HSC examinations in [Language] in Context courses – advice for students

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# Context

Note: This document provides generic advice only. It is the responsibility of individual teachers to ensure their students are adequately prepared for the HSC examinations.

The advice is current as at 2 July 2020.

Where you see [language], replace this with the language you are studying, for example Chinese, Japanese or Korean.

The [Language] in Context syllabus documents are referenced in this advice – familiarise yourself with the relevant syllabus sections.

The [Language] in Context courses were previously known as the Heritage [Language] courses.

# How to approach the oral examination

## General information

The oral examinations take place in August or September each year. All languages oral examinations (except for Modern Hebrew) are held on a Saturday. Specific information about your examination will be made available to you approximately 3 weeks before the examination date. You can access the HSC languages oral examinations timetable on the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/hsc/key-dates-exam-timetables/hsc-languages-oral-examinations).

The Languages Oral Online Examination Scheduling Function allows your school to schedule the time and venue for your HSC oral examinations. Once you have been scheduled, your school will be able to print a copy of your confirmation sheet from Schools Online. You should also download your confirmation sheet and relevant venue location maps through [Students Online](https://studentsonline.nesa.nsw.edu.au/go/login/).

## Examination specifications

The oral examination is a 10 minute interview between you and an examiner. It is worth 25 marks.

You are not permitted to use dictionaries or refer to written notes during the oral examination.

The oral examination will explore the subject of your **personal investigation** in [language]. It relates to Objective 1 and related outcomes from the relevant [Language] in Context syllabus. You can access the syllabus from the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-languages/in-context).

*Objective 1 – interact with others to exchange meaning in spoken [language], applying knowledge and understanding of the relationships between language, culture and identity*

| Outcome |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.1 | use strategies to maintain communication |
| 1.2 | exchange information and justify opinions and ideas |
| 1.3 | express personal opinions, emotions and feelings |
| 1.4 | present information and ideas appropriate to context, purpose and audience |
| 1.5 | recognise and use language appropriate to different cultural contexts |
| 1.6 | develop bilingual and bicultural identity through interacting with others |

You will need to complete an *HSC Languages in Context interview sheet*, which your teacher will upload to [Schools Online](https://bosho.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/links/schoolsonline.html) at least 2 weeks before the oral examination. On this sheet, you will provide information such as the topic of your personal investigation, texts used in your investigation and a summary of key ideas in your investigation. This will be handed to the examiner on the day of the oral examination.

In the interview, you will be expected to explore with the examiner the subject of your personal investigation, including your reflections on your findings and references to the texts and resources you used.

## Preparing for the examination

This is an examination for which you can be well prepared. This is your opportunity to talk about various aspects of your personal investigation, including the prescribed issue it relates to.

You are advised to:

* familiarise yourself with potential questions, for example:
* the reason/s for your choice
* the time taken to research
* the type of resources used
* your findings
* reflections on your findings
* how the personal investigation has helped to develop your understanding of [language] and the culture of [language]-speaking communities
* learn as much useful vocabulary and expressions related to your personal investigation as you can. This will enable you to discuss your personal investigation in depth and to answer questions in detail
* practise responding to a wide range of sample questions from a bilingual and bicultural viewpoint
* practise speaking with as many [language] speakers as you can, for example family members, classmates, your teacher/s
* record your answers and, if possible, ask your teacher for feedback. This will give you practice in recording your responses and will also help you to assess areas on which you may need to focus, for example pronunciation, intonation, variety of vocabulary, sentence structure and/or grammatical features
* practise speaking in full sentences and extending your responses where possible. This will enable you to show a greater facility with [language] than if you consistently answer with simple phrases or single words
* practise giving detailed information in your answers. You may be asked a range of questions from the perspectives (personal, community, international) you have chosen for your investigation. It is up to you to maximise this opportunity during the 10 minutes of the examination
* practise speaking in the past tense, as you may be asked about things that have happened in the past (as your personal investigation research has already taken place)
* practise speaking using formal language as you will be speaking to an examiner – do not use plain or colloquial language as it will not be the appropriate register.

