

# Supplementary Frequently Asked Questions – GCSE Controlled Assessments (Speaking and Writing)

Chinese

French

Italian

German

Spanish

Urdu

## **NB: GCSE Chinese**

Please refer to the specification for language-specific variances on number of words/characters permitted on notes forms and expected in the writing unit.

## Controlled Assessments (Units 2 & 4) Supplementary FAQs

### 1. I understand my students can do a speaking and a writing task on the same theme. How much overlap is allowed across these 2 assessment tasks?

**Some** overlap is acceptable and understandable as long as the tasks are distinctly different. Speaking and writing tasks can be linked to the same theme but the purpose of the tasks set must be different. The specification states on p23 that *Teachers must ensure that the formal assessments used enable students to demonstrate their ability to use language for different purposes. Although the context of the tasks may be common, teachers must check that there is **no direct overlap of content** across the formal speaking and writing assessment.* It is important to ensure the content is different – not just the context and purpose of the tasks in the 2 skills.

Here is an example where there is significant direct overlap:

**Speaking Task:** *Presentation and Discussion on House, hometown and local area*

*Give a presentation about your house, hometown and local area. Your teacher will then ask you some questions which may refer to any of the following:*

- i. **what your house is like***
- ii. **what you would like to change in your house***
- iii. Information about the town where you live*
- iv. **advantages of living in your local area***
- v. **what you did recently in your local area***

*You should also be prepared to respond to questions your teacher might ask you.*

**Writing Task:** *House, hometown and local area*

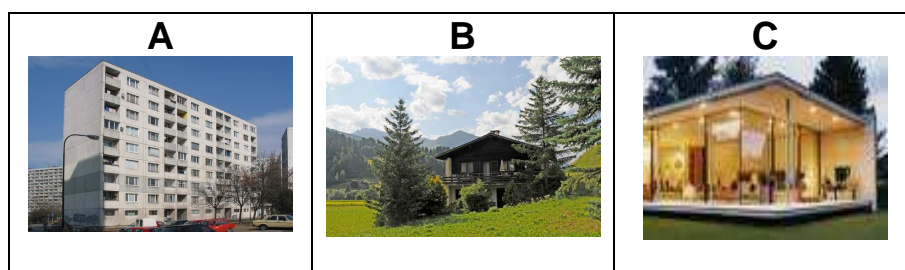
*Write an article for a [TL] magazine about your home and local area.*

*You may wish to refer to the following:*

- i. **what your house is like***
- ii. **advantages and disadvantages of living in your local area***
- iii. things to do and see in your local area [might overlap potentially with point iii. in speaking task]*
- iv. **what you did recently in your local area***
- v. **what you would like to change in your house or local area***

One of these tasks should be modified to minimise the extent of the direct overlap of content and to allow the candidates to demonstrate their ability to use a range of language. The speaking task could be turned into an Open Interaction; an example is given below:

*Your family has decided to visit [TL country] and wants to exchange homes with a [target language-speaking family]. You speak to a representative from an agency in the (target language-speaking) country that arranges this. There are three homes to choose from:*



*During the course of the conversation, you **may** need to do the following:*

- explain what sort of home you want*
- explain where it should be and why*
- say what you will do while you are in (target language-speaking)*
- choose which of the three homes you want to exchange with*
- say why your choice of home (and area) would be suitable for the (target language-speaking) family*

Be prepared to ask at least 2 questions

However, teachers use tasks that overlap in this way **if only one** of these tasks (speaking or writing) is counted towards final assessment or if one of these is used **informally** as part of the students' general language learning and development.

**2 I am using the Edexcel GCSE textbook with my students. Can I use the tasks set at the end of each chapter for their speaking and writing controlled assessment tasks?**

As long as students are NOT expecting to use a textbook derived stimulus, then this would be OK. However, we would recommend that teachers alter such stimuli in some way – perhaps changing or adding a bullet point. This could also help to ensure that the tasks are more student-focussed. Candidates must not know what the task is in advance of the task-specific preparation period.

**3 In task setting, what exactly does the 70-word limit refer to? Does it apply to both speaking and writing assessment tasks?**

The following information relates to controlled assessment speaking **and** writing tasks and is given on p33 of the specification: *As tasks are designed to develop target-language speaking or writing skills, related **stimuli** should feature a minimal amount of text (maximum 70 words) and may feature visual prompts, potentially with some additional English-language explanation of context. Prompts and cues may be set in either English or TL, appropriate to the specific scenario.*

The 70 words limit refers therefore to any stimulus element provided and NOT to the complete task itself. There is no word limit for the task but you are advised to set tasks that are as concise and precise as possible.

