

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

JUNE 2008

FRENCH

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FRENCH

GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

MAY/JUNE 2008

GENERAL COMMENTS

Performance in the 2008 examination was not as good as in 2007, although there were many candidates displaying fair to excellent levels of logistic competence, spontaneity and grammatical accuracy.

Teachers are encouraged to continue exposing students to authentic samples of language from electronic and paper-based sources and to simulate real-life situations in which students may practise the target language. Teachers must continue their good work in engaging students in language learning by making it relevant, personal and meaningful for the students.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

This paper, which is composed of two sections, tested candidates' ability to listen to and understand a number of aural items in the target language and to read and understand a number of written items. Both sections require candidates to have sufficient mastery of essential grammar and vocabulary. The performance was comparable to that of previous years.

Paper 02 – Free Response

Section I- Directed Situations

This section tested candidates' ability to respond in French to a series of situations described in English and requiring written responses. All the situations drew on functions/notions and settings and topics that could be within the experience of a 16-year-old candidate. Furthermore, the situations allowed for performance over the six grade bands, with some items within the reach of all candidates, while some discriminated in favour of the stronger candidates.

Points to watch

- Candidates must read each situation carefully, paying close attention to what is required. They must focus on the key words in order to respond to the function or notion tested. They must choose the correct time frame/tenses and the appropriate register (formal/informal) for each situation.
- Candidates must try to be concise in their answers. Far too often, candidates' tendency to write long, convoluted sentences results in the loss of marks.
- Candidates are reminded to number the situations as on the question paper, even if they answer the situations in random order.
- Candidates should NOT write each situation on a new page.

* An asterisk (*) indicates incorrect form, spelling or structure.

SITUATION	FUNCTION/NOTION	SETTING & TOPICS
1	Expressing the wish to receive a particular item	Email to aunt
2	Naming an event and announcing the date/day when it will take place	Poster at school
3	Making a suggestion for a birthday outing	Email to a friend
4	Date/time & Weather + future tense	Newspaper item
5	Indicating a change of plans	Note to parents
6	Expressing apology for absence	Note to teacher
7	Expressing past action and the reasons for that action	Note to a relative
8	Expressing wishes for better health/speedy recovery	Card to teacher
9	Expressing a positive reaction/comment about something	Visitors' book in a public place
10	Expressing prohibition for certain persons	Notice in a public place

Situation 1

The situation of the email to an aunt required candidates to make a request for a named item. Answers ranged from the highly idiomatic: *“Une voiture, ça ferait l’affaire.”* To the more prosaic *“Je voudrais une nouvelle robe.”*

Situation 2

Some candidates produced appropriate and grammatically correct poster type information such as the following:

- 1) *Activité: Fête de Noël*
Heure: 7 heures du soir.
- 2) *Grande boum –la semaine prochaine*

An answer such as *“Il y aura une fête de Noël samedi prochain à partir de sept heures”* was also acceptable.

Situation 3

This item required candidates to offer a suggestion for an outing in celebration of a friend’s birthday. The expected answer should have included the suggestion and the reason for the outing, for example, *“Si on allait au cinéma pour ton anniversaire?”*

Situation 4

As was the case in situation 2, an answer in note form was as appropriate as an answer written as a complete sentence. The essential elements were 1) time reference, i.e. indication of day/date etc/ 2) the weather (future form). The following candidate was awarded full marks:

*** An asterisk (*) indicates incorrect form, spelling or structure.**

Demain **TIME REFERENCE**

il fera du soleil **EXPRESSION OF WEATHER (future form)**

donc porter vos lunettes de soleil. **ADDITIONAL ELEMENT**.

That candidate would have received the same mark for “*Demain il fera du soleil.*” The additional element “*donc porter vos lunettes de soleil*” was in this case **appropriate** and **correct** but **unnecessary**. A less proficient candidate could easily have lost marks if any one of these elements was incorrect, for example, an incorrect possessive article, the spelling of *lunettes*, or the spelling of *soleil*.

Situation 5

Some candidates had difficulty as they attempted to produce a literal translation of the kind, “There has been a change in X’s flight...” therefore, they produced inappropriate and incorrect sentences, unsure of how to express change and not knowing the word for “flight.” The candidate who simply said “Jean-Paul arrive maintenant à 19h” appropriately and correctly conveyed the change of plans with reference to the arrival time.