## During the examination

You should aim to establish effective communication and to maintain the flow of the interview to create the best overall impression. Demonstrate how well you can:

* express ideas and reflect on personal experiences
* make detailed and perceptive references to texts and resources studied/researched
* present and substantiate a point of view effectively and consistently
* communicate effectively and fluently with appropriate intonation and pronunciation
* demonstrate a high level of grammatical accuracy and sophistication in the use of language structures and vocabulary.

You should:

* remain calm and speak confidently and clearly
* avoid the temptation to rush into a response. If you need a moment to think about your answer, then take this – just as you might in a normal interview. On the other hand, long pauses would not be natural, and should be avoided. Learn ‘filler’ phrases in [language] to help you to sound natural and authentic
* listen carefully to the question. If you have not understood, or are uncertain, then ask the examiner in [language] for clarification or to repeat it
* be aware that the questions asked may follow on from the answers you have already given. However, a number of different aspects may be covered in the examination so there may be a switch to other aspects of your personal investigation during the course of the interview. You should be prepared for this to happen
* be prepared to expand your answers. This does not mean giving a prepared monologue and attempting to dominate the interview. However, you should attempt to expand your responses by making a number of relevant comments to demonstrate the range of vocabulary and [language] structures you have at your disposal as well as to show your knowledge of the area of your personal investigation
* try to treat every question as a springboard to show what you know – avoid the temptation to restrict your response
* be aware that this is an interview and not a conversation, with a series of questions provided for you to demonstrate your knowledge of your subject matter. It is therefore not appropriate for you to ask the examiner questions
* remember that there is a wide range of possible questions that you could be asked. It is impossible to accurately predict the questions in this type of examination. However, if you have practised, you can be confident you will be able to handle any line of questioning that develops
* remain consistent throughout the conversation. For example it is not advisable to agree with something at the beginning of the exam, and then disagree at the end
* answer as best you can, but do not worry if there is a question you cannot answer. A range of questions may be asked
* be aware that you should not ask the examiner for assistance, other than to repeat or clarify the question
* be prepared to answer questions in the past tense, for example you may be asked your current view of the issue addressed in your personal investigation, compared to before you started your research
* avoid using English words if you don't know the correct word or expression in [language]. You should have a range of appropriate vocabulary related to your personal investigation at your disposal and should keep to what you know to be correct. The examination is not a good time for experimentation
* always remember that the examiner’s role is to facilitate the examination. The aim is to provide you with a positive experience, by giving you the opportunity to show your range of ability in spoken [language].

# How to approach *Section I – responding to texts*

## Examination specifications

This section of the examination in worth 50 marks. Allow approximately 1 hour 45 minutes to complete this section.

You may use monolingual and/or bilingual print dictionaries, including print character dictionaries for Chinese and Japanese. You may consult your dictionaries during reading time and during the examination.

This section is designed to assess your knowledge and skills in responding to spoken and written texts which may include audiovisual texts. You will be required to demonstrate your understanding of texts by interpreting, summarising, extracting and synthesising information and reflecting on language and culture in use.

This section relates to Objectives 2 and 3 and related outcomes from the relevant [Language] in Context syllabus. You can access the syllabus from the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-languages/in-context).

*Objective 2 – create texts to express meaning in written [language], demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the relationships between language, culture and identity*

| Outcome |  |
| --- | --- |
| 2.1 | sequences and structures information and ideas |
| 2.2 | uses appropriate linguistic features and structures to convey information, ideas, emotions and opinions |
| 2.3 | creates texts in a variety of forms appropriate to a range of contexts, purposes and audiences |
| 2.4 | applies knowledge of cultural concepts and perspectives to the creation of texts |
| 2.5 | express ideas and opinions from a bilingual and bicultural perspective |

*Objective 3 – analyse spoken and written texts in [language] to interpret meaning, examining and reflecting on relationships between language, culture and identity*

| Outcome |  |
| --- | --- |
| 3.1 | summarises information and ideas from texts |
| 3.2 | synthesises information and ideas from texts |
| 3.3 | infers points of view, opinions and attitudes expressed in texts |
| 3.4 | respond to texts personally and critically |
| 3.5 | analyses the way in which culture and identity are expressed through language |
| 3.6 | reflects on own and others’ values, beliefs, practices and ideas expressed in texts |

There will be approximately 6-8 texts including a range of text types. The texts may be spoken, written and/or audiovisual, for example a television commercial. The texts will be related to the issues, perspectives and contexts as listed in the syllabus (see below) and will be of varying length.

