

OIB British Option
Language and Literature

ORAL EXAMINING GUIDE, 2017

Important note for Heads of Centre

1. The standard version of the six core poems for the appropriate synoptic topic – ‘Writers and Writing of the Romantic Age’ or ‘Post-Colonial Writing’ - must be made available to candidates. It is the responsibility of the examining centre to provide examining pairs with copies of the poems for use in the examining room.
2. Candidates preparing the poems of William Blake, or Wordsworth and Coleridge, or John Keats, for the ‘Writers and Writing of the Romantic Age’ topic must have a copy of the list of set poems clearly visible on the table in front of them. It is the responsibility of the examination centre to provide examining pairs with copies of the list of poems for use in the examination room.

Notes for Oral Examiners

I: Editions

1. All passages set on all three Shakespeare plays must come from the New Cambridge edition (*N.B. not the Cambridge Schools Edition*).
2. For the poem provided for candidates to introduce the synoptic topic, the standard version of the six poems for the appropriate topic (‘Writers and Writing of the Romantic Age’ or ‘Post-Colonial Writing’) - must be used. The examination centre will provide copies of this.

II: Setting Shakespeare passages

1. Passages should be between 30 and 34 lines in length, with lines numbered to the right of the text. Stage directions should be counted as lines. Act and scene numbers must not be given.
2. Each passage can be used NO MORE THAN TWICE. A passage can ONLY be used twice for two candidates who immediately succeed each other - i.e. if there is a break between candidates, the passage must be changed.
3. **For plays other than *Richard III*, each extract should involve more than one speaker: where a soliloquy is set, the extract should also include some dialogue either before or after the soliloquy. In the case of *Richard III*, an extract taken entirely from a soliloquy is acceptable.**
4. Each extract should be self-contained, in the sense that it should not require a detailed knowledge of the dialogue that immediately precedes or follows it.
5. An extract can cross two scenes: the scene break should simply be indicated by inserting the words ‘scene break’. Naturally the scene numbers should not be given.
6. An extract can begin half way through a speech (at the beginning of a sentence), provided that the name of the speaker is clearly indicated.

7. Extracts must not include cuts: the text must be exactly as published in the New Cambridge edition.

III: Exam room checklist

1. Make sure the desks are laid out in the triangular formation shown on p27 of the OIB Handbook (2017 edition).
2. Make sure that the examining room clock is clearly visible to candidates; examiners should synchronise their watches to this.
3. Make sure that a list of the set poems for the synoptic topic is on the candidate's table if appropriate (for Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats in the Romantic topic).
4. Have the appropriate poem for the synoptic topic ready to give to the candidate.
5. Have your copy of the marking criteria easily accessible to consult after each interview.
6. Check that *fiches d'évaluation* are in the correct order for the candidates to be examined.

IV: Procedural points

1. The candidate's identity should already have been checked in the preparation room, by the invigilator; examiners should not have to do this.
2. **Remember to write the title of the poem to be used as an introduction to the Topic on the candidate's copy – and your own copy! - of the Shakespeare passage. Draw the candidate's attention to it when you give the passage.**
3. We should be rigorous in respecting the time divisions of the Oral exam. Examiners should synchronise their watches to the clock in the exam room in order to avoid misunderstandings. Please avoid using a mobile phone as a timer.
4. **The 30 minutes of the oral begin as soon as the candidate enters. It is helpful to write down the end time, the 8-minute limit for the Shakespeare commentary and the timing for the transition to the Synoptic Topic at the start. The candidate must be allowed the full 8 minutes for the Shakespeare commentary (with a final closing minute if necessary). The time taken at the beginning by the candidate's signing of the *fiche*, etc. should come out of the *discussion* part of the 15 minutes allocated to the Shakespeare play.**
5. Try to put each candidate at ease at the beginning of the Oral: introduce yourselves, briefly explain the presence of Inspector, Assistant Moderator or observer (future examiner) if appropriate; confirm with the candidate the texts you are going to discuss, etc. (see Section V, item 1 below for a checklist of points to make at the beginning of the oral).
6. Candidates should leave all materials (passage, notes, etc.) in the exam room at the end of the Oral; the examiners then dispose of them (but don't rip them up in front of the candidate!)
7. Offer a fresh glass of water to candidates, especially in hot weather.
8. Take notes on paper during the interview: do not use a laptop computer.
9. Keep all notes on the Orals until the *Rentrée*, in case any mark awarded is queried.

