Core French

French 3200 Oral Testing Manual

Newfoundland Labrador

Education and Early Childhood Development

FOREWORD

This manual sets out a framework for the universal administration of an oral test in French 3200 classes. The plan is based on a review of oral testing in other jurisdictions and on research, and takes into consideration the educational context of Newfoundland and Labrador. It proposes a test instrument that reflects the trend away from discrete point assessment to an integrative approach which attempts to measure overall oral proficiency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

French second language study has gained in prominence in Canada over the past two decades to the point where it is now considered a necessary component of students' school experience. Most public attention in second language study focuses on the need for the development of oral proficiency. There is a widespread expectation that students should be able to speak French as a result of their second language experience.

Enabling students to communicate with others in French is the essential purpose of the Core French program. Throughout the program, students use French to establish and maintain relationships and to share opinions. One of the organizing principles of the general curriculum outcomes is communication.

An evaluation plan in Senior High Core French should reflect equal emphasis on oral and written comprehension and production. This manual provides a detailed description of the way in which oral proficiency is assessed in French 3200. It is primarily a training manual intended to prepare teachers to administer interviews to students in an accurate and consistent way. Teachers of senior high Core French should study its contents to obtain a general understanding of the interview procedure. Teachers of French 3200 administering interviews should study this manual thoroughly; the overall description of the procedure and the practical suggestions presented will help them become more proficient interviewers.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ORAL INTERVIEW

The interview is a conversation between the student and teacher during which the teacher determines the level of proficiency of the student.

The interview is conducted by the French teacher and comprises part of the Public Examination in the overall French 3200 evaluation. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development specifies a time period for the administration of the interview, and provides an information package to facilitate administration and reporting.

When assessing the student, consideration is given to pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension; however, these factors are not scrutinized individually. Instead, the assignment of a mark involves a global rating of the student's overall performance.

LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY

In an interview, the student's linguistic behaviour is analyzed from three perspectives: functions, context/content, and accuracy.

Functions are linguistic tasks, such as obtaining information, giving information, describing, and narrating. These functions do not exist in isolation; they are always attached to a particular context/content or topic. The content of the oral interview is the most variable element as it depends largely on the interests and inclinations of the student. It may include such items as family, school, current events, leisure, holidays and travel and challenges of the future. Accuracy pertains to the acceptability, quality, and precision of the message. At the lower levels of proficiency, accuracy can be defined as intelligibility; at the advanced levels, accuracy is more a matter of correctness.

Every teacher administering the oral interview will compare the student's performance with the profile descriptions for the levels of proficiency. After identifying the student's sustained level of performance, the teacher assigns a numerical score. Teachers should remember that this is a criterion-referenced procedure; thus, it is important to avoid the tendency to compare student to student.

Prior to each interview period, the teacher will find it essential to review the following level descriptions.*

LEVEL I

11   12   13

Able to operate only in a very limited capacity within very predictable areas of need. Vocabulary limited to that necessary to express basic courtesy formulae and to identify components in several of the following subject areas: basic objects, colors, clothing, numbers, family members, food, months, time, weather, weekdays, year. Syntax is fragmented, inflections and word endings frequently omitted, confused or distorted and the majority of utterances consists of isolated words or short phrases. Speakers at this level do not show evidence of creating with language or being able to cope with simple situations. Speech is limited to phrases rather than complete sentences and is marked by frequent long pauses. Repetition of interlocutor's words is often necessary.

* Source: New Brunswick Middle School Scale 1984 for The Assessment of Oral Proficiency. Developed for the New Brunswick Department of Education by Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey, November 1984.

LEVEL 2

14   15   16

Able to satisfy immediate needs using learned utterances. There is no real autonomy of expression, although there are some emerging signs of spontaneity and flexibility. There is a slight increase in utterance length but frequent long pauses still occur. Comprehension is often limited enough to inhibit normal conversation. Can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only where this involves short memorized utterances or formulae. Can handle with confidence vocabulary related to most of the following subject areas: basic objects, colors, clothing, numbers, family members, food, months, time, weather, weekdays, year. Can handle general high frequency utterances. Is sometimes but not consistently able to remember learned elements to produce simple original sentences. At times, can handle simple situations but cannot sustain performance that demonstrates ability to create with language. Usually unable to make needs known and communicate essential information in a simple survival situation. There is some concept of the present tense forms of the verbs and some common irregular verbs, although use is limited primarily to first person singular and first and second person plural. There is some use of articles, indicating a concept of gender, although mistakes are numerous.