Included in the 6-8 texts will be approximately 3 spoken/audiovisual texts, each of which is approximately 1-2 minutes in length. The total time for one reading/playing of all texts will be approximately 5 minutes. Each text will be read/played twice with a pause between each reading/playing and a longer pause after the final reading/playing for you to answer the question.

The 6-8 texts will be accompanied by approximately 6 questions. Questions will be in [language] and English for a response in [language] or English as specified (only 1-2 responses will be in English). Questions will be graded in difficulty. Each question will relate to 1-2 stimulus texts and may involve integrations of skills such as viewing, listening, reading and writing.

The length of response in [language] will depend on the nature of the question, and will be in the range of:

* 60–180 characters for Chinese
* 100–300 *ji* for Japanese
* 125–375 *ja* for Korean.

For Chinese,candidates may present responses in either simplified characters or full-form (complex) characters, but are expected to use a consistent style throughout their responses.

## Preparing for the examination

You should be familiar with the five prescribed **issues**. They are:

* young people and their relationships
* traditions and values in contemporary society
* the changing nature of work
* the individual as a global citizen
* [language] identity in the international context.

The **issues** will be studied through three **perspectives**:

* personal – individual identity
* community – connections with the [language]-speaking communities locally, regionally and worldwide
* international – connections with the world as a global citizen.

You will study the **issues** and **perspectives** through a range of **contexts** and texts:

* social and community settings (such as home, family, school, workplace, the internet)
* contemporary literature and the arts
* media (such as television, newspapers, radio, the internet).

‘Texts’ can be spoken, written or visual. You are advised to read/listen to/view as many texts as possible related to the prescribed issues, for example:

* class discussions
* course books
* interviews
* films and television programs, including reviews
* short stories, poems and extracts from novels
* selected online material (ask your teacher for appropriate links)
* selected articles in magazines and newspapers
* short stories from anthologies.

You should familiarise yourself with a wide range of vocabulary that is relevant to the prescribed issues. This will be fundamental when dealing with this section of the examination.

Develop a sound vocabulary base by learning as many key words as possible related to the issues. Keep a record of new vocabulary, adding new words and expressions used in the material you read during your course work, especially those which are commonly used.

Ensure you are familiar with grammatical items you are expected to recognise and use for your language – these are listed in section 8.5 of the syllabus for Korean and in section 8.6 of the syllabus for Chinese and Japanese.

For Chinese and Japanese, learn all prescribed characters and use them whenever you can in your written response.

The dictionary is a very useful tool if there is a key word you do not know. In this instance, you should underline or highlight the key word for checking. However, you should not be tempted to rely on the dictionary for too many common words. You will not have time while reading the text to look up a significant number of words. You should regularly practise using a dictionary as much as possible to develop the skill of quickly and accurately looking up words.

Practise past HSC examination papers from the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/resources/hsc-exam-papers).

## During the examination

If you are well prepared, you can approach this section with confidence, knowing you are capable of coping with this exam, including dealing with the unexpected.

You should focus on the key words in the questions – you may find it helpful to underline or highlight these key words to avoid misreading the question. Remember, some questions will require you to answer in [language] and some in English. The length of the required response will vary so be sure to read the question carefully.

You should be familiar with your own style of answering. Some students prefer to concentrate during the first reading, without writing anything down. Others prefer to jot down relevant points in the candidate’s notes section as the first reading begins. You should know which strategy is best for you and keep to your own approach.

