

Interstate Assessed Languages (beginners)

2015 Chief Assessor’s Report

Overview

The Interstate Assessed Languages Beginners Level Chief Assessor’s report provides general information and feedback about the school assessment component and the oral examination component for Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Modern Greek, and Spanish at Beginners Level, relevant for SACE students.

The report gives an overview of how students performed in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the Interstate Assessed Languages Beginners Level subject outline. The report provides information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards, and the quality of student performance.

Assessment information for the written examination for Interstate Assessed Languages at Beginners Level are available at ‘HSC examinations’ at the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES) website [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc\_exams/](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc_exams/).

School Assessment

Students were generally adequately prepared for school assessment and most demonstrated a pleasing level of language skills and knowledge.

In general, most work submitted for moderation complied with the assessment format as prescribed in the subject outline, with tasks appropriately designed for the purpose of assessing students’ level of skill in the language.

To give opportunity for students to achieve at the highest level, teachers are encouraged to pay attention to task design. Teachers are encouraged to design tasks which clearly specify the purpose, audience, and context for the students. Tasks should be clear, with appropriate assessment conditions.

There was a variety of standards presented for moderation. It was evident that teachers who had familiarised themselves with the Stage 2 subject outline and school assessment requirements had prepared their students well and based their assessment decisions appropriately on the performance standards.

Assessment Type 1: Interaction

Most students showed an appropriate command of oral language at this level. An interaction assessment task has to give students an opportunity to interact with others to exchange information, ideas, opinions, or experiences. Teacher questions are intended to be used as a prompt and should give students the opportunity to extend their answers, rather than the teacher monopolising the conversation. Students who were able to respond spontaneously to open-ended questions without over-reliance on scripts were able to demonstrate the highest level of expression and fluency against the performance standards.

Most of the audio for the tasks submitted for moderation was accessible on the storage devices submitted and the quality of sound was generally clear. However, where the interaction is presented between students, it is imperative that the students are clearly identified on the recording. If the interaction is between two or more students, there needs to be clear guidance regarding the types of questions asked so that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate depth and breadth in their responses without relying too much on prepared responses. Reliance on prepared responses impacts the ability for a student to demonstrate evidence of natural flow of conversation in [Language].

Most students adhered to the required time-limits. Teachers are reminded that to exceed this limit is considered a breach of rules and in the interest of fairness for all students any part of an interaction task which exceeds the prescribed time-limit cannot be assessed or considered at moderation.

Assessment Type 2: Text Production

A variety of tasks were presented at moderation and generally they were designed to meet all levels of the performance standards. Tasks need to be specific and appropriate, with a clear context, audience, purpose and text type. Revision of different forms of writing and scaffolding may help students to meet the requirements of the task with confidence.

Teachers are reminded that there are prescribed guides to word-limits for tasks in this assessment type, and that task design must reflect this so that students are not disadvantaged.

Although the complexity and elaboration of responses varied greatly, it was noted that most students proved to be able to successfully produce relevant and appropriate responses with a good level of accuracy.

Students are reminded to take time to check their punctuation, spelling, and syntax after writing their texts.

Assessment Type 3: Text Analysis

The text analysis was the assessment type with the most variation. Tasks included a variety of reading and responding tasks and listening and responding tasks. Most students showed an appropriate command of language at this level in both domains, and the ability to extract information and interpret intention of a range of texts.

Students are advised to take time to clearly identify the context and intention of each text for analysis. Students are also expected to answer questions in their own words, and refer to the original text to support their response, rather than extract a few disconnected words from the original text as a way of response.