Situation 6

A number of candidates seemed to forget that since the writer of the note was the mother, a feminine adjective (*désolée* ≠ *désolé*) was needed. Some candidates nevertheless managed to produce very solid responses, for example, “*Je regrette l’absence de ma fille, mais elle était malade.*” Another good response was, “*Excusez ma fille, elle a eu une éruption cutanée.*” Both these answers contained an element of regret/apology and an indication of the absence/illness leading to the absence.

Situation 7

This situation was generally well done by most candidates, except those who confused “*emprunter*” and “*prêter*.” A variety of creative responses explained what was borrowed and why.

Situation 8

A surprisingly large number of candidates did not know how to express wishes for a (speedy) recovery or improved health. The candidate who wrote “*J’espère que vous serez en pleine forme bientôt*” received full marks, having appropriately and correctly rendered the necessary elements of the situation.

Situation 9

This situation demonstrated the importance of having students practise supplying answers that are appropriate and grammatically correct. Candidates who gain full marks only do so if their answer is first of all appropriate, then grammatically correct. A correct but inappropriate answer cannot be rewarded. More often, it is the case that the response is appropriate but incorrect in some way—subject/verb agreement; noun/ adjective agreement; tense; mood and so on. The candidate who wrote “*J’adore les photos de la maison de Fidel Castro, *ce sont vraiment *magnifique*” was rewarded for appropriateness, but the use of ‘ce’ instead of ‘elles’ and the singular “*magnifique*” instead of “*magnifiques*” was penalized.

Situation 10

Over the past few years, candidates seemed to be developing considerable skill in expressing interdiction. This year, although a number of clumsy expressions re-appeared, a fair number of candidates managed successfully.

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The following is an example of the script of a candidate who scored almost total marks in this question:

1. *Je voudrais un ordinateur pour mon anniversaire s'il te plaît.*
2. *Il y aura un tournoi de football le mois prochain.*
3. *Nous povons avoir une boum à la plage*^.*
4. *Demain il fera beau.*
5. *Le vol de Marc va arriver à sept heures et demie ce soir au lieu d'à cinq heures.*
6. *Je suis désolée, mais Trent n'a pas pu aller à l'école parce qu'il était malade.*
7. *J'ai emprunté ton manteau pour aller au cinéma.*
8. *Nous espérons que vous *soyez mieux bientôt.*
9. *La peinture de Dunstan St. Omer était magnifique.*
10. *Nous ne permettons pas *les personnes *moins de 18 ans d'entrer.*

• INCORRECT RESPONSES

CANDIDATE ANSWER	CORRECTIONS	CORRECT RESPONSE
3. <i>Nous pouvons avoir une boum à la plage* ^.</i>	The question asked candidates to suggest what he or she and the friend might do to celebrate the occasion. This email omitted birthday, which was an essential element.	<i>Nous pouvons avoir une boum à la plage pour fêter ton anniversaire.</i>
8. <i>Nous espérons que vous *soyez mieux bientôt.</i>	The candidate made two errors in the verb following <i>espérer</i> . First of all, the wrong verb was selected – “être” instead of “aller.” Secondly, the wrong mood was used. “Espérer” is NOT FOLLOWED BY THE SUBJUNCTIVE . It is followed by the indicative, either the present or as here the future.	<i>Nous espérons que vous irez mieux bientôt.</i>
10. <i>Nous ne permettons pas *les personnes* moins de 18 ans d'entrer.</i>	The candidate omitted the preposition “à” after “permettre.” The preposition “de” was needed before “moins de.”	<i>Nous ne permettons pas aux personnes de moins de 18 ans d'entrer.</i>

Section II – Letter/Composition

This section tested candidates’ ability to produce a piece of French of about 130-150 words based on an outline given in English.

The answers in Section II ranged from excellent to poor. The letter was the more popular item. A number of very proficient candidates did the composition. This selection required candidates to show greater prowess with past tenses in order to narrate in the past. Each selection required candidates to produce vocabulary appropriate to the situation described.