LEVEL 3

17   18   19

Able to show some spontaneity in language production and to initiate and sustain simple dialogue. Vocabulary permits discussion of topics beyond basic survival needs. Can use language creatively. Can maintain simple face-to-face conversation. Can talk simply about autobiographical details, leisure time activities and daily schedule. Comprehension good enough so as not to interfere with normal conversation. Some grammatical accuracy in basic constructions, i.e., subject-verb agreement, noun-adjective and gender agreement for familiar vocabulary, present tense of regular verbs and common irregular verbs. May have a concept of past time, but can use only isolated past tense forms which have been learned as vocabulary items. Syntax in most simple declarative sentences is generally correct, including placement of most common adjectives.

LEVEL 4

20   21   22

Able to show considerable spontaneity in language production and to initiate and sustain general conversation. Developing flexibility in a range of circumstances beyond immediate survival needs. Can use language creatively to initiate and sustain routine conversation but accuracy may be uneven. Ability to describe and give precise information is limited to present tense. Other tense forms occur although errors in formation and selection are frequent. Is able to produce some narration in past, present and/or future time but cannot sustain performance at this level. Can use most question forms. While some word order is established, errors still occur in more complex patterns. Speaking performance is often uneven (strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but not both, for example) but shows remarkable fluency. Cannot sustain coherent structures in longer utterances by the use of conjunctions or relative clauses. Some control of past tense forms and basic reflexive verbs. May be able to use some direct and indirect object pronouns, although syntax may still be faulty.

LEVEL 5

23   24   25

Able to satisfy routine work or school requirements and to communicate in a limited manner on concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Can handle with confidence most social situations related to work or school requirements including some facility in handling complications or difficulties arising from these. Has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond, with circumlocutions, on concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Can narrate, describe, and explain in present, past, and future time although errors still occur. Can communicate facts - what, who, when, where, how much - and can explain points of view in an uncomplicated fashion, but cannot conjecture or coherently support an opinion. Can talk in a general way about topics of current public interest.

(e.g., student rules and regulations), as well as personal interest. Can make factual comparisons, such as high school life vs. college life or elementary school life. Can communicate needs and thoughts in a familiar situation with a complication (e.g., calling for help when an accident has occurred). Speaking performance shows high degree of fluency and ease of speech.

Areas of weakness in grammar can range from simple constructions such as noun-adjective, gender, and subject-verb agreement to more complex structures such as tense usage (imperfect vs. passé composé),and relative clauses. Is able to use the partitive (affirmative and negative), demonstrative adjectives, most expressions of quantity, most adverbs, and some idiomatic expressions.

INTERVIEW FORMAT

The interview should be friendly and relaxed; however, it is not simply a friendly conversation. Although it is as natural and relaxed as possible, it must maintain a structure and be purposeful. The task of the tester is to guide the student in performing functions which will clearly indicate his/her level of oral proficiency.

Questions should be posed in a normal tone of voice and at the normal pace for the language. However, at low-functioning levels it may be necessary to slow down, repeat, or paraphrase for the student.

Although the interview process remains consistent, the interview topics may vary. Interviews should develop two to three topics in detail; however, every interview must be flexible and develop in accordance with the interests and linguistic competency of the student. Once a topic is selected, it is important that the tester stay with it until a rateable sample can be obtained.

The task of the tester is to look for patterns which reflect the student's proficiency at a particular level. The principal procedure in rating a student is to compare the characteristics of the speech sample in the interview with the characteristics of the level descriptions and to find the closest match.

A well-conducted interview will involve different stages, each blending naturally into the next, and each bringing the tester closer to confirming the proficiency level of the student. Pardee Lowe Jr. systematized the structure, dividing the interview into four phases horizontally: (1) warmup, (2) level check, (3) probes, and winddown; and three planes vertically: (1) the psychological, (2) the linguistic, and (3) the evaluative. This general structure is shown in the table on page 11 and provides a useful framework for rating oral language proficiency.

Warmup

This phase includes the first few minutes of the interview. The questions asked during this phase should be natural, friendly, and easy to understand. The student is put at ease, and the tester gains a preliminary indication of the level of speech and understanding.

