



Common questions about National 3, National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Modern Languages

SQA worked with SCILT to produce the original version of this document published on SQA and SCILT websites in late 2013.

This version contains further information and clarification where appropriate and has been updated in view of the revised National 5 course and to include information relating to Advanced Higher.

Section A

General questions: unit assessments

Can candidates give an oral rather than a written response to the unit reading and listening assessments?

Yes, but for evidence purposes the assessor must keep a written record or checklist to indicate that the candidate has completed the activity satisfactorily.

If a candidate fails to meet the standard required to pass a unit assessment, can the candidate be re-assessed?

The candidate can be re-assessed on one occasion (or two occasions in exceptional circumstances). However, depending on the circumstances, it is not always necessary to use a different instrument of assessment. For example, failure to address the overall purpose question may result in the candidate being re-assessed in that element only.

How long should candidates be given to complete unit assessments?

Time restrictions are not normally a feature of unit assessment and centres need to determine this with reference to the specific situation of their candidates. Candidates can access audio recordings themselves, and are allowed to listen to them as often as they need to. However, assessors should exercise judgement as it is unlikely that candidates would benefit from more than two or three playings.

Do assessments need to be linked thematically?

No, they can all be completed independently. However, assessors may find it helpful to combine assessments.

How are unit assessments marked?

Unit assessments should be marked according to the 'judging evidence' tables, available within unit assessment support packs, on SQA's secure website. Candidates should, for instance, identify the overall purpose of the reading or listening text and be able to extract the main points of the passage.

Assessors are to use their professional judgement in determining whether a candidate has written enough detail to meet the requirements of each assessment standard.

How should evidence be recorded?

Detailed notes must be kept for unit assessment of talking. Audio/video recording of each candidate's performance is not mandatory for the unit assessments, but it may be good practice to keep the evidence from each class for verification purposes. Audio/video recordings will also assist centres with internal verification. Reading, listening and writing scripts must also be kept for verification purposes. SQA provides templates for this.

At National 5 and Higher, recordings of the performance–talking coursework assessment task must be available for verification purposes.

Section B

National 4 Added Value Unit

How is reading assessed for the added value unit?

A minimum of two texts should be used. These are selected from a range provided by the assessor. Candidates are required to show their understanding of the content of the texts by demonstrating comprehension through, for example gap fill tasks, questions in English or a written or oral summary of the main points of a text in English.

Candidates are judged on their ability to extract the main points of the passages. There may be evidence of some misunderstanding but it will not be serious.

Candidates may use a dictionary.

How is talking assessed for the added value unit?

The candidate makes a short presentation, lasting 1–2 minutes. The presentation can be supported by brief headings in English, the target language or by visual aids.

The presentation may be delivered to the whole class or to groups of candidates within the class, but candidates should be discouraged from giving a one-to-one presentation to the assessor.

Should the oral presentation be based on the reading texts?

The presentation does not need to make direct reference to the reading texts, but it should be on a related theme. Candidates could be encouraged to incorporate words and phrases from the reading texts into their oral presentation.

How is listening assessed for the added value unit?

There is no formal assessment of listening. However, after completing the presentation candidates will take part in a conversation with responses that show evidence of listening for communication.

This part of the assessment should last 1 minute.

The candidate should be able to ask for help in the modern language, where appropriate.

Should the questions for the conversation in the added value unit be prepared in advance?

No. Questions should not be scripted in advance, but the candidate should be asked questions covered previously in class. For example, a candidate may be asked questions previously practised in class, but will be unaware of exactly which questions he or she will have to answer, or in which order they will be asked.

How long do candidates have to complete the added value unit?

There is no time limit for completing the added value unit. This is at the discretion of the centre. The added value unit should be part of a series of lessons to be completed at an appropriate point in the course. It should be part of the on-going classroom work, and not be seen as a stand-alone test.

How much assistance should candidates receive when preparing for the added value unit?

