

ORAL TESTS HANDBOOK

PREPARATION MATERIAL
FOR ORAL TESTING OF
ENGLISH AND MALTESE

END OF YEAR 6

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This handbook is the property of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

**The work was commissioned by Prof. Grace Grima, Director General, DQSE
in preparation for the introduction of the oral component
in the National End of Primary Examination
to be introduced in June 2010.**

**This handbook was compiled by Dr Doreen Spiteri and Raymond Facciol
in collaboration with
David Agius Muscat, Antoinette Debattista, Anthony Sammut and Mary Anne Spiteri.**

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sessions during the scholastic year 2009-2010 and who provided valuable insights in
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in the preparation of this resource and to the technical team responsible for the
recordings.**

**This online resource is to be regarded as work-in-progress and will be updated as
necessary as we collectively build up our local experience in the implementation
process.**

It is managed by Roseanne Xerri at the eLearning Centre.

INTRODUCTION

**RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND
GENERAL GUIDELINES
ORAL TEST PAPER CONTENTS**

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

1. Why are Oral tests for Maltese and English being introduced only now?
Oral skills are fundamental to language learning, particularly in the primary school years; however they have been regrettably neglected in favour of reading and writing to the effect that classroom work on oral skills has been virtually absent. The situation was compounded by the fact that for various reasons, the Junior Lyceum examination and the Common Entrance Examination did not test students' abilities to speak and understand Maltese and English. This inevitably shaped the teaching that took place in the lead up to these examinations. *Why introduce oral tests now?*

2. The Curriculum Review has addressed the issues surrounding the early selection of students for secondary school and the removal of the Junior Lyceum examination is followed by an enhancement of the National End of Primary Examination which will function as a benchmark examination. To this end, from 2011, the NEPE will include the testing of oral skills in Maltese and English thereby giving credit to all the four language skills and representing what the students are able to do in Maltese and English. The Oral tests complement the oral component in the syllabi of the preceding years. *Preparation*

3. Preparation started in October 2009 when a team consisting of Ray Facciol, Melanie Vella Sammut and Ruth Bonello visited all the classes teaching Years 4 and 6 in Maltese State Schools, meeting teachers and giving demonstrations of various activities and strategies to enhance oral skills. At the same time, in-service training started with the same years targeted, and by the end of the scholastic year 2009-2010 all teachers had received 12 hours of training in classroom strategies. *Teacher preparation for oral tests*

In addition, a team led by Dr Doreen Spiteri, Educational Consultant, together with Education Officers Ray Facciol, David Agius Muscat, and Antoinette Debattista organized two training sessions for Year 6 teachers. These were held in May and June 2010 during which the introduction of the oral tests was discussed. Teachers were

familiarized with oral test materials that are used in international examinations and shown proposed test materials constructed locally to better reflect the local educational context. Teachers' opinions on a number of issues relating to the testing of languages, in particular the testing of oral skills, were solicited through a questionnaire. These views informed the final format of the oral test papers which are being presented in this document.

4. The Oral tests were piloted with Year 6 students in three schools – two State schools and one Independent school. The students were not coached in any way for the tests, and yet they did not find the tasks problematic though clearly performance on the test differed among students. *Piloting of test materials*

5. In most language tests, the four language skills are accorded equal weighting, however, the formal testing of oral skills locally represents a novel situation, something of a milestone in the recognition of oral skills as an integral part of language ability. In a context where reading and writing have enjoyed a privileged status, the speaking and listening skills have had to struggle for their rightful place and their inclusion alongside reading and writing could not but be contentious. Having surveyed teachers' opinions on this it has been decided that the reading and writing parts of the Year 6 examination will share 60% of the marks while the listening and speaking make up the other 40%. *Weighting of the four skills in the test papers*

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Language testing is about testing students' ability to use the language. *What are we testing?*
The Oral Tests focus on learners' ability to speak in English and Maltese on every day topics. The topics that students are required to talk about are drawn from the materials in use in schools and from the kind of experiences that students of that age can be expected to be familiar with either through actual experience or through vicarious experience from the media and books. We are therefore interested in the students' range of vocabulary, their ability to form sentences, to use a variety of grammatical structures, to ask questions correctly and interact in a contextually meaningful and appropriate way.

2. The oral tests are designed to be carried out by two teachers whose role will be that of Assessor and Interlocutor respectively (refer to p.11 for seating arrangements) who will assess two students in the same test. *Roles of Interlocutors and Assessors*
The Interlocutor will conduct the Oral Test and will also be making a mental judgement of the students' performance. The full assessment will be carried out by the Assessor whose role during the test is to listen carefully and apply the Rating Scale (pp 29, 30) to assess the students' spoken language. The Assessor may take notes when necessary as these help in assigning marks on the different criteria. At the end of each test the Interlocutor will give an impression mark and this will be noted on the Marks Sheet along. Before assigning the total mark, the Assessor and the Interlocutor should briefly exchange views on the students' performance.

3. Interlocutors should ensure that they are in possession of a watch or a similar device to manage the time well and to check the time discretely during the test.

4. While carrying out the Oral Tests, Interlocutors are encouraged to give students confidence and put them at their ease. *Put students at ease*
This should not be confused with giving students unfair advantage. This has to do with creating the right conditions so that students are able to show how

well they can speak English and Maltese.

