

Serge Berot from the Institute of Education and Cian Hogan from St Killian's in Clonskeagh came into studio to talk about what you need to know for the French exams.

### **The Oral**

This part of the examination is worth 25%. An examiner who will record what you are saying will ask you a series of questions. You will normally be examined for just over ten minutes. Most of the questions that the corrector will ask you will concern themselves with you and your life. It is unusual to be asked about the more abstract topics. You may, if you wish, bring in a prepared document. This can take the shape of a photo, picture or article that you are interested in.

- \* · Try to use the document.
- \* · Try as far as possible to lead the corrector.
- \* · You can do this in subtle ways.
- \* · For example, if you mention that you play football be prepared to talk about this. If you say that you have just turned 18 then expect several questions on this.
- \* · Never wear anything that you are not prepared to talk about.
- \* · Be polite and smile frequently.
- \* · Remember that the corrector is there to help you.
- \* Consider these questions and make sure that you can deal with them.

**The Written Paper is worth 220 marks and the Listening Comprehension is worth 80 marks. You have 2&1/2 hours to answer the Written Paper and 40 minutes to answer the Listening Comprehension. If you follow this timing scheme you will have about 15 minutes to check your answers.**

### **On the day of the exam**

Marks Timing

Reading Comprehension 1 - Compulsory - 60 marks - 35 minutes

Reading Comprehension 2 - Compulsory - 60 marks - 34 minutes

Written Question 1 - Compulsory - 40 marks - 25 minutes

Written Questions 2,3 and 4 - You must answer two of these three - 30 marks each - 20 minutes each

On the day of the examination make sure you are well prepared. Include a pencil, a highlighter pen an eraser and plenty of spare pens.

Start with the comprehensions however before you do make sure to look at and make a note of what has been asked on the written paper. By doing this your brain will begin to think, if only even on a subconscious level, about what is needed. You may also encounter turns of phrase or vocabulary in the comprehension that may be useful to you later.

At Higher Level, Reading, Section 1 (the reading comprehension) is worth 120 marks, which means the comprehensions are worth 30% of the total marks of the entire examination! The reading passages are worth more marks than any other section of the exam.

When dealing with the comprehension remember to

1. read the questions first, highlighting each question

2. read the comprehension straight through, underlining any sentences that you think may be of importance
3. read the questions again this allows the questions to direct you to the area in the comprehension that you need
4. follow the sequence of the comprehension (for example, the answer to question number one is normally contained in an area that comes before the answer to question number two.)

When answering the comprehension questions remember that your examination technique is vital. Of course, it goes without saying that you must practise. If you work through one comprehension with a dictionary and look up every word that you don't know, it should take you about 1 hour. You need to be able to answer a comprehension in 35 minutes! Each question is worth 5 marks.

There is nearly always a grammar identification question. You need to be completely familiar with all the terms and tenses that you will be asked to find. You may be asked to find examples of any of the following:

Grammar Term

Example

Un article défini Le / La / Les / L'

Un article indéfini

Un / Une / Des

Un article partitif

Du / De la / De l' / Des

Un article/déterminant démonstratif

Ce / Cette / Ces

Un article/déterminant possessif Mon / Ma / Mes / Ton / Ta / Tes etc.

Un article interrogatif

Quel / Quelle / Quels / Quelles (usually followed by a question mark)

Un article exclamatif

Quel / Quelle / Quels / Quelles (usually followed by an exclamation mark)

Un adjectif Beau / Belle / Beaux etc.

Un adjectif possessif

Mon / Ma / Mes / Ton / Ta / Tes etc.

Un pronom démonstratif Celui / celle

Un pronom féminin Elle / elles

Un pronom forme forte / disjonctif Moi / Toi / Lui / Elle / Nous / Vous / Eux / Elles

Un pronom interrogatif qui?, que?, quoi?, lequel? laquelle? lesquelles?.  
(look out for the exclamation mark)

Un pronom masculin Il/ Ils

Un pronom neutre Ceci / Cela / Ça

Un pronom objet direct Le/ La / L' Les

Un pronom objet indirect Y / Lui / Leur

Un pronom personnel Je/ Tu / Il / Elle/ Nous / Vous / Ils / Elles

Un pronom possessif Le mien / la mienne/ Le tien / La tienne / Le sien / La sienne / Le notre / La Notre / Le votre /La votre