Level Check

Once the tester has determined the student's general proficiency level during the simple conversation of the warmup, the next phase is aimed at finding out more about student competence. In this phase the tester checks which functions and content the student performs with the greatest accuracy on a range of topics. Questions should naturally follow from the warmup phase. While the conversation is progressing, the tester will pay attention to such areas as pronunciation, extent of vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension.

Probes

While the level check phase lets the tester know the sustained level at which the student can comfortably function, the student may at times go beyond this level. The purpose of the "probes" phase is to bring the student to the uppermost level at which s/he can function. Probing on a range of topics enables the tester to find the level at which the student can no longer speak or understand accurately.

Wind-Down

Once the tester has determined the uppermost limit for the student on a range of topics, the next phase is the wind-down. It is during this phase that questions become easier, returning the student to the level at which s/he functions most accurately. It ends the interview on a positive note, giving the student a sense of accomplishment, and also giving the tester a chance to recheck the rating.

Using the interview structure previously outlined, the tester is able to guide the student to perform the functions that will indicate his/her sustained speaking level. Having obtained an adequate sample of the student's sustained speech, the tester next has to compare the student's proficiency with the proficiency level descriptions and find the appropriate match. Once the tester finds the match, s/he is able to assign a rating to the student. Valid and efficient assignment of ratings demands that the tester have a thorough knowledge of the various characteristics of each of the proficiency levels.

General Structure of the Oral Interview

	Warmup	Level Check	Probes	Wind-Down
Psychological	Puts student a ease	Proves to student what s/he can do.	Proves to student what s/he cannot do. Gives student a feeling of accomplishment.	Returns student to level at which s/he functions most accurately.
Linguistic	Reacquaints student with language if necessary	Checks for functions and content which student performs with greatest accuracy.	Checks for functions and content which student performs with least accuracy.	Checks to see if phases are all complete. Chance to recheck level.
Evaluative	Gives tester preliminary indication of the level of speech and understanding.	Finds student's level of speaking and under-standing.	Finds level at which student can no longer speak accurately. Finds level at which student can no longer understand accurately.	Assigns global rating.

Factors in Speaking Proficiency

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Pronunciation	Often unintelligible	Major and frequent errors often impeding understanding and requiring repetition of utterances.	Few major errors, but frequent minor errors at times hamper understanding.
Grammar	Syntax fragmented. Inflections and word endings often omitted. Use of grammar almost always inaccurate.	Has concept of present tense of regular and common irregular verbs. Use limited to first person singular and first and second person plural. Uses articles but errors are numerous.	Reasonable accuracy in basic constructions (subject - verb agreement, noun and gender agreement). Present tense of regular and common irregular verbs. Some concept of past, but able to use only isolated forms learned as vocabulary. Syntax is generally accurate.
Vocabulary	Limited to basic courtesy words, basic objects, colors, clothing, family members, food, months, days, time, weather.	Handles with confidence vocabulary related to following areas: basic objects, colors, clothing, numbers, family members, food, months, days, time and weather.	Vocabulary permits discussion beyond survival needs; e.g., autobiographical details, leisure, daily schedule.
Fluency	No evidence of creating with language. Limited to isolated words and phrases. Long pauses, unable to cope with simple situations.	Can ask accurate questions and make statements only when it involves memorized material. Handles high-frequency utterances. Unable to cope with most simple survival situations.	Can initiate and maintain simple face-to-face conversation. Speech is slow and uneven except in routine phrases.
Comprehension	Repetition often necessary even with slowed speech	Often limited enough to inhibit normal conversation.	Good enough so as not to interfere with normal conversation. Some repetition required

Factors in Speaking Proficiency

	Level 4	Level 5
Pronunciation	Accent markedly foreign, but mispronunciations rarely lead to misunderstanding.	Accent possibly foreign but mispronunciations are slight.
Grammar	Ability to describe often limited to present tense; other tenses occur but errors are frequent. Some narration in past, present, and future but unable to sustain performance. Errors in complex sentences. Cannot sustain use of relative clauses and conjunctions. Uses some indirect and direct object pronouns.	Errors are random and seldom interfere with comprehension. Can narrate, describe and explain in past, present and future though errors still occur. Weaknesses range from simple to complex. Able to use partitive (affirmative and negative), demonstrative, expressions of quantity, and adverbs.
Vocabulary	Vocabulary beyond the survival level. Adequate to handle inquiries about self, family, friends, trips, studies and interests.	Vocabulary sufficient with circumlocutions to speak on concrete topics relating to interests and familiar themes. Evidence of some idiomatic expression.
Fluency	Initiates and sustains general conversation but accuracy is still uneven. Speaking is uneven.	Can handle with considerable confidence most common situations. Shows some facility in handling complications. Can communicate facts. Can explain point of view in simple fashion, but has difficulty in supporting an opinion. Can make factual comparisons. Can communicate needs in situations with complications.
Comprehension	Good comprehension of normal speech. Rarely asks for repetition or rephrasing.	Comprehension of normal speech is nearly perfect and repetition is rarely required.