Teachers must ensure that the assessment design criteria, as outlined in the assessment task sheet and in the learning and assessment plan, have been assessed. The text analysis is an opportunity to demonstrate learning of interpretation and reflection. Specific feature IR2 (analysis of the language in texts) would most logically be assessed by a text analysis assessment task, yet some tasks did not provide the opportunity to do so. Teachers are encouraged to examine the assessment design criteria and performance standards when devising questions for text analysis tasks to ensure that they provide an opportunity for students to analyse and interpret linguistic and cultural elements at all levels. It is also an opportunity for bilingual skills to be developed and insights into language, culture, and reflection demonstrated.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 4: Examination

Oral Examination

Any assessment process, but particularly an oral examination, may be stressful for students and every effort is made to help the students feel as at ease as possible. Examiners understand this and do keep it in mind when they are assessing the students. Students who performed well overcame their nerves and went beyond minimal responses in the oral examination. Practice is essential in the preparation for an oral examination and students are encouraged to participate in as many opportunities using oral language as possible.

It was also noted in the oral examination for some languages that there was a high number of heavily scripted, memorised presentations that did not lend themselves to further discussion. The examination provides opportunities for students to go beyond a formulaic use of language and show some understanding of the topic for discussion. Most successful students provided spontaneous responses, as opposed to repeating memorised extended text.

Most students were polite and used conventional greetings. Although it was obvious to examiners that most students had been well advised as to how to prepare for the examination and most of them were adequately prepared, it was noted that some students could have benefited from a little more guidance from their teachers when choosing and tackling their topics for discussion. Examiners noted that some students were unable to discuss their topic of choice at any length beyond repeating a memorised basic script. A satisfactory variety in topics was noted, although some topics did not lend themselves well to further discussion. Popular choices of topics across the languages included travel experiences and leisure time activities.

Generally, most students were able to maintain a conversation with the examiners, the scope of their answers ranging from the very basic and formulaic to many examples of excellent use of language. The more successful students were able to demonstrate a good range of vocabulary and complex sentence structures. Students are reminded that, in this section of the examination, the fluency and naturalness of the conversation is also important, as well as accuracy. Therefore, hesitations and requests for clarification are not necessarily considered to be evidence of lack of skill, but a regular part of natural oral language. Students are encouraged to practise appropriate ways to seek clarification in language, and to avoid the use of English. In instances where this was done well, students sought clarification in [Language] rather than simply stating, ‘I don’t know’ in [Language].

Students are reminded that any sample questions available on the SACE website are not prescriptive and that they should not expect them to appear literally in the course of the conversation with examiners. Some students experienced difficulty when examiners formulated questions differently or when examiners rephrased the student’s own response. Students should be exposed to a range of questioning styles and techniques in [Language] so that they are adequately prepared for success in the oral examination.

More successful students had prepared well for the examination; they demonstrated the ability to go beyond minimal responses, made use of different linguistic resources (a variety of structures, tenses, expressions, etc.), and avoided responding with one-word sentences. Stronger students were able to self-correct, coped well with more complex questions, and were able to elaborate their responses when appropriate.

Students who brought a picture or artefact to the oral examination used these to their advantage to maintain the conversation, convey appropriate detail, and demonstrate effective language use. Students are encouraged to ensure that they are using support objects to enhance the discussion, rather than relying on them as prompts or cues. Use of support objects in some languages was again minimal this year.

Oral examinations are at times conducted using teleconference and videoconference technologies. Teachers are reminded not to remain in the same room where the examination is taking place. The invigilator of the examination must not be the subject teacher. Care should be taken to avoid interruptions when an examination is based at a non-central venue.

Written Examination

Assessment information for the written examination for Interstate Assessed Languages at Beginners Level are available at ‘HSC examinations’ at the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES) website [www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc\_exams/](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc_exams/).

Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

In general, materials for moderation were packaged and organised adequately. Schools are reminded to organise students’ samples by assessment type. Teachers are also reminded to complete the Variations — Moderation Materials form when assessment tasks are not able to be submitted for moderation.

It is helpful to the moderators to have supporting transcripts or discs with any audiovisual material their students were requested to analyse, when appropriate and available.

It is essential that all student materials are easily accessible, clearly organised, and correctly labelled. Where more than one CD, DVD or USB is provided for moderation, it is helpful to label the cover, as well as the files. Care should be taken to ensure that recordings are individual files, not a continuous file. Most importantly, all care should be taken when recording and processing students’ grades for each particular assessment type, in order to avoid clerical errors.

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