The recurring difficulty in the correct and sustained use of the appropriate second person problems requires teachers’ urgent attention. Far too many candidates are using “*tu*” and “*vous*” to refer to the same person. Sometimes even very proficient candidates are inconsistent and may use the correct address form, for example, “*tu*” in writing to a relative, but then err in their choice of possessive adjectives, that is using “*votre/vos*” when “*ton/ta/tes*” were required; or using “*s’il vous plait*” instead of “*s’il te plait*.”

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Points to watch

- The practice of going beyond the word limit is very widespread. **CANDIDATES MUST OBEY THE LIMIT OF 130-150 WORDS. THEY ARE PENALIZED FOR EXCEEDING THE WORD LIMIT.**
- Candidates sometimes include learnt chunks of language that are inappropriate and irrelevant, often at the expense of responding appropriately to the situation being tested. This practice must be avoided.
- Candidates must plan their work carefully. The lack of planning was especially evident in the composition.
- Candidates need to develop the habit of proofreading their written work. Frequent spelling errors and omissions may be avoided with just a little more care.
- Candidates must think of the most common mistakes found at this level and try very hard to eliminate them from their writing.
- Candidates should avoid using direct speech unless they have mastered inversion of the verb after direct speech.
- Candidates who do the letter must be reminded to include the **place and date**.

Candidates' use of tenses, even the present tense, was problematic this year. Errors noted ranged from the manipulation of basic grammatical structures to the spelling of common vocabulary items. Too many candidates still resort to translating literally from English. They should be encouraged to think in French as much as it is possible within the well defined areas of vocabulary and settings which they are expected to know. Too many students seem to lack the basic vocabulary to talk about the home and school life, daily routines, hobbies and interests and so on. Far too many candidates are still producing language of the kind:

**J'ai eu non fois rester....*

**Je séjour à la maison*

**Volonté toi aide moi*

Despite this, some candidates do produce rich and idiomatic language such as the following:

J'ai téléchargé beaucoup de musique.

Quel comportement honteux!

Qu'est-ce que tu proposes que je fasse?

Ça me fait plaisir d'avoir de tes nouvelles...

C'est avec plaisir que je t'adresse ces quelques mots pour...

Deux battements de cœur plus tard...

Elle a repris le chemin par pure obligation.

The following candidates' work was assessed as excellent. The first, an example of the letter, the second of the composition, reflect the almost error-free production of the most proficient candidates. These model answers included all the expected content and necessary stylistic elements, for example, the date and place in the letter. They were grammatically very accurate. They were coherent and flowed well. The language was rich and idiomatic in each piece of writing.

*** An asterisk (*) indicates incorrect form, spelling or structure.**

TWO MODEL ANSWERS

Letter

Cunupia, le 18 juin

^{1*} Chère grand-père,

Merci beaucoup pour ta jolie lettre et pour les bonbons que tu m'as envoyés. Je t'écris cette lettre pour te dire que je viens de finir tous mes examens.

Moi, je suis très fatiguée parce que je me couche à onze heures depuis quatre mois. Aussi, je ne suis pas sortie avec mes amis depuis janvier! Tous les jours je faisais mes devoirs et j'aidais ma mère à faire le ménage.

^{2*}Maintent, je fais la grasse ^{3*}matinee. Je reste au lit ^{4*}jusqu'a midi et, après, je vais au cinéma ou au centre commercial.

L'année prochaine, je voudrais continuer mes études, probablement à la même école. Je veux faire la biologie et la chimie parce que je veux être ^{5*}docteur. Qu'est-ce que tu en penses? C'est une bonne idée?

Aussi, j'aimerais te rendre visite en France parce que tu me manques. Ecris-moi vite, et à la prochaine!

^{6*}Amitiés,
Claudette

***Indicates an Incorrect Form/Word.**

CANDIDATE ANSWER	CORRECTION	CORRECT RESPONSE
1. *Chère grand-père	Adjective is wrong gender	Cher grand-père
2. *Maintent	Incorrect spelling	Maintenant
3. *Matinee	Incorrect spelling, omission of accent	Matinée
4. *Jusqu'a	Incorrect spelling, omission of accent	Jusqu'à
5. *Docteur	Wrong vocabulary item	Médecin
6. *Amitiés	Wrong vocabulary item	Bons baisers/grosses bises

Composition

C'était un bel après-midi de samedi. Un pâle soleil brillait. J'étais au volant très contente, parce que ma journée allait très bien. J'étais en route ^{1*}à l'aéroport parce que ce soir-là, j'ai dû aller aux Etats-Unis pour rendre visite à ma tante et son nouveau ^{2*}né.