**4 Can the CA2/CA4 notes pro forma include conjugated verbs?**

Yes, conjugated verbs are allowed. The notes should be written in bullet point or mind map format and could be in either English or the TL (or a mixture of both\*). We would recommend that candidates do not write full sentences as this may not represent the best use of their 30 words of notes. Coding such as writing down the first letter of key words in key sentences is not allowed. Similarly, students should not apply colour-coding to individual words to convey gender as this is not in the spirit of this assessment. However, it is acceptable for students to produce bulleted notes that are colour-coded for specific paragraphs/aspects.

\* Please refer to the Administrative Support Guide (*Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination and Controlled Assessments [ICE]*) for more detailed of the acceptable permutations for GCSE Chinese notes. (<http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/GCSE%20New%20GCSE/ICE-GCSE-tiered-2011.pdf>)

**Are students allowed to have printed images on or attached to their CA2/CA4 pro forma (30 words sheets) for the controlled assessments? Some have found pictures on the internet.**

No. The instruction to candidates on both controlled assessment forms states: *You may also produce up to five small drawings in the box below.* This means that students may produce their own simple drawings to support them during the task-taking phase. Visual learners may find this particularly useful.

If we allowed pictures from the internet etc, students might spend too much time researching appropriate images rather than on developing language skills. In addition, there are issues of copyright to consider.

**5 Are students allowed to talk to their classmates during the controlled assessment preparation time?**

Yes, for both Speaking and Writing, but students may not produce any extended pieces of language for one another. The resulting assessable work must be the individual student's own. Please refer to the Joint Council for Qualifications' document *Instructions for conducting controlled assessments 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011* <http://www.jcq.org.uk/attachments/published/1125/ICA.%202010-2011.doc>

## 6 Are students allowed to take the draft home?

Students may take home the controlled assessment task, their exercise books, textbooks and the CA2/CA4 forms. We would recommend that they do not take a draft home.

Students may engage in general revision/preparation for their assessment at home, but they should not produce a draft. The following notice appears on the GCSE 09 MFL web pages <http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/GCSE%20New%20GCSE/Specification-Erratum%20Notice.pdf>.

*The GCSE 2009 specifications for **French, German, Spanish, Italian, Urdu and Chinese** state that stimuli for the controlled assessments should not be taken out of the classroom. However, since task-setting regulations permit a 'limited' level of control and as it is logical for most students to source their stimuli for picture-based discussions at home, this requirement has been revisited. Consequently, **it is possible for students to take a copy of the task stimuli home** if undertaking related research within the prescribed task specific preparation period.*

*Although it is possible for students to do some background preparation/research at home, teachers must be able to confirm that the final assessed product is the candidate's own work and has been prepared individually, without assistance from anyone else. (The latter is a QCDA requirement across all awarding bodies and teachers and students will need to complete a form to confirm this.) Students should not, therefore, be expected to produce full drafts of writing tasks (for example) at home.*

*Initial guidance was revisited following the publication of guidance for JCQ on controlled assessments (published after publication of our specifications) and in response to teachers' feedback. A notice was produced on August 19th 2009 to advise teachers of this amended guidance (<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gcse/gcse09/mfl/german/pages/viewNotice.aspx?notice=1532>). NB: Students may also refer to other resources when undertaking research and preparation including textbooks and exercise books*

Both the teacher and the candidate have to sign the Authenticity form to confirm that the work has been produced without any assistance other than that which is acceptable under the scheme of assessment. It may well be difficult to confirm this if the candidate had written a draft - or a significant portion of a draft - at home whilst not under supervision.

It is important to note that it is not the intention of this specification that students take drafts home with the aim of learning them by heart.

## 7 Does the task have to be taken within the two weeks' preparation time or after it?

The **time control** allows for a preparation time in respect of formal assessments of up to two weeks and no more than six hours' contact time. As the most important stage in the process is the general teaching and learning phase during which a related practice task may be undertaken and when teacher feedback to students is unlimited, many teachers consider it more appropriate to reduce this 2 week task specific preparation time and allocate more time to the general, pre-task release preparation phase. In such cases, the task for formal assessment would be undertaken well within the 2-week period.