During the first reading/listening/viewing, note key words that will help you identify the gist of the text and begin to formulate your response. Do not panic if you do not understand everything. Remember that unfamiliar vocabulary may be provided in English in the question, or may not even be required in your answer. You can often gain a good understanding of the text, without knowing every word.

During the second reading/listening/viewing, watch out for any details you may have missed and complete your answer.

If you have not understood a key word, write it down in the candidate’s notes section in [language]. You may have time to look it up after the second reading.

Some answers will require more information than others and the number of marks allocated to each question is a guide to the depth of the answer required. The number of lines printed on the paper and the number of marks allocated are often a guide to indicate the length and depth of the response required. It should be noted, however, that these lines are a guide only.

You are advised to use your time wisely. If you have time between questions, you should quickly review a previous answer, or answers. Check to see if your response has been clearly expressed, or if your expression is ambiguous. Remember the only way you can be assessed is by the answer you have written.

Ensure that you have transferred all relevant information written down in thecandidate’s notes section to the answer space on the printed lines.

If you decide to change an answer, especially a number or spelling response, do not over-write the original answer. Delete the original and write the correct information above or beside it so that your response is legible. Do not expect the examiner to guess what you meant to write.

Pay careful attention to providing all relevant detail and information.

Do not panic if you miss hearing the information required for an answer or part of an answer. If you really have no idea, you should make an intelligent guess based on the understanding you have derived from the text as a whole. There is a chance you may be right. If you leave your answer blank, you will certainly receive no marks.

Maintain your concentration and treat each question as a new beginning. If you have found one particular question difficult, it is likely that other students may have found it challenging too. Put it behind you and focus on the next question.

In some questions you may be asked to form a conclusion or give an opinion, supporting your answer with evidence from the text. Always remember to base your answer firmly in the facts you have heard. You should link your response back to specific information, so that you can support your answer and relate your response, or any conclusions you have drawn, to the text itself.

Keep in mind that, for your response you need to:

* summarise information and ideas from texts
* infer points of view, opinions and attitudes
* respond personally and critically to texts
* analyse the way in which culture and identity are expressed
* synthesise information and ideas from texts
* communicate relevant information and ideas in either comprehensible [language] or English as required
* create texts in a variety of forms appropriate to a range of contexts, purposes and audiences
* demonstrate control of a range of language structures and vocabulary in [language].

# How to approach *Section II – creating texts in [language]*

## Examination specifications

This section of the examination in worth 25 marks. Allow approximately 45 minutes to complete this section.

You may use monolingual and/or bilingual print dictionaries, including print character dictionaries for Chinese and Japanese. You may consult your dictionaries during reading time and during the examination.

This section is designed primarily to assess your ability to express ideas through the creation of original text in [language]. You will be expected to write an evaluative, persuasive or reflective text in [language].

This section relates to Objective 2 related outcomes from the relevant [Language] in Context syllabus. You can access the syllabus from the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-languages/in-context).

*Objective 2 – create texts to express meaning in written [language], demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the relationships between language, culture and identity*

| Outcome |  |
| --- | --- |
| 2.1 | sequences and structures information and ideas |
| 2.2 | uses appropriate linguistic features and structures to convey information, ideas, emotions and opinions |
| 2.3 | creates texts in a variety of forms appropriate to a range of contexts, purposes and audiences |
| 2.4 | applies knowledge of cultural concepts and perspectives to the creation of texts |
| 2.5 | express ideas and opinions from a bilingual and bicultural perspective |

The questions will relate to the **issues**, **perspectives** and **contexts** of the course. You will be required to answer one question from a choice of two. Each question will specify a context, purpose and audience. The questions will be phrased in [language] and English for a response in [language]. The length of the response will be approximately:

* 300 characters for Chinese
* 500 *ji* for Japanese
* 625 *ja* for Korean.

For Chinese,candidates may present responses in either simplified characters or full-form (complex) characters, but are expected to use a consistent style throughout their responses.