Un pronom réfléchi Me / Te / Se / Se / Nous / Vous / Se / Se

Un pronom relatif Qui / Que / Dont

Un pronom sujet Je/ Tu / Il / Elle/ Nous / Vous / Ils / Elles

Un adjectif Heureusement / Complètement ( Look out for ment added on to the feminine adjective)  
Une préposition De / à / Pour etc  
Un participe passé Donné(e)(s) / Fait(e)(s) / Fini(e)(s)/ Vendu(e)(s)  
Un verbe dans  
L'imparfait donnais / finissaient / Faisons  
L'impératif Donnez ! Donne ! Donnons ! (Look out for the !)  
L'infinitif Donner / Finir / Vendre/ Dire etc  
Le conditionnel donnerais / finirions/ Iraient etc (Look out for the r before the imperfect endings)  
Le futur simple donnera / vendrons/ auront (remember the future endings are the same as the present tense endings of avoir)  
Le passé Composé suis allé(e) / ai vendu (if given the choice always pick an avoir example).  
Le passé récent Viens de faire / viennent de faire  
Le plus-que-parfait Avais fait / était allé(e) (if given the choice always pick an avoir example.)  
Le présent de l'indicatif Donne / finis / vendons/ suis / ai  
Le Subjonctif Donne / finisse / vendions / sois / ait (look out for que before the verb)

Un verbe pronominal Nous levons / me lève / te lèves

Un verbe auxiliaire The avoir or être part of the verb in any compound tense

Le futur proche Vais aller / vont faire / vas devoir

Avoid silly mistakes such as, putting down two answers on the one line or thinking that an answer can be correct more than once. Avoid very long answers. Generally if you write more than the given space alarm bells should start to ring! Pay particular attention to question 6 where you must answer in English. This question is worth ten marks and should be given some thought.

According to the chief examiner's report of 2003:

Mark loss, in the final, 10-mark question in English in both Comprehension passages, was caused, generally, by failure to distinguish two clearly identifiable points or by supporting a point with irrelevant quotation. As in other questions of comprehension, candidates are advised to clearly think about their responses before putting pen to paper. So, put simply you must give two separate points and back them up with quotations.

## **Section 2 - written production**

### **Question 1 at a glance !**

You will be asked to write ninety words. This question is compulsory. It is worth 40 marks or roughly 10% of the over all paper. You will get 20 marks for your what you say and 20 marks for how you say it. You have 25 minutes to answer this question.

Q 1 (a) will take its theme from the first reading passage. You will be asked to write a story (narrative) or personal response to some aspect of the text.

Q 1 (b) will take its theme from the second reading passage. Here again you will be asked to write a story or give a response to some aspect of the text.

You will rely heavily on the imperfect and passé composé tenses. So, make sure that you are very comfortable with these. Avoid writing too much and don't regurgitate big chunks of learnt off material.

In many cases, you can reuse some of the vocabulary that you learnt for the oral examination.

According to the chief examiner's report of 2003 marks were lost in many Production Écrite answers, due mainly to (a) irrelevance caused by trying to slot in learned-off material; (b) grammatical carelessness. Make sure that you fall into neither of these traps.

### **Question 2 at a glance !**

You will be asked to write 75 words. This question is compulsory. It is worth 30 marks or roughly 7% of the over all paper. You will get 15 marks for your what you say and 15 marks for how you say it. In the case of a letter, you will receive 6 marks for the correct address and ending and then 12 for what you say and 12 for how you say it. You will have 20 minutes to answer this question. You may be asked to write a note, formal letter, informal letter or diary entry.

In the case of a letter:

- make sure that you have highlighted all the tasks that you must complete.
- deal with the tasks sequentially
- don't write too much.
- it is a good idea to write out a quick list of codes for the tenses and constructions that you are familiar with. This will help you focus on the grammar that you are using and will also ensure that you don't forget to include a tense or construction that you have learnt.
- always say what you can say never say what you want to say
- avoid direct translations from English to French
- practise as many past Leaving Cert examples as possible
- check your verbs, nouns and adjectives
- only ever use learnt off material if it fits the task perfectly

### **Have a look at some of this Formal Letter**

Répondez en français à la lettre dont l'extrait vous est donné ci-dessous.

