2021 VCE Dutch oral external assessment report

General comments

The Dutch 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.

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.

Students overall engaged well with the assessors during the conversation. They usually readily provided information and often elaborated on their answers without further prompting required. Students who were less forthcoming with information had a little more difficulty in this section, requiring more support from the assessors.

Students generally had a well-developed vocabulary to discuss their personal lives, employing appropriate tenses, registers and tones to talk about the everyday subtopics that arose. Some grammatical and syntactical issues that came up repeatedly included:

* simplistic use of tenses
* incorrect word order or sentence structure
* incorrect use of definite articles (de and het)
* wrong conjugations of verbs for the subject or tense
* incorrect Anglicisms
* use of English words.

Section 2 – Discussion

Following the conversation, the student indicates to the assessor(s) 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 Dutch 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 Dutch 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 Dutch-speaking community.

Most students were well prepared for the discussion and had studied their chosen subtopic thoroughly. Many students required little support and elaborated on their answers with confidence and without hesitation. More confident students were able to make an individual response to the content of their detailed study in a way that was engaging and gave greater depth and meaning to their responses. Students with a less extensive knowledge of their subtopic required more support in the way of input from the assessors and were sometimes unable to respond to follow-up questions.

Many students were confident in using sophisticated vocabulary, tenses and phrases in the discussion. This aided them both in keeping the discussion going smoothly and in delving into more complex aspects of their detailed study. Some examples of Dutch idioms that were used to good effect include ‘over koetjes en kalfjes praten’ (small talk) and ‘de appel valt niet ver van de boom’ (the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree). Conversely, students who had a more limited vocabulary and a weaker grasp of tenses struggled to answer the assessors’ questions with any great depth or to elaborate on their subtopic.

It is very important for students to read, watch and listen to a wide variety of content about their subtopic of choice for the detailed study, as well as absorb a lot of Dutch content more generally. It is also paramount for them to talk with others about their subtopic throughout the year in the lead-up to the oral examination. This will help them to become familiar with the vocabulary required and to gain confidence in deploying more complex tenses and sophisticated, authentic turns of phrase.