Quand je suis arrivée ^{3*}au feu rouge, je me suis rappelée que ^{4*}j'ai laissé mon ordinateur portatif sur mon lit à la maison. J'ai commencé à paniquer. J'ai cherché mon portable dans ma poche mais je l'avais oublié aussi. Quel désastre!

J'ai décidé de retourner chez moi. A quoi bon servirait-il d'aller à l'étranger sans ces choses importantes? Malheureusement quand je suis arrivée à l'aéroport l'avion ^{5*}avait déjà décollé. Pauvre de moi!

La prochaine fois, je ferai une liste et je vais essayer de me préparer bien au lieu de faire les préparatifs en hâte.

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*** Indicates an Incorrect Form/Word.**

CANDIDATE ANSWER	CORRECTION	CORRECT RESPONSE
1. *en route à l'aéroport	Wrong preposition	En route pour l'aéroport
2. *nouveau né	Missing hyphen	nouveau-né
3. *Au feu rouge	Wrong number	Aux feux rouges
4. *J'ai laissé	Wrong tense	J'avais laissé
5. *l'avion avais déjà décollé	Wrong auxiliary verb ending	L'avion avait déjà décollé

Section III – Contextual Announcement/Dialogue

This section has two options. Candidates are required to respond in French either to a set of cues or to complete a dialogue in French based on a set of cues. In both options, the candidate must use between 80-100 words to complete their responses.

In both options the average candidate scored in the satisfactory to moderately good range. Even though the contextual announcement was the less popular option and proved to be more challenging, candidates still attempted to be creative in their responses. In the contextual dialogue candidates were more fluent in their use of the language.

Candidates need to be reminded that if they think about the announcement and the dialogue holistically it would assist them to provide more appropriate and accurate responses.

The following are two examples of very good answers that were submitted by candidates for the contextual announcements and the contextual dialogue.

Contextual Announcement

Le club de français de Bay St. Girls' High invite ¹à toutes les élèves ¹*au réunion. ¹*Il sera vendredi à huit heures au gymnase.

Madame Martin, une traductrice qui travaille à l'université de St. Vincent, viendra ²*à parler des pays francophones dans la Caraïbe, du prix du voyage et des correspondantes françaises. On pourra ³*poser des questions. ¹*Le réunion sera très ¹*intéressant et ¹*amusant.

On ^{*}trouve qu'il est importnat de voyager à l'étranger: on peut apprendre une langue, ¹*se rencontrer des amis et s'amuser.

Après ¹*le réunion, il y aura des boissons pour les élèves. Ce sera super!

*** Indicates an Incorrect Form/Word.**

CANDIDATE ANSWER	CORRECTION	CORRECT RESPONSE
1. *(invite) à	No preposition	Invite toutes les élèves
2. *au réunion	Wrong gender	À la réunion
3. *(viendra) à parler	No preposition	Viendra parler
4. on pourra *poser des questions	Indirect object pronoun omitted	On pourra lui poser des questions
5. *se rencontrer	Not reflexive	Rencontrer des amis

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Contextual Dialogue

L'employé: Bonjour jeune homme, est-ce que je peux vous aider?

Philippe: Oui, demain est ^{1*}le jour ^{2*}de pères et je cherche un cadeau.

L'employé: Comment est votre père?

Philippe: Il est de taille moyenne. Il a les cheveux ^{3*}courtes et ^{3*}noires.

L'employé: Est-ce qu'il aime les vêtements à la mode. Nous avons de beaux T-shirts.

Philippe: Je pense qu'il préfère le look pratique.

L'employé: Vous voulez donc lui acheter une chemise à manches longues?

Philippe: C'est parfait! Mais, je voudrais une chemise en bleu, ^{4*}verte ou rouge.

L'employé: Nous en avons des bleues, des vertes, ça dépend de la taille.

Philippe: ^{5*}Sa taille est trente mais quelque fois il *porte trente deux. Vous ^{6*}avez?

