

2021 VCE Armenian oral external assessment report

General comments

The VCE Armenian oral examination assesses students' knowledge and skills in using spoken language. The examination has two sections – a conversation of approximately 7 minutes, during which students converse with the assessors about their personal world, and a discussion of approximately 8 minutes.

It should be noted that during the oral examination:

- students may be asked a variety of questions of varying levels of difficulty. Questions may also be asked in a different order from the one students anticipate
- assessors may interrupt students to ask questions during either section of the examination; this should be regarded as a normal process in a discussion
- assessors may also repeat or rephrase questions
- normal variation in assessor body language is acceptable.

Students are reminded that they must be prepared to use language spontaneously in unrehearsed situations. Students are not expected to be 'experts'; they are expected to have learnt strategies in order to respond to unexpected questions. It would be valuable for students to learn phrases such as, 'I have not studied this aspect of the subtopic, but I think ...', 'I don't know, but I feel ...' and 'I am not sure about this question, but I know ...'.

Students will be assessed in both the conversation and the discussion in communication, content and language. The criteria are published on the VCAA website. It is important that all teachers and students be familiar with the criteria and descriptors, and that students use them as part of their examination preparation. This will help students to engage in a lively and interesting exchange with assessors. Although there are similarities between the assessment criteria for the conversation and discussion sections of the examination, the criteria assess two very different aspects of performance. Students who are well prepared are generally able to demonstrate their abilities and proficiency in the language.

All students who presented for the 2021 Armenian oral examination were well prepared. Students conversed using appropriate constructs and the correct register consistent with appropriate Armenian social norms, such as the plural form of personal pronouns for teachers and elders (e.g. դուք, ձեր, ձեզ) throughout the examination.

Sentence construction was sufficiently complex and sophisticated where appropriate. Pronunciation was clear and accurate with audible utterances, crisp consonants and appropriate intonation and stress.

Discussion subtopics were well researched and well prepared. The vocabulary range used was rich and quite extensive without borrowing any foreign words. Most responses had no unnatural pauses and were both logical and spontaneous.

Specific information

Section 1 – Conversation

Section 1 consists of a general conversation about the student's personal world, for example, school and home life, family and friends, interests and aspirations. It is an organic conversation about the student's personal world. These examples provide students with a basis for preparing a range of interesting and engaging ideas about their personal world, so that they can engage in a spontaneous discussion with the assessors about things that interest them.

A broad range of subtopics was covered in the conversation including family background, structure and origin, personal issues, career aspirations, hobbies, travel plans or experiences, part-time employment, future plans and the impact of COVID-19 on their lives.

All students engaged the assessors confidently with direct, highly relevant and spontaneous responses. Students were comfortable in describing their personal situation, schooling and subject selections as well as recreational activities. Students elaborated on their opinions with reasons and justification. There was a strong sense of identity, self-awareness and belonging to the Armenian community. Students also wanted to discuss current events in Armenia.

Assessors were satisfied with the depth, breadth and complexity of the conversations. False starts were rare, and the use of self-correction, clarification and elaboration indicated excellent preparation, awareness and application of repair strategies and confidence to influence the direction of the conversation.

Students need to remember to use the correct form of irregular declensions with the commonly used nouns of kinship, for example, հորս, մորս, քրոջս, եղբորս instead of հայրիկիս, մայրիկիս, քոյրիկիս, եղբայրիս (father, mother, sister, brother).

Section 2 – Discussion

Following the conversation, the student indicates to the assessors the subtopic chosen for detailed study and, in no more than one minute, briefly introduces the main focus of their subtopic, alerting assessors to any objects brought to support the discussion. Suitable objects include photographs, maps or diagrams, and should include no text or very little text. The support material must have minimal writing, which includes only a heading, name or title.

The one-minute introduction should give assessors an indication of the area of discussion. The purpose is for students to briefly introduce their chosen subtopic; it is not an opportunity for students to list all their information or texts.

The focus of the discussion is to explore aspects of the language and culture of communities in which Armenian is spoken, with the student being expected to make reference to the texts studied.

The choice of subtopic for the detailed study is very important. It should be an engaging subtopic that motivates students to become familiar with the content and vocabulary needed, and to elaborate on information, ideas and opinions. It is important that students and teachers select materials for the detailed study carefully so that students are exposed to a variety of views. The type of texts used by students should vary in complexity and be in Armenian so that students can become aware of key vocabulary related to their subtopic. Students should be able to draw on the texts they have studied and make links between the texts to support, expand on and explore opinions and ideas on the subtopic and different aspects of the texts. Students should be able to relate this to the Armenian-speaking community.

Subtopics for the detailed study included, but were not limited to, the invention of the Armenian alphabet in 301 CE and the work of the holy translators, the designation by UNESCO of Western Armenian as a

'definitely endangered' language, the Armenian Genocide and its significance to the Armenian nation and diaspora, the Pan-Armenian Games, the Hayastan All Armenian Fund and its worldwide current fundraising efforts, the tree-planting initiative in Armenia, the formation and structure of the Armenian community in Australia, and the links between Armenia and the diaspora.

Students scored highly in the discussion due to more extensive preparation and mastery of their chosen subtopics. Students utilised a rich array of sources for research, and this thorough preparation enabled them to respond to open-ended questions. This also allowed for a free-flowing discussion where students demonstrated the capacity to engage the assessors by giving appropriate responses and influencing the direction of the discussion.

Students engaged the assessors with good expression and sentence construction. It was encouraging to see students asking questions to clarify points discussed. Answers to open questions demonstrated students' affinity with the subtopic area and mastery of most of the detail of the subject matter. Additionally, probing questions were handled spontaneously, logically and linguistically correct.

The effort and commitment students had made to present for the oral examination was evident, for which students are to be commended.