Teachers may give their students the maximum of six learning hours over a maximum period of two weeks. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that the task taking goes beyond this maximum period so that students do not exceed the preparation time allowance. It is expected that the tasks will be undertaken within the 2 week period although, if necessary, it may be possible for some students to undertake assessments on the day after the maximum two weeks period of preparation has elapsed.

## 8 Candidates may have a fortnight's preparation for their written or spoken controlled assessment (subject to 6hr time limit). Would a week's half-term holiday count as part of that fortnight if one were to set up a controlled assessment just before half-term to complete after half term?

Centres are advised not to set controlled assessments just before a school holiday. If this approach is adopted, the half term would form part of the two week preparation period.

**9 What forms need to be sent with the controlled assessments? Is there a checklist for teachers so we know what we need to send off ?**

The following document has full details: *Administrative Support Guide (Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination and Controlled Assessments) 2011*

<http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/GCSE%20New%20GCSE/ICE-GCSE-tiered-2011.pdf>

This document will be refreshed and updated periodically. We would recommend referring to the Edexcel website for the most up to date documentation before you submit candidate work.

**10 If a candidate wants to retake a task, does he/she need to do a completely new one?**

If a candidate wants to retake a task on a specific theme, the task must not be exactly the same as one that the candidate has used previously. It will be necessary to change the task (eg. **at least one significant bullet point.**)

**11 How do you define a refreshed task?**

All tasks used for live assessments **must** be refreshed every two years. This means that at least one significant bullet point must be changed.

**12 If a student is resitting a unit with controlled assessments (Units 2 and 4), can s/he resubmit one piece?**

This is **not** possible for the controlled assessments in Writing. These are marked by Edexcel and are, therefore, treated in a similar fashion to examination scripts and will not be returned to centres.

However, it is possible for a student to resubmit ONE of the two required controlled assessment task in Speaking **if this is what the centre wishes to do**. In this case, the centre will need to ensure that the work is **re-assessed** (since this is a fresh assessment series) and that the original marks are adjusted if appropriate. Of course, *this would be only possible with those pieces of student work that have been recorded.*

NB: Centres are advised that students who wish to resit a Unit 2 (Speaking) controlled assessment in Speaking may well benefit more from undertaking different or 'refreshed' tasks.

**13 We have a 3 year KS4 starting in Y9. Can the Edexcel GCSE be studied over 3 years with entries for all exams in all 3 years? Or is it restricted to Ys 10 and 11 or a 2-year course?**

GCSE qualifications are intended to be taken over two years. However, centres may, of course, adopt a more flexible approach to delivery, for example by teaching GCSE qualifications over three years. However, please note that candidates are allowed to resit each unit once only before claiming their GCSE. In addition, younger candidates tend to have a much more limited range of both vocabulary and structures at their disposal, so it is *usually* much better to avoid formal assessments in Y9.

## Speaking-specific

Some of the controlled assessments for speaking that have been Edexcel moderated have been characterised by a definite sense of more natural conversation and greater interaction and spontaneity than was perhaps apparent in the legacy specification. Some candidates' levels of performance and achievement were impressive and teachers are to be congratulated on managing the process effectively and putting their candidates at ease during the orals.

Teachers may find the *Controlled Assessments Teacher Support Book – Speaking* useful. It is available for download under this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/CPS/GCSE%20from%202009/GCSE%20MFL%20Controlled%20Assessment%20Teacher%20Support%20Book%20-%20Speaking.pdf>

### 14 For the controlled assessment in Speaking, is it only the Open Interaction task type that can be accompanied by a stimulus and instructions?

For the controlled assessments in Speaking, there are 3 task types:

1. an open interaction
2. a picture-based free-flowing discussion
3. a presentation followed by discussion.

Only the first of these i.e. the open interaction will have a **stimulus**. The picture-based free-flowing discussion and the presentation followed by discussion tasks types do not have a stimulus. However, all 3 tasks could have instructions and may have bullet points to support and guide candidates through the content. Please see an example below.

#### *Picture based discussion on holidays*

*Find a picture of a recent holiday. If you wish, you may give a presentation of no longer than 1 minute on your photo or the holiday. You should be prepared to answer a range of questions about this holiday and holidays in general. These questions **may** include reference to*

- *where you spent your last holiday and what you did;*
- *what you normally do in the holidays and why ;*
- *how you travel when you go on holiday and why;*
- *what sort of accommodation you stay in when on holiday;*
- *who you go on holiday with;*
- *any holiday plans for next year.*

*You should be prepared to answer any other related questions from your teacher.*

It would be possible to achieve differentiation in this task by giving weaker students more support via bullet points and reducing the number of bullet points for more able students. It is not necessary to include any bullet points at all if that would suit your candidates better.

