral approach, starting with a broad question, then narrowing in on more detail. For example:

* *What subjects do you study at school?*
* *Why did you choose to study [language]?*
* *Do you think you will study [language] after the HSC?*

Avoid:

* exploring areas and issues that are sensitive and inappropriate for students, including questions relating to COVID-19 and lockdowns
* questions that require responses that go beyond the scope of the syllabus in relation to language structures, vocabulary and topics
* prompting your students to answer and providing any English words
* correcting your students
* talking too much – you are only facilitating the conversation.

In the event that you feel a student is reproducing rote-learned chunks of text, find an appropriate point to interrupt immediately. Remember you are the examiner and you control the oral exam and lead the conversation. Allowing students to dictate the direction of the conversation may negatively impact their performance.

If you do need to interrupt a student:

* exercise care
* wait for the student to finish the sentence and quickly change the direction of the conversation by interjecting with another perspective, or change the topic using one of your introductory questions for a new topic.

If a student does not answer a question:

1. repeat the question
2. rephrase it using simpler language
3. if they still do not answer, say something like *‘Let’s move on’* and introduce a new topic.

## Additional support

Join the [Languages statewide staffroom](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=muagBYpBwUecJZOHJhv5kSNaKRC4ClVDiPgZI5jjt3lUQ1pMWVRSU0kzWExaMEIyVFg5VlJPVkRVRyQlQCN0PWcu) to access direct support from the Languages and Culture team and your teaching colleagues (for NSW public school teachers).

Access practice speaking question, by topic from the [Stage 6 section](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/languages/s6) of the languages curriculum website – you can use this as a basis to generate your own questions.

Advice documents to support students to prepare for the oral and written HSC examinations:

* [HSC examinations in Beginners language courses – advice for students](https://hschub.nsw.edu.au/languages-items/advice-for-beginners-languages-students)
* [HSC examinations in Continuers language courses – advice for students](https://hschub.nsw.edu.au/languages-items/advice-for-continuers-languages-students).

# Marking an HSC-style oral exam

Your role as the ‘marker’ is to:

* assess your students’ performance
* allocate marks according to the [Beginners marking guidelines](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-languages/beginners/marking-guidelines) or [Continuers marking guidelines](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-languages/continuers/marking-guidelines).

It is important to understand the marking guidelines and identify main characteristics expected in each range and between ranges – it may help to highlight the key points

When assessing performance in the oral exams, look for the extent your student demonstrates:

* capacity to maintain communication
* relevance and depth of information, opinions and ideas
* accuracy of vocabulary and sentence structures
* variety and appropriateness of vocabulary and language structures
* sequencing of information
* clarity of expression – pronunciation, stress and intonation.

## Preparing for marking

Begin by reading the marking guidelines and consider how to interpret them. You may want to refer to the [NESA Standards Materials](https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/resources/hsc-standards-materials). The packages are quite old (2002 for Continuers, and 2009 for Beginners), but if you are not sure where to start when it comes to aligning your students’ grades, it might be worth a look.

Clarify the meaning of key words in the guidelines that might be open for interpretation such as ‘Converses **effectively** by exchanging relevant information, opinions and comment’. Define what is ‘effectively’ in the context of spoken language.

Listen to as many exams as possible before marking and regularly engage with the guidelines. If you can, practise with past examples from colleagues, which have been de-identified.

Listen for linguistic features and characteristics found in the different ranges of the marking guidelines.

Engage in discussion/consultation about standards and performance to ensure consistency of marking (for example borderline grades). If possible, try corporate (pilot) marking first with another teacher.

## During marking

Impartiality and removal of all bias are important. Focus on each student’s performance against the marking guidelines and not the effort they make.

Find evidence to support your judgement. For example sophistication of language, use of time markers, sequencing of ideas and so on.

When you first listen to each student’s responses, do not allocate a mark. Instead, consult the marking guidelines and place the overall response within a range – what aspects of the response can you see in that range? Next, ascertain if it is the lower or higher mark of that range. Finally, with your evidence and unbiased judgement, allocate a mark.

Be mindful of self-moderation. If there are too many exams to mark, you may become inconsistent. Check back over exams that have been marked to ensure that responses marked at different times have been treated similarly.

## Recommendations

* Consider marking with another teacher to minimise subjectivity. You can seek support via the Languages statewide staffroom, networks, the Languages and Culture team or other teachers.
* By working with another teacher, you are able to double mark responses, reviewing:
  + consistency of judgement
  + borderline grades
  + difficult or conflicting grades.