## Preparing for the examination

As with Section 1, make sure you are familiar with the prescribed **issues*,* perspectives**and**contexts*.***

Practise planning and writing responses:

* drawn from all the prescribed issues, perspectives and contexts in the syllabus, so that you have a comprehensive bank of vocabulary and structures at your disposal
* from a bilingual and bicultural perspective
* within the allocated time limit, to ensure you’re able to respond appropriately within the given time frame
* within the allocated length of the response and familiarise yourself with the skills required to communicate effectively in each text
* using the grammatical items you are expected to recognise and use for your language – these are listed in section 8.5 of the syllabus for Korean and in section 8.6 of the syllabus for Chinese and Japanese. For Chinese and Japanese, use the prescribed characters whenever you can.

Practise past HSC examination papers from the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/resources/hsc-exam-papers).

Correspond with a [language] friend, via email or social media. This will assist you in developing your writing skills in an authentic context. However, it is very important that you practise writing in the modern standard version of [language], without abbreviations or colloquialisms.

Learn from your mistakes. Always carefully review corrected work handed back by your teacher, noting mistakes and corrections and asking for clarification when necessary.

Avoid the temptation to learn prepared answers off by heart and expect them to fit any question. It is highly unlikely that a prepared answer will be relevant, and responses that are not written specifically for the examination question will be immediately obvious to the examiner. Remember that relevance to all aspects of the question is vital in your response.

Practise using a dictionary effectively. This requires a particular skill. Crosscheck words if you are uncertain whether you have chosen the correct alternative.

## During the examination

You should:

* clearly indicate on your answer paper which question you are attempting
* read the questions carefully
* write approximately the response length advised in the question. Remember, writing more than the advised length is unnecessary. An accurate, interesting, well-crafted response, which adheres to the advised length, will make a more positive impression than one which is significantly longer, but is disjointed and full of mistakes
* allocate an appropriate amount of time to ensure you are not hurrying to complete this task. The suggested time taken to complete this section is 45 minutes, so you might decide to spend a few minutes reading and understanding the question and planning your response. However, from practice you will know how to effectively use your time for planning and writing
* take time to plan your answers, even if it means simply noting down a few key words or phrases before you begin writing – a plan is often a good idea for this type of extended response, as you will be judged on your ability to organise information and ideas coherently
* use a variety of structures and vocabulary where possible
* for Chinese and Japanese, use a variety of prescribed characters
* decide whether a formal or informal form of address is appropriate for the context, purpose and audience required by the task and keep to this – this will depend on whom you are addressing. Once you have decided what to use, do not switch between these when addressing the same person/people
* avoid using your own personal details (for example, name, school) even though you may be writing from a personal viewpoint – this will ensure the anonymity of your response
* avoid repeating phrases and vocabulary across the texts you write. You only have a limited opportunity to show the examiners what you know, and a more positive impression will be made if the vocabulary, expressions and structures you use are not repeated
* aim to make your answers as interesting as you can, ensuring that the development of your ideas is logical. Try to avoid jumping from one idea to the next in a disjointed fashion
* write a relevant response and avoid the temptation to rely on slabs of pre-learned material. Your written text will not flow logically if you insert blocks of material learned by heart from somewhere else. Remember that your text must be relevant and must clearly address every aspect of the question
* avoid experimenting with the language you use. In an examination you should always write what you know to be correct. Do not invent your own phrases and expressions or take a guess at what you think may be correct, simply because you are determined to make a particular point. If you are uncertain, you should write something different instead. A good student can always find ways of adapting what they know to suit the question
* avoid any temptation to lift text from *Section 1 – responding to texts*of the examination, as this is plagiarism and will be easily identified by the examiner – you can only be awarded marks for your own work
* keep going back to the question to ensure that what you are writing is relevant
* allow enough time to review your work. Re-read what you have written to make sure that you have not left anything out
* keep in mind that, for your response you need to:
  + demonstrate the relevance of information and ideas
  + write a text that is appropriate to its audience, context and purpose
  + structure and sequence information and ideas
  + demonstrate control of a range of language structures and vocabulary in [language].