ELICITATION TECHNIQUES

Before the interview session, the teacher should review question types which may be used at the various proficiency levels. While considering these questions and conducting the interview itself, the teacher must keep clearly in mind that the purpose of the interview is to determine the highest sustained level at which at student can function in French.

To do this, the interviewer will need to pursue a series of topics with the student. As a topic is introduced, the teacher begins with simple information questions at the level considered appropriate for the level initially determined in the warmup. This would be the level check, where the student shows what s/he can do in the language. These questions are interwoven with probes; e.g., an involved question, a situation or an opinion which pushes the student to perform at a level higher than that of which s/he is capable. These probes indicate what the student cannot do. These phases are pursued two to three times during the course of the interview to enable the interviewer to determine the ceiling of the student's proficiency. The interview concludes at the level where the student has performed most comfortably, so that s/he leaves the interview with a feeling of accomplishment.

During the interview it is important that the teacher let the student do most of the talking. In order to decrease student uneasiness and encourage the student to talk, the interviewer must be conscious of her/his manner of interaction.

There are many encouragers which can be used to further communication. These show that the tester is listening attentively, while being minimally disruptive and nonevaluative. Nonverbal encouragers include the following:

1. Keeping eye contact.
2. Being alert and keeping an attentive body posture.
3. Avoiding looking at the clock.
4. Nodding.
5. Smiling.

With students at the lower levels of proficiency, the interviewer may need to slow down, repeat, or paraphrase a question. However, these techniques should be resorted to only when the normal rate of speech clearly interferes with communication. As interviewers, teachers need to avoid the following:

1. Filling in pauses in the conversation.
2. Supplying vocabulary, or completing sentences for the student.
3. Correcting student responses.
4. Repeating student responses.
5. Asking too many simple information questions.
6. Interjecting personal opinions especially at the lower levels
7. Giving too much preamble.

The questions and statements of the interview will range from the concrete to the abstract. Some of the techniques which may be used follow; these have been organized from the simple to the complex:

1. Yes/No Questions

Example: Est-ce que tu aimes les sports?

These questions do not require much speech production, but they are useful in determining the interest and ability of the student.

2. Choice Questions

Example: Quel sport préfères-tu, le tennis ou le baseball?

These questions elicit some speech production, but they deprive the student from producing speech on his/her own. They should be avoided, except when the student has extreme difficulty in conversation.

3. Regular Statement with Question Intonation

Example: Tu as travaillé l'été passé?

This question type encourages the student to expand on what was already said.

4. Polite Request

Example: Décris cette salle s'il te plaît.

Parle-moi de ta famille, s'il te plaît.

This may be a command or a question presented in a polite, friendly manner involving certain politeness adverbs or the subjunctive.

5. Simple Information Questions

This type elicits a speech sample containing facts rather than opinion. These questions cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no". At levels 2 and 3, many of the questions will involve memorized material introduced by "qui", "qu'est-ce que", "où", and "quel". At levels 4 and 5, questions introduced by "pourquoi" will be more frequent.

6. Hypothetical Questions

Example: Tu aimes voyager?

Où voudrais-tu voyager si tu avais assez d'argent?

These permit the student to show his/her command of conditional constructions.

7. Opinion Questions

Example: Que penses-tu des examens publiques?

Quelle est ton opinion des salaires des athlètes professionnels?

This question type would be appropriate at the upper levels.

RECOMMENDED READING

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APPENDIX A : French 3200 Evaluation Plan

French 3200 is a level three course and is therefore subject to the regulations of the shared evaluation system. The table below outlines the recommended values for the school evaluation and also sets out the values for the Public Examination.