Assessments are to be completed in class time under some supervision and control. Further advice on supervision and control can be found in our [Guide on conditions of assessment for coursework](#)'.

Candidates should have reasonable assistance and support from the assessor to complete the added value unit, but should be encouraged to work independently.

The amount of support a candidate needs, particularly in the listening/responding section, should be reflected in the assessor's overall assessment of the candidate.

What evidence is the assessor required to retain?

Assessors must retain copies of candidates' written responses to the reading texts. If the candidate has given oral feedback on the texts, detailed notes must be kept by the assessor.

For talking, assessors must retain a written summary or detailed checklist of responses or an audio/video recording, if desired. It is not mandatory to audio or video record the oral presentation, and where a centre does not record the talking, detailed checklist/notes must be taken.

Each piece of evidence must be named and dated.

What happens if a candidate does not pass the added value unit?

There should be only one or, in exceptional circumstances, two re-assessment opportunities. Re-assessment must always take place under the same conditions as the original assessment.

What if a candidate passes the reading and talking presentation sections of the added value unit, but not the conversation?

Candidates who did not secure a pass in the conversation only need do that part again, with a different set of questions from the first attempt. They do not need to redo the entire added value unit.

Section C

Freestanding units at SCQF level 5

IMPORTANT: an updated Questions and Answers document on the course assessment for National 5 is now available at <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/47415.html>.

The information below applies only to those candidates undertaking units.

Can all four skills be assessed within one context, eg culture?

Yes, in theory, but this may not offer a large enough range of opportunities to candidates.

How should unit evidence be recorded?

Candidate scripts for reading, listening, writing must be kept for verification purposes. Talking audio recordings should also be kept for verification and where a centre does not record the talking, detailed checklist/notes must be taken.

Can the conversation section of the performance–talking generate evidence for the talking outcome of the Using Language unit?

Technically, this is possible. If this approach is taken, how a candidate has met the assessment standards for talking in the Using Language unit must be documented.

What percentage of the total mark does a candidate need to pass a unit assessment?

There are no cut-off scores. Assessors base their decision on whether a candidate has given enough information by referring to the judging evidence tables. Assessors should use professional judgement and a holistic approach in deciding whether candidates have achieved the assessment standards.

Section D

Higher

Do teachers need to cover all the topics listed on the development of the four contexts?

The context development grid and list of topics is provided for guidance only and is available in the Higher Modern Languages Course Support Notes.

Do candidates have to pass all assessment standards for each outcome in the unit assessments to achieve a unit?

Yes, candidates need to pass all the assessment standards to achieve each outcome. Passing all outcomes for a unit means that the student has been successful in achieving the unit. This is the same for units at all SCQF levels.

How much support are candidates allowed in assessment of writing in the Using Language unit?

Candidates must not see the assessment beforehand, but classwork and preparation activities will help candidates ahead of the assessment. Candidates are allowed reference materials — dictionaries and glossaries — and may have some brief written notes. They are not to have access to pre-prepared drafts.

Are candidates given the reading paper and directed writing paper at the same time in the exam?

Question papers and answer booklets for both are issued at the same time. It is important for candidates to note that the time stated on the front cover of both booklets will be the same, and relates to the entire duration of the reading and directed writing paper. Candidates need to organise how much time they allocate to each of the two sections.

How long are the listening monologue and the listening dialogue?

The monologue generally lasts between 1 and a half to 2 minutes and the dialogue generally between 3–4 minutes.

Is the directed writing always based on the contexts of culture and employability?

No. The exam samples all four contexts of society, learning, employability and culture, and the directed writing includes options based on two of the four contexts. If the reading samples the context of culture and the listening employability, the directed writing samples the contexts of society and learning.

How is the directed writing assessed?

The directed writing is assessed holistically using the pegged-mark descriptors provided in the marking instructions. These include detail relating to three aspects of candidate performance: content, accuracy and language resource.

In the piece of writing following the listening, do candidates need to answer all the questions in a balanced way?