## 15 Is it acceptable to ask all candidates the same questions in a Presentation and discussion task

Please refer to the following extract from p14 of the Edexcel GCSE MFL Controlled Assessments Teacher Support Book (speaking)

<http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/CPS/GCSE%20from%202009/GCSE%20MFL%20Controlled%20Assessment%20Teacher%20Support%20Book%20%20-%20Speaking.pdf> is relevant here:

*It is not in the spirit of the new GCSE controlled assessments for speaking for teachers to simply provide their students with a list of pre-set questions to be rote-learned and regurgitated. All tasks ... should aim for natural interaction. However, your students should be familiar with language and structures appropriate to the theme and topic area of their assessment.*

*A range of possible, potential questions related to the topic area will have been encountered during the general (pre-task release) preparation phase and students should consider those when preparing for the task. It is, therefore, possible for students to refer back to questions and answers previously used and it is quite possible that some of these (or questions very similar to these) may arise in the controlled assessment as a natural consequence of your interaction with your students. Remember that the tasks must include an unpredictable element.*

*The idea is that the questioning will relate to what the student says rather than the questions leading the student to say certain things. The conversation should involve as free and genuine dialogue as possible within the constraints of a formal assessment.*

It is, therefore, not appropriate for all candidates to be asked exactly the same questions. Teachers are expected to ask each student a range of different questions dependant on what s/he is saying – so the responses given by an individual candidate will determine the questions asked by the teacher - although some common questions are envisaged. In addition, it should be borne in mind that many tasks will require students to provide individual and distinctive content even though a common brief has been set: a picture based discussion about a famous sports personality would probably involve different people and teachers would, therefore, need to ask different questions to elicit different information and opinions.

The teacher support book (p15) provides further information is given in relation to questioning:

*It is likely that teachers and students may establish a bank of potential questions as part of teaching and learning. However, **students must not have any prior indication of the actual questions that they will be asked during their assessment.** Students will be expected to demonstrate their language knowledge through manipulation of language rather than an ability to rehearse a series of questions and answers.*

*It is important to note that the assessment grid for Content and Response refers to the fact that students should be able to demonstrate they can cope with **unpredictable elements.***

## 16 For the controlled assessments in speaking, what exactly are the 'unpredictable elements' (referred to in the assessment grid for 'Content and response')?

Unpredictable elements relate to **questions on aspects not specifically mentioned on the task sheet** but which are firmly related to the theme and which you have covered with your group during the general teaching and learning phase. Please see the task below for a picture-based discussion on work experience:

*You could be asked*

- *where the work placement was and what you had to do*
- *your opinion of work colleagues*
- *which aspects you enjoyed and why*
- *why you feel work experience is important*
- *what you want to do as a career in the future and why*

*You should be prepared to answer any other related questions from your teacher.*

Unpredictable elements might then include questions on any aspects not covered by the above bullet points. These might include who organised the work placement, when the candidate did work experience, how long the work experience lasted, which aspects the candidate did not enjoy and why etc.

### 17 Can I ask all candidates in my group the same unpredictable questions?

No, this would not be in the spirit of the test. In addition, the assessment criteria for Content & Response contain certain key concepts such as **spontaneity** and **interaction**. These are important elements - if you ask all candidates the same unpredictable questions, there would be very little spontaneity or natural interaction. Of course, there will be some overlap of questions between candidates but the intention is that questions and answers will follow a natural (non-contrived) and logically occurring sequence (as far as is possible within the confines of a formal oral assessment).

### 18 How I should approach the marking of my students' oral interactions in those cases where some candidates have not asked any questions - how much should they be penalised for this?

For the Open Interaction task the following marking principle has been agreed:

If the task reminds candidates that they should ask the Teacher/Examiner questions i.e. more than one, but the candidate asks only ONE question, then there is a flat rate deduction of one mark on the Content and Response grid; if the candidate asks the TE no questions at all, then there is a flat rate deduction of 2 marks on the Content and Response grid. There are no penalties on the other two assessment grids. There is an expectation in this task type that the candidate will ask the TE questions since it is a transactional task type.