V: Conducting the Oral

A: At the beginning of the oral:

1. Ask the candidate to sign the *fiche d'évaluation* in the space provided (top right).
2. If you are asked to complete a *bordereau* in addition to the *fiche*, do not enter any marks or comments on this document: this could result in unmoderated marks being entered as final (see VIII 10). Marks and comments must only be entered on the *fiche*.
3. Confirm the Shakespeare text and those for the synoptic topic (the introductory poem and two other texts) to be discussed in the oral.
4. Remind the candidate that he/she can consult the copy of the introductory poem on his desk when the time comes.
5. Tell the candidate, 'your commentary should last up to eight minutes. If you have not finished by then I will interrupt to tell you that you must draw to a close within the next minute.'
6. N.B. For timing purposes, the oral begins as soon as the candidate enters (see IV 4 above).

B: The Synoptic Topic

1. **Always use the standard question to introduce the synoptic topic:**
'Please talk about poem X for 2-3 minutes, and give me some idea of how it throws light on Writers and Writing of the Romantic Age/Post-Colonial Writing as you have studied it'
2. Remember to give each candidate a copy of the relevant poem to refer to in the oral. Do not allow candidates to annotate the copy.
3. Give the candidate time to gather his/her thoughts on the introductory poem. If, however, the thought-gathering is too long (more than 1 minute), ask him/her to begin.

N.B. Candidates preparing the poems of William Blake, or Wordsworth and Coleridge, or John Keats, for the 'Writers and Writing of the Romantic Age' topic should have a copy of the list of set poems on the desk in front of them.

VI: Styles of questioning

- The best orals tend to involve discussion – i.e. examiners responding to what the candidate says – rather than a succession of separate questions and answers. Start with a broad question, then listen to the candidate's response and develop it into a line of enquiry – if it seems productive.
- If a line of questioning is unproductive, don't pursue it any further: change to a new topic.
- Ask questions that bring the candidate back to the text, and to his response to it: 'where can you see that?' 'Is there a moment in the text that demonstrates what you have just said?' 'Would you like to point to a moment when...' etc.
- Try to keep questions brief and clear; remember that your role is to facilitate and elicit, not to dominate. Be prepared to re-phrase if the candidate seems not to have understood.
- Avoid questions that contain an implied correct answer.
- **Make sure that your questions include invitations to each candidate to discuss issues of language, style, form, genre or other literary features. The use of thematic and character-based questions alone may prevent a candidate from reaching the higher key points through no fault of his/her own.**

- Questions should strike a balance between enabling the candidate on the one hand, and challenging on the other. All questions should be accessible.

Shakespeare

- After the commentary, ask questions that give the candidate the opportunity to explore the extract in more detail (unless the commentary has been full) before moving on to ask about the play as a whole
- Questions on drama should explore the dramatic qualities of the text. Avoid questions about how the candidate would stage the scene, since these tend to move the candidate away from the text

The Synoptic Topic

- Remember that questions on the synoptic topic should focus on **aspects of the topic**, with **the texts used to shed light on the topic**.
- Do not ask questions that are *focused on the context* – e.g. how does Romantic art help us to understand ‘Frankenstein? References to context **by the candidate**, used to illuminate the topic in reference to the text, are **appropriate** - but they are **not required**, even in the highest key points.

VII: Assessing the Oral

1. **Refer to the Cambridge marking criteria for each interview.** It is essential to use the latest edition (in the 2015 Handbook).
2. The assessment discussion after the interview **must be structured in the following order**:
 - i) a discussion of the features of performance;
 - ii) a consideration of the most appropriate Key Point, and final mark.

The discussion of the features of the candidate’s performance must come first; the Key Point, and then the mark, should be the natural outcome of this discussion.

3. Remember that part one of the oral, based on the Shakespeare play, is a unified whole, described as ‘commentary and discussion’, and that a candidate’s performance for this section is considered as a whole. Thus, **the candidate must be given credit for all (s)he offers, regardless of whether it comes in the commentary or the discussion.** It does not matter if the candidate needs prompting: observations are not worth less because the examiner has to probe for them.
4. Consider the two parts of the oral – Shakespeare and synoptic topic - as a single entity: the final assessment is based on a holistic consideration of the candidate’s performance, and not on an aggregate of two marks for the two parts.
5. During the discussion of key points, always check the KP above the one being considered, to avoid the danger of undervaluing the performance.
6. Remember that as examiners **we are not looking for a specific reading** of a text, but responding to the **informed personal response** of the candidate. Provided a reading is explained and grounded in the text, we must not penalise it because it isn’t what we are looking for, or because it isn’t expressed using the terms we have

used in our own teaching. On the contrary, we must reward it according to its merits.

7. If, in the discussion of features of a candidate's performance, you find yourself commenting on what seemed to be *missing* (e.g. discussion of style or literary/genre features), **be sure that your questioning gave the candidate the opportunity to offer what was missing.**
8. A candidate's performance should be considered in relation to the marking criteria, not in comparison with another candidate's performance.
9. English fluency should always be considered, following the descriptions in the criteria, as part of the assessment.