« Nous vous remercions de votre lettre du 3 avril et de votre candidature à un poste d'accompagnateur de langue anglaise au centre International d'Equitation à Uzès. Toutefois nous aimerions quelques détails supplémentaires :-

Combien de temps avez-vous travaillé au Thomond Riding School et quelles étaient exactement vos fonctions ?

Vous écrivez correctement le français mais quel est votre niveau à l'oral ?

En dehors de l'équitation, quels autres sports pratiquez-vous ? »

Destinataire : Monsieur René Bastide,

Directeur,

Centre International d'Equitation,

30700 Uzès,

France.

Expéditeur : James/Jean Williamson,

78, Dublin Road, Drogheda,

Co. Louth, Ireland.

Drogheda le 13 juin,

René Bastide,

Directeur,

Centre International d'Equitation,

30700 Uzès,

John Williamson France.

78, Dublin Road,

Drogheda,  
Co. Louth, Ireland.

Monsieur,

Je vous remercie de votre lettre du premier mai et je vais faire de mon mieux pour répondre à toutes vos questions. Je travaille à Thomond Riding School depuis trois ans (les étés précédents) Normalement je dois ranger les écuries et donner à manger aux chevaux. Donc je suis très qualifié. Pourtant je puis vous fournir, si vous le désirez, des attestations de mes employeurs.

Vous m'avez demandé si mon niveau de français écrit est aussi bon que mon niveau de français oral. Depuis cinq ans maintenant je fais partie d'un échange scolaire en France, et chaque Pâques je vais dans votre pays pour améliorer mon français oral. Donc, je le parle assez couramment.

En dehors de l'équitation je suis fana de sport, surtout le tennis, la natation et le hurling (le jeu national d'Irlande). J'espère que j'ai répondu à toutes vos questions et vous demande de me contacter si vous avez besoin d'autres renseignements supplémentaires.

Je vous prie de bien vouloir recevoir, Monsieur, l'expression de mes sentiments distingués.

John Williamson

**Here is a sample of a past Leaving Cert Informal letter.**

Your parents have agreed with your idea of inviting your French penpal François(e) to spend three weeks with your family in Ireland this summer.

Write a letter to him/her in French.

- Mention the discussion with your parents.
- Make the invitation, including the period that would suit your family.
- Give some indications of your plans for the three weeks in question.
- Ask François (e) to write back as soon as possible.

Your name is Paul(a)

**Questions 3 and 4 at a glance !**

You will be asked to write 75 words. Usually you will have to deal with an extract from a newspaper, a graph a picture or a cartoon. You will have to answer either question 1 or question 2. The question you will answer will be worth 30 marks or roughly 7% of the over all paper. You will get 15 marks for what you say and 15 marks for how you say it. You will have 20 minutes to answer this question.

(Here again before you start make sure you have a list of key tenses and expressions. This will help you write clearly and will also ensure that you don't leave out any tense that you have studied.)

- \* · Make sure that you have prepared sentences learnt.
- \* · Answer as many past Leaving Cert questions between now and the exam.
- \* · The golden rule here is to say what you can say not what you want to say.
- \* · Do not write too much.
- \* · Do not translate directly from English.
- \* · Do not use large chunks of regurgitated material.
- \* · Only use sentences that fit the topic perfectly.
- \* · When you have finished writing, go back and check all your verbs, nouns and  
\* adjectives.

**The Aural (listening comprehension)**

Practise is the key to success here. In the past few years a trend has begun to emerge that would suggest that the aural is the worst answered question on the paper. Many students were deprived of a higher grade because of their performance in the aural section.

### **Before the exam**

- \* . Answer all the previous year's questions
- \* . Prepare vocabulary associated with numbers, accidents, time, dates, news events.

### **During the examination**

- \* . Make a note of how many times the tape will play
- \* . Write out the answer to the first half of each question before the tape begins to play.
- \* This will have the effect of preparing you mentally for what is to come.
- \* . Highlight any key words that you feel are important
- \* . Only write one answer on each line
- \* . An answer will never be right twice
- \* . Never give more than is required (a wrong answer will always cancel out a right answer)
- \* . Try not to answer in pencil as this can fade and become smudged
- \* . If you change an answer, make it clear that you have done so
- \* . Never leave a blank