Although interaction is important in all three task types, **there is no requirement for candidates to ask questions in the Presentation and discussion or in the Picture-based discussion task options.**

### 19 Is there any deduction of marks if the Presentation in the Presentation and discussion task type does not last for 1 minute?

In the Presentation and discussion task type candidates must give a presentation which should last between 1 minute minimum and 3 minutes maximum. If the presentation section falls short of 1 minute there will be a flat rate deduction of 2 marks for Content and response. If teachers are concerned that their students may be unable to give a presentation lasting a minimum of 1 minute, they could consider the other 2 task type options instead.

Teachers should be reassured that 1 minute is long enough for the presentation part of the task and reminded that it is not acceptable for all candidates to learn the *same* presentation off by heart.

### 20 What happens if a candidate cannot manage to undertake an assessment over 4 minutes?

These principles have been agreed across languages:

Each oral task should last between 4 & 6 minutes - this affords flexibility to suit different candidates. Teachers should not assess any material after 6 minutes (moderators will stop moderating at 6 minutes) – this will ensure a more even playing field for all candidates. It should be remembered that prolonging the oral rarely brings any advantage to the candidate and that often the reverse is true. However, we recognise that 4 minutes may represent too long a time for some candidates, and in such cases, orals which last 3 minutes 30 seconds will be acceptable. Anything shorter than 3' 30" is too short and there will be an automatic deduction of 2 marks on the Content & response grid.

### 21 I am marking Speaking controlled assessments. If I decide on a mark for *Content and response*, is there a limit on how many marks I can give for *Range of language* and *Accuracy*?

There is no restriction across assessment grids as such. However, it is fair to say that a candidate scoring 8 marks for *Content & response* would be quite unlikely to score 6 + 6 on the Language grids. Similarly, it would be unlikely for a candidate to score e.g. 16 on *Content & Response* and then just e.g. 3 + 3 on the language grids. It is possible to achieve a score of e.g. 12 + 5 + 5.

There is usually a correlation between the 2 language grids - so a candidate who scored 3 for Range would be unlikely to score 5 or 6 for Accuracy due to the absence of complex language BUT it might be possible to score 5 for Range and 3 for Accuracy.

## Writing-specific

Teachers may find the *Controlled Assessments Teacher Support Book – Writing* useful. It is available for download under this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/migrationdocuments/CPS/GCSE%20from%202009/GCSE%20MFL%20Writing%20Teacher%20Support%20Book.pdf>

### **22 Can a candidate who writes fewer than 200 words still score a grade C? Does writing fewer than 200 words mean that a student cannot gain a C grade for writing controlled assessments?**

It is expected that students aiming for grade C and above will produce over 200 words in their controlled assessment tasks. Clearly, marks are applied on a *best-fit* basis and examiners will reward the individual pieces on their own merit. However, at the top end, examiners must see evidence of extended writing. Therefore, in order to access the full mark scheme, extended writing should, at least, approach 200 words. Consequently, a piece of writing of about 125 words, for example, would be significantly short and would be unlikely to access uppermost marks.

### **23 Are there any penalties if candidates write more than 200 words?**

No, there is no upper word limit. However, the assessment is qualitative rather than quantitative and candidates will have no longer than one hour in which to write up their task. Over-long pieces of written work are often self penalising and candidates might be better advised to produce just over 200 words and use any 'spare' time constructively to check what they have written.

### **24 If my students write 2 shorter pieces which together make up 100 words, do these pieces of writing have to be on a different theme or topic?**

It is possible to set two short tasks rather than one long one in a single assessment session. However, this type of activity is envisaged for only very weak candidates. There is an expectation that most candidates operating at a notional 'foundation tier' level will undertake a single task of at least 100 words in the allocated time – and not two shorter ones.

If it is appropriate to set two shorter tasks, students should be set two tasks on the same theme. For example, on the theme of Business, work and employment they could be asked to complete a simple job application form and then write a short letter of introduction (i.e. a few lines about themselves) to afford them a greater chance of reaching the 100 words minimum word count.

Whilst Examiners will, of course, assess the work of candidates who do not reach the minimum word count, it is extremely unlikely that those who write fewer than 100 words will score more than 4 - 6 marks for Communication & content since the *level of* such a *response* will be *minimal*. In addition, the marks awarded for language (both Knowledge & application and Accuracy) will be restricted since such candidates will have shown evidence of only limited vocabulary and structures.