5. Interlocutors should not code-mix during the Oral Tests and should be sensitive to certain utterances such as 'Thank you', 'OK', 'Iva' and other responses when carrying out the tests.
6. For teachers it is natural to react to students' use of language by confirming or questioning or correcting. In a testing situation however, we should remain neutral. We should resist praising and saying 'Good' or 'Prosit' and instead use neutral language such as 'Ehe', 'Yes', 'Iva'. It is best to encourage by nodding and when necessary rephrasing the prompt. The simplification of the prompt should be however noted by the Assessor as it indicates some difficulty on the student's part in understanding what is required and achieving the task. Also, it is natural for teachers to correct inaccurate language but in an examination situation, this must not happen. For example, in one of the filmed tests a student mistakenly refers to a 'football stadium' shown in the picture as a 'playground'; the Interlocutor does not react. In another filmed Maltese test, one of the students is unable to say 'zebbug' for 'olives' and again the Interlocutor makes no comment. *Testing not teaching*
7. We must see our role in this context as examiners and assessors; we are no longer in the role of teachers. This will be initially difficult however, if we are mentally prepared for this, it will help guide our reactions during the oral tests.
8. Most of the time should be taken up with student talk. This is particularly important during the Inverted Interview task where the Interlocutor **responds** to students' questions. See transcript on page 53 for an example. *Student talk*
9. Interlocutors should be guided by the test materials so that standardization is achieved across the schools conducting the tests. This will make for better time management too. There are, however, instances when the Interlocutor can prompt the students by saying 'What else...?' and this is perfectly acceptable. *Follow the test materials*

10. The Interlocutor should allow students a few seconds' think time as they formulate a response and if the student continues to hesitate, the prompt / question should be reformulated and simplified. If the student experiences difficulty and is unable to carry out the task, the Interlocutor should make no reaction and move on to the next stage without passing judgement. *Student thinking time*
11. In cases where students show very limited linguistic competence in either English or Maltese, and are unable to carry out the tasks, the Interlocutor should gently bring the test to a close without putting undue pressure on the student. This does not relate to issues relating to physical or mental impediments for which other conditions may apply. *Student difficulty*
12. If at the end of the oral test students ask for feedback on their performance, both Interlocutor and Assessor should avoid giving any information whatsoever and add that the students will be receiving the result at a later date. *Do not give feedback to students*
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ORAL TEST PAPER CONTENTS

Each oral test is composed of the following parts:

TASK 1	1 minute	Warmer - <i>Thejjja</i>
TASK 2	3 minutes	Interview - <i>Intervista</i>
TASK 3	3 minutes	Tasks 3 and 4 will consist of two tasks set from the following:
		a. <i>Single Picture Task</i> - <i>Stampa Wahda</i>
		b. <i>Thematic Picture Task</i> - <i>Stampi dwar Tema</i>
TASK 4	3 minutes	c. <i>Inverted Interview Task</i> - <i>Staqsin Int</i>
		d. <i>Compare and Contrast</i> - <i>Qabbel</i>
		e. <i>Picture Story Task</i> - <i>Stampa Storja</i>

- On the following pages the teacher can find two examples of a complete oral test, one for English and one for Maltese (shaded in grey).
- In the English specimen paper the tasks chosen for Task 3 and Task 4 are the *Inverted Interview* and the *Compare and Contrast*.
- The Maltese specimen paper contains the *Thematic Picture Task* and the *Picture Story Task* for Task 3 and 4 respectively.
- In addition to the Sample Test Papers, users of this Handbook can find ten more test tasks exemplifying tasks a. to e. in the table above.
- In this way, users of the Handbook can find at least one example of each of the different tasks.
- In addition, there are guidelines for each task on the facing page. These guidelines are intended to give information on the purpose of the task and on how to conduct that part of the Oral Test. The guidelines appear only for the English test paper and they apply equally to the Maltese test paper.

- The Criteria for Assessment describe the criteria against which students' oral performance will be assessed. The two marks in the last criterion are tied to Tasks 3 and 4, and are intended to be specific to the tasks set for that test session. The other criteria will still apply to these tasks.
- Depending on the task set, the following describes what the Assessors should look out for, while the particular tasks are being carried out, if these marks are to be awarded.

Single Picture - hypothesizing / taħdit ipotetiku (i.e. kapaċi jitkellem fuq sitwazzjoni/jiet ipotetiċi)

Picture Story - organization of speech / organizzazzjoni tat-taħdit (i.e. kapaċi jiġhaddet f'ordni kronoloġiku)

Compare and Contrast - use of appropriate qualifiers to describe points of comparison and contrast / attenzjoni għad-dettalji tal-istampi (i.e. kapaċi josserva d-dettalji u jikkummenta dwarhom)

Inverted Interview - question formation / it-tfassil tal-mistoqsijiet (i.e. kapaċi jistaqsi mistoqsijiet f'lokhom u f'waqthom)

Thematic Picture - substantiating opinion / it-tiżiħ tal-opinjoni (i.e. kapaċi jsaħħaħ l-opinjoni/jiet li jipprovdi)