L'employé: La voici, c'est très beau et pas cher.

Philippe: C'est génial parce que je n'ai que vingt euros. Ça suffit?

L'employé: Alors jeune homme, avec 20 euros, vous ne trouverez rien ici!

Philippe: Mais j'ai besoin d'un cadeau en ce moment ou papa sera déçu.

L'employé: Désolé, jeune homme, je ne peux pas vous aider. Achetez-lui des chocolats peut-être!

Philippe: Quel dommage! La chemise est ^{7*} parfait.

*** Indicates an Incorrect Form/Word.**

CANDIDATE ANSWER	CORRECTION	CORRECT RESPONSE
1. *le jour	Incorrect vocabulary item	La fête
2. *de pères	Wrong article	Des pères
3. (cheveux) *courtes et noires	Wrong gender	Courts et noirs
4. *verte	Wrong gender	(en) vert
5. *Sa taille est trente	Wrong structure	Il prend du trente...il prend du trente-deux
6. Vous *avez	Omission of pronoun	Vous en avez
7. La chemise est *parfait	Wrong gender	La chemise est parfaite

Section IV – Reading Comprehension

This section tested candidates' ability to read and comprehend a short passage in the target language. The questions on the passage and the candidates' answers were in English.

The passage 'Finding and keeping a pen-friend' centred on a very familiar topic for most candidates. Candidates generally seemed to have understood the text. Those who did not perform well were often hampered by their inability to express themselves fluently in English.

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The passages used for testing comprehension are very concise texts that are generally between 100 and 150 words. There is therefore little room for redundancy with this restricted content. In classroom practice, students should be encouraged to identify the key words or elements in the questions as a preliminary strategy, before attempting to answer the questions. This might help them to read critically and arrive at a sound understanding of the text.

KEY

1. It is fairly easy to do.
2. This is so because English is spoken in many countries.
3. Two topics are themselves/their family/school/hobbies [any two].
4. They might want to find out about their lives and their activities.
5. They can correct their mistakes.
6. The three ways are writing legibly; sending emails; sending digital photographs.
7. They should take time to explain them.
8. They should avoid boring them with long stories about their friends.
9. Two benefits are learning about another way of life and learning a language better.
10. Young French people who want an English-speaking pen-friend.

Paper 03 – Oral Examination

This paper tested candidates' ability a) to produce appropriate responses in the target language in a number of simulations; b) to read aloud a short passage in the target language; and c) to respond in the target language to general questions based on 4 out of 6 topics indicated in the syllabus.

Performance in the oral examination ranged from excellent to poor. This range in performance is also reflected in the very mixed feedback submitted by different examiners depending on the centres where they conducted the examination.

As is the case in Papers 01 and 02, the Oral Examination is intended to elicit performance across the six grade bands. All candidates should be able to perform with a degree of ease and fluency in an oral examination based on a communicative syllabus. In the responses to situations/instructions, questions requiring the same speaker to give two responses should be within the competence of the more proficient candidate, whereas the less proficient candidate might perform best in the two-speakers questions requiring almost stock responses. Similarly, less proficient candidates should have a measure of success in most items in the Conversation, but naturally might perform less well in the more open ended descriptive questions (items 9 and 10) since these attempt to elicit description, narration or supposition. Thus here, as throughout the examinations, candidates' results should represent a range of performance across the six grade bands. It is nonetheless a cause for concern when Oral Examiners state that candidates are unable to perform even the easiest of tasks in the foreign language. A candidate who has been taught using a communicative approach should not be hesitant to say his or her name, give basic personal information, observe common courtesies-- 'thank you,' 'you are welcome', 'sorry' and so on in French. Yet, the feedback from some Oral Examiners suggested that this was the case in many instances.

There is little argument that trying to mimic a communicative situation in a foreign language classroom is a challenging task. But there seems to be a growing tendency to teach the language independent of, divorced even, from the culture. How can it be that a student of French is not made aware of the currency used in France? Indeed, if one were to accept the criticism from the Oral Examiner who objected to the use of 'euros' instead of dollars in the oral examination, students visiting Martinique or Guadeloupe would discover *for the first time* some of the fundamental cultural differences, for example,

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currency, eating habits, greetings and salutations that they need to know or understand to participate in the foreign culture.