Assessing the Synoptic Topic

1. Remember that you are not assessing the candidate's handling of the poem as a detailed textual commentary, but as an introduction to the topic.
2. Remember that **you are assessing the candidate's handling of the topic** through the texts, rather than a detailed knowledge of individual texts.

VIII: Completing the *fiches d'évaluation*

Examiners are required to complete the French *fiche d'évaluation*. **N.B. The key point descriptors in the Handbook remain the *only* reference for determining the mark awarded to each candidate. The *fiche* is simply an official record of that mark. Do not use the descriptors on the *fiche* to determine the mark awarded to the candidate.**

Completion of the *fiche d'évaluation*

1. The *fiche d'évaluation* must be signed by each candidate (in the space provided at the top right) at the very start of the interview. The rest of the *fiche* should only be completed once the marks for each group of two or three candidates have been decided. Extra 10-minute breaks have been introduced after every two or three interviews to allow for the completion of the *fiches*.
2. In completing the *fiche* you will need to refer to the notes you have made during each oral interview. Make sure that your notes record clearly the candidate's name and the mark awarded.
3. Complete the *fiche* **in black ink**, so that it remains legible after being scanned and transmitted.
4. Each *fiche* is printed with a particular candidate's name. Check that the *fiches* are arranged in the correct order. In each case, **double check that the candidate name on your notes made during the oral corresponds with the name on the *fiche*. It is important to verify this before you complete the *fiche*. A mistake made at this point will result in the wrong mark being attributed to the candidate.**
5. The mark awarded using the key point descriptors **must** be the mark recorded on the *fiche*. Refer to the conversion table, 'Equivalences between Key Point descriptors and *fiche d'évaluation*', on p44 of the 2014 Handbook. The mark awarded using the Cambridge key point criteria should be broken down into three elements, following the divisions on the *fiche*: *niveau de lecture*; *culture littéraire*; *expression orale*. Start with oral expression. 'Response to texts' will focus particularly – though not exclusively – on the Shakespeare commentary; 'literary context' will take account both of candidates' awareness of dramatic features of the Shakespeare passage and, in

particular, of their discussion of the synoptic topic.

The overriding principle is that **the mark already decided by using KP descriptors must never be changed**: the marks on the 'fiche' must match the mark already awarded through the key point system.

6. Please write the mark for each element – *niveau de lecture, culture littéraire, expression orale* – **at the foot of each column**. N.B. Please do not circle the marks in the three columns: if the Cambridge Inspector needs to change a mark during the moderation process, each circle will have to be painstakingly erased.

7. Referring to your notes made during the interview, write a comment in English in the box for the *appreciation* (check that you are referring to the correct notes for each candidate).

The comment is the only record of the oral; it plays an important role in the moderation process. It should identify the essential features of a candidate's performance that determined the mark awarded.

Please write the comment in your own words; do not copy phrases from the descriptors. Examples of appropriate comment writing are shown below.

8. Both examiners should sign and date each *fiche*.

9. At the end of each day, examiners must give the completed *fiches* to the Head of Centre so that they can be scanned and despatched to the Cambridge Inspector for moderation.

10. **Do not enter a mark on any document other than the *fiche*, even if (as in the *bordereau*) a space is provided for a mark to be entered. This could result in unmoderated marks being entered, depriving the candidates of access to moderation.**

IX: Final points

1. Pace yourself. Candidate ten, at the end of the day, deserves as much of your energy and focus as candidate one in the morning.
2. Never be blasé. You may have examined dozens, if not hundreds, of orals. Each candidate, however, only has one chance - so every single oral is important.
3. Good luck – and enjoy the examining!

Appendix: examples of comments for the *fiche d'évaluation*:

The most helpful comments offer a brief but fairly specific summary of strengths and (if appropriate) limitations.

Helpful comments:

1. Shakespeare commentary was clearly structured, analytical and sensitive to language and drama. Synoptic topic demonstrated secure understanding of ideas and effective use of texts in exploring them.
2. Shakespeare commentary showed broad understanding but little detail; some comments on language, but not much sense of meaning and effect. Synoptic topic was better, with an ability to develop ideas through both texts.
3. Little sense of the extract within the play; points made seemed tangential to the passage. The topic was understood only in general terms, with little sense of how the broad ideas could be seen in the texts. English was too approximate to express ideas clearly.

Less helpful comments:

1. Excellent (*excellent in what ways?*)
2. Close reading is attempted. Candidate can point to parallels and contrasts. Knowledge flexible enough to permit discussion.

*(phrases copied from the criteria: **your own** description of strengths and weaknesses in the performance is much more helpful in showing how you saw the candidate's performance and why the chosen KP seems the 'best fit')*

3. Discussion centred on plot and character. Broad familiarity with texts. Response to texts and topic ill digested.

(phrases copied from the criteria)

Nicholas Baker, June 2017