TABLE OF SPECIFICATIONS						
Evaluation Exercise			Cognitive Levels			Total %
			Knowledge	Understanding and Application	Higher Mental Processes	
C O M M U N I C A T I O N	Audio Component	Listening Comprehension		25		25
		Listening and Writing				
		Listening, Reading and Writing				
	Speaking (Listening)			25		25
	Reading and Writing			50		50

APPENDIX B : French 3200 Interview Score Sheet

Name: _____

Level 1

11   12   13

Level 2

14   15   16

Level 3

17   18   19

Level 4

20   21   22

Level 5

23   24   25

Comments: _____

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APPENDIX C

TOPICS

The areas identified under each topic are provided solely for the purpose of illustration. Teachers should feel free to interpret them with the backgrounds of their own students in mind; in all cases, individual interests should be exploited fully.

While it is expected that all themes, as outlined in *Core French Senior High: A Curriculum Guide 1998,* will be covered during the course, two or three will be sufficient for assessment purposes.

The Family and Home

Immediate family: personal details, daily routine, individual responsibilities, family activities, family relationships, occupations..

School Life

Type, size, sports facilities, subjects, homework, schedule, examinations, teachers, school events, school clothes, organization of the school day/year, travel to and from school, relationships with peers and authority figures.

Leisure

Hobbies and interests, personal spending, friends, television, radio, music, reading, films, sports, cars, dining out, computers, clothes, shopping, routines outside of school, part-time jobs, social events, dating, movies, volunteer activities, community involvement, health and fitness, social concerns.

Holidays and Travel

Holiday plans, special days, methods of travel, weather, holiday activities, food and drink, learning about other people and their way of life, learning other languages.

Challenges of the future

Life after high school, becoming independent, career options, protection of the environment, human rights, scientific and technological advances, other topical issues.

APPENDIX D

Useful Vocabulary

l'adolescent(e)	teenager
les arts langagiers (matières)	language (course)
l'anglais	English language
la littérature anglais	literature
l'assistant (e) [de service] sociale	social worker
le bal d'étudiants	prom
la bande dessinée	comic (strip)
le beau-fils, la belle-fille	stepchild (as in step-son/daughter)
la belle-mère, le beau-père	stepmother, stepfather
le demi-frère, la demi-soeur	stepbrother, stepsister
le centre commercial/ le centre d'achat	mall/shopping centre
le centre commercial	shopping centre
le changement (nom m.)	change (noun)
la chimie	chemistry
le collège communautaire	trade school
le courriel	e-mail
le courriel électronique	e-mail
la demande	application
faire une demande	to apply (to make application for)
déménager	to move away
le diplôme universitaire (m.)	degree (university degree)
le droit canadien (m.)	Canadian Law

l'éducation physique	physical education
entraîner (verbe)	to coach
l'entraîneur (nom.m)	coach
le fichier	file (computer)
le football/le soccer	soccer
le football américain/canadien	football
la formule (f.) Nous devons apprendre des formules pour la physique...	formula
l'informatique	Computer Science
l'Internet	The Internet
le logiciel	software; computer program
la maison de retraite/ le foyer de vieillard le foyer de vieillards	old age home
la majorette	cheerleader
les majorette	cheerleaders
les montagnes russes	roller coaster
la motoneige	snow mobile
le skidoo	skidoo
naviguer sur le web	surf the web
le niveau/l'année	grade
Je suis au niveau 11/Je suis en 11e année.	"I am in grade 11"
la note	grade
Il a reçu une bonne note sur son projet.	"He received a high grade on his assignment."

obtenir un diplôme/être diplômé	to graduate
l'obtention d'un diplômegraduation	
ou la remise de diplômes	
l'imprimante	printer
l'orchestre/le groupe	band
l'ordinateur	computer
la parenté (f.)	relatives
Toute notre parenté est venue nous	"All our relatives visited for Christmas"
visiter à Noël.	
passer un examen	to write an exam
réussir à un examen	to pass an exam
le personnage	character (movie/book)
le petit ami/la petite amie	boyfriend/girlfriend
la physique (matière)	physics (course)
la physiothérapeute	physiotherapist
le plan/le projet	plan
planifer	to plan
un programmeur/une programmeuse	programmer
le repas	meal
les sciences familiales	family living course
le SIDA	AIDS
Syndrome d'immuno	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
déficience acquise	
suivre un cours	to take a course
J'ai suivi un cours de biologie l'an	"I took biology last year."
dernier.	
le sujet/la discipline/la matière	subject (school)

le (la) technicien (ne) de radiographie	X-ray technician
le télécopieur	fax
par télécopieur	by fax
le téléroman	soap opera
virus informatique	computer virus