If we choose to keep the foreignness out of foreign language learning, the majority of our students who never get an immersion opportunity would leave our classrooms bereft of this rich cultural knowledge. In discussing and comparing schooling and school systems, should students remain with the assumption that French classes go in ascending order as in the English-speaking world? Should a Fifth Form student be kept ignorant of the fact that their peers in France and the French Caribbean are “*en seconde*” and thus are “*lycéens*” in the French system? How can students of French not know “*la boulangerie*” and not understand the central role of bread in the French diet? No one would expect a Fifth Former to know the French legislative system. But a CSEC candidate should have a working knowledge of basic terms relating to school – “*matière; professeur (principal); lycée; seconde*” and their cultural significance. It is a gross disservice to our students, especially in a communicative approach to language learning, to give them such an impoverished introduction to the foreign language culture that words like “*seconde*” are regarded as too challenging. Indeed it is precisely the novel and different, the otherness, which traditionally attract and motivate foreign language learners.

Situations

Examiners expressed their surprise at candidates’ inability to ask the price of an item, talk about the weather and many of the common topics of oral interaction. It was felt that candidates should have been able to produce answers to those topics far more spontaneously. All the candidates are expected to be able to respond appropriately in familiar contexts for the 16+ language learner, while the more proficient candidates are expected to be able to handle the more challenging situations. In this part of the oral paper, examiners rated candidates’ performance as excellent to unsatisfactory. Oral examiners felt that there were too many instances of candidates simply responding ‘*Je ne sais pas*’ or ‘*Je ne comprends pas*’ without making any attempt to provide an answer.

Reading

Candidates’ performance in reading demonstrate their level of comfort and familiarity with the target language. The oral examiners found that while some candidates read fluently, with mostly correct pronunciation, good expression and suitable intonation, many seemed not to understand what they were reading. Additionally, examiners commented on a) the pronunciation of the ending of verb forms in the third person plural b) the lack of liaisons in places where these were necessary and c) anglicization of certain French words.

Conversation

As in sections I and II, performance ranged from excellent to unsatisfactory in the conversation. The graded nature of the items in this section--as in all three papers of the examination--from pre-CSEC level questions requiring candidates to produce their name, their age, their favourite sport or hobby, to CSEC level questions about their school/home/ and wider environment should allow all candidates to perform comfortably in some areas of the examination and the better candidates to perform very well in all areas of the examination.

General comments

Students must be helped to understand that their participation as candidates in the oral examination is a natural progression from the kind of oral activities in which they had been engaged since Form 1. Candidates could be trained to expand on their answers, as happens in normal conversation, even when the question posed is a closed question. The candidate who in reply to the question, “*Combien de frères ou de sœurs as-tu?*” answers “*Deux frères. Mon grand frère s’appelle John et mon petit frère s’appelle Richard.*” obviously shows more ease and familiarity in the language than the candidate who stops his/her answer at “*Deux*”.

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Examiners too are asked to demonstrate a level of flexibility in their examination techniques. It is understandable that a candidate living in a country that has been severely affected by volcanic activity, hurricane, or floods, may be constrained to talk about public buildings in his/her area. But a candidate should not feel at a disadvantage, if there is no public building in his/her immediate environs. There is nothing to prevent such a candidate from talking about places of worship; fire stations/post-offices/police stations real or imagined in the nearest village/town/district/city or even the capital of his/her country.

Teachers should guide their students' understanding of the fact that the oral examination is not a test of content information. It is immaterial whether they live in a city or village or have no or multiple public buildings in their environment. The oral examination is a test of skill. The oral gives candidates the opportunity to show off their ability to communicate on a restricted number of topics (four per year) in the target language. Students who are comfortable speaking French bring a level of confidence to the oral examination and acquit themselves quite well. The reports coming from the various examiners in the various territories suggest that well-prepared candidates are in no way traumatized by having to participate in a 10-15 minute oral interview with an unknown examiner. Thus, while the examination caters to a range of mastery from less proficient to more proficient candidates, there is a strong feeling expressed by Oral Examiners, as by their counterparts in the written examinations, that even the weaker candidates could perform better with more practice.