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What to do the night before...

- Remember that you're not starting off at zero. The oral exams took place in the Easter holidays, and you've already completed 20-25% of the exam, depending on grade.
- Quick revision of tenses, their roles in sentences, the temporal markers that trigger them, how to make them.
- Quick revision of pronouns: subject, direct object, indirect object, adverbial pronouns. How they are used and **always remember number and gender**.
- Quick revision of reusable phrases for opinion writing and diary writing. Develop richness in your expression by looking for synonyms for common adjectives, verbs, etc.

What to do the morning of...

- Reread questions from multiple reading comprehensions to make sure you understand what the questions are actually asking.
- **NB:** *Citez la phrase...* = the full (usually brief) sentence. *Citez l'expression...* = part of the sentence. *Trouvez le mot...* = One word only.
- Learn off a handful of generic idiomatic phrases.

What to do when you open the written paper...

Section A: Compréhension écrite

(Q1 60m, Q2 60m)

Time: 40 mins per text

The two reading comprehensions are arguably the most important part of the paper. They add up to 30% of the entire grade, 40% of the marks available on the day, and 55% of the marks on the written paper. Each single question accounts for 1.25% of your entire French grade.

The beauty of the reading comprehension is that you have everything on the page to answer the questions, and you can reread it as many times as you want within the recommended time.

Question 1 is a piece of journalism, from a newspaper/magazine/website. This will be written in the present tense, the *passé composé*, and future and conditional tenses. It will have a headline, and a photo, but neither of these will provide an answer. They will, however, provide context.

Question 2 is a piece of literature, from a novel/short story. This may be written in the present, but more likely to be in the *imparfait*, and even possibly *le passé simple*. With the latter, with regular verbs you'll have no problems. But remember that *être* = *il fut*, *avoir* = *il eut*, and *faire* = *il fit*.

The approach to both texts is straightforward: build context before reading. Read all of the questions in reverse order. Question 6 is answered in English, so provides more understanding about the people you're about to encounter. Work backwards to question one, and rather than predicting answers, start to anticipate answers.

Then start reading. Read the section straight through, then go back and read it again looking for answers. Two really important things to remember: **the questions are in sequential order**, and **you have to show comprehension**. The former is important because if you know were 2(b) is,

2(a) has to be above it in the text. The latter is vital, you need to show you're not just taking a sentence at random from the text and copying it down. Edit, adjust, use pronouns, change from 1st to 3rd person.

For the **grammar-focussed** questions, remember that a pronoun refers back to something before it, and it keeps its number and gender. If they want a verb, what kind of tense is it: simple (one-word) or compound (more than one-word). Include only the verb if they ask for the verb, no subject pronouns.

Don't freak out if they ask to find a synonym and you don't know the meaning of the word you need to find. What kind of word is it? A noun, a verb, an adverb? Isolate the section of the text and ultimately make your best guess.

As you work through the text, underline things that will support an answer for Q6. For that, you want to offer two answers and support them with lines from the text, **BUT** you must be 100% certain that your supporting answer says what you think it says.

Section B: Production écrite

(Q1 60m, Q2 40m)

Time: 35m, 25m

Question 1 is obligatory, but you have three options to choose from.

NB: Ignore the prompt that connects the question to the text. RTFQ: You have to answer the question asked, not run with the words you recognise from the text.

Two of these will be opinion pieces, with a word count of around 90 words. The classic model to follow is: *thèse*, *antithèse*, *synthèse*. This is such a classic approach to writing an opinion in French, it has its own Wikipedia article. Offer an opinion, give an example, offer a counterpoint, give an example, come to a conclusion. You must stay on task.

One of these is a new question for the post-covid era: *le récit*. Here you must write a narrative of something, real or imaginary, that happened in the past. Do not mistake this for a longer diary, this is a narration and sequencing of events. Only attempt this question if you absolutely know the difference between the *passé composé* and the *imparfait* (Eg. I bought a car, it was a silver Renault.)

Aim to go slightly over the word count, but more is not better. The more you write, the more likely you are to make a mistake. Make every sentence count.

Now you must choose one from Q2 to Q6. Many of these are shorter opinion pieces, similar in style to the options from Q1. But the most popular one to answer is the *journal intime*. This diary question is the one question where you can ignore the question (it's always the same), so focus on the prompt. A positive-skewering diary hasn't appeared on the paper in several years.

With the diary, here is the chance for your idiomatic French to flourish - but... I always say idioms are like salt, once you add too much the dish won't taste right. The diary is about your emotional reaction to something, so feel free to be a bit histrionic, but ground it in three solid sentences that explain what happened/will happen.

Between the written paper and the aural: eat some Jaffa Cakes. Ignore everyone else. Keep in the zone.

The aural paper is perhaps the trickiest part of the entire exam, as you have a lot of mental processing to do, and you can't control the audio. But you can control yourself, and I always advise my students to follow the five rules of listening...

1. Prepare to panic. The French comes quick and fast. You have a lot to do. Let it wash over you and move on.
2. Reread the question. Put your index finger under each word and make sure you don't answer 'who' for 'when', etc.
3. Be ready. The answer could be in the first sentence of the section, so you have to be primed to answer from the get-go.
4. Keep up with the audio. You can't listen for the answer, translate the answer, write the answer down, and keep listening to the next answer. Write prompts and move on to the next question, flesh out the answer as you hear it again. Use the third playing to confirm you're right.
5. Shut up. Don't make noise, don't distract yourself or anyone else. There is a lag in your brain as you translate things, let your brain buffer. Close your eyes to focus if necessary.

A blank answer is always wrong, so make your best guess. This section isn't negatively marked, so incorrect information on your script won't cost you, unless it invalidates the correct answer. (Sunny at night.)

Watch out for answers with 'around/approximately/more than/less than...' Use the entirety of the box, no need to squeeze your answer under the English-language question.