Questions in the stimulus act as prompts. Candidates should attempt to touch on all of the questions but there is no requirement to answer all of them in the same amount of detail.

Are candidates permitted to use any prompts in the performance-talking?

For the presentation section, candidates may refer to five headings of up to eight words (in English or in the modern language), or visual aids.

Section E

Advanced Higher Portfolio/Specialist study

What will happen to the specialist study unit in light of the removal of units from National Courses?

As with National 5 and Higher, unit assessments will be removed from the Advanced Higher course from session 2019–2020. As such, the specialist study unit will no longer contribute to the achievement of the Advanced Higher course.

Does SQA provide a list of approved texts?

No. One of the fundamental principles of CfE is personalisation and choice. For that reason, it is not appropriate to limit candidates to a list of prescribed texts. It is for candidates, in consultation with teachers and lecturers, to decide on the focus of their specialist study and portfolio and thereafter choose whatever sources they feel to be appropriate.

How many sources do my candidates have to consult?

There is no upper limit on the number of sources but candidates must use a minimum of two in the language of study, one of which must be written.

What happens if candidates do not consult the requisite number of sources?

If candidates fail to consult the requisite number of sources in the course of the specialist study, they will be judged to have failed to meet the assessment standards for that unit. If they consult only one source in the course of producing the piece of writing for their portfolio the maximum number of marks they can achieve will be 15 marks. If there is incontrovertible evidence that they have failed to consult any sources in the modern language in the production of the portfolio they will be awarded 0 marks.

Do my candidates have to refer directly to all their sources in the portfolio?

No, candidates do not have to refer directly to all sources in the portfolio but they must list them all in the accompanying bibliography.

What are the rules regarding the sources?

Sources in the modern language must have been produced for native speakers of the language. This applies to written and other sources (films, audio recordings, etc). Additional sources, ie above and beyond the minimum of two in the modern language, may be in any language.

There are no limitations on the length of a source — it can be anything from a single poem to a novel. The only requirement is that it must contain sufficient material to allow for analysis. Note: where a film is chosen as a main source, the screenplay of that film does not count as an additional source.

Films should be viewed in their original format and without English subtitles.

How detailed does a bibliography need to be?

These sources should contain the following:

- ◆ book — last and first name of author, title of book, publisher, year of publication
- ◆ film — name of film, name of director, year of release
- ◆ article or report — name of author (if known), title, name of publication, country of origin, date of publication, page number(s) (if suitable)
- ◆ internet sources — name of author (if known), title of article (if applicable), full URL and date accessed

What penalties could my candidates face?

The lack of a bibliography will incur a penalty equivalent to 1 pegged mark but this penalty will not be applied if the candidate has made some attempt to include one, even if it is sparse.

The work submitted by the candidate should be between 1,200–1,500 words, excluding quotes and bibliography. If the word limit for the portfolio is exceeded by 150 words or more, a pegged mark will be deducted.

Note: the maximum deduction per portfolio is 1 pegged mark, ie 3 single marks. Portfolios which fall short of the word limit are likely to be self-penalising.

Performance–talking

How much detail should be included in the STL form?

The STL form provides a framework for the conversation. Candidates should list the topics they wish to talk about (normally three or four) as well as some details about the specialist study. The visiting assessor will take a lead from this. There is no need to cover all the topics listed and again this will depend on how much each candidate has to say. The interlocutor will move from one to another depending on how comfortable the candidate is and when he or she feels a particular topic has been fully discussed.

The more information is given on the STL form the easier this will be but candidates must NOT include specific questions they would like the visiting assessor to ask.

How much are candidates expected to say about their specialist study?

Assessment is based on the candidates' ability to sustain a conversation and NOT on their knowledge of specific details of a particular text or source. Questions will allow candidates to express opinions, explain their reasons for choosing a particular area of study, what they derived from their study or which aspects they did or did not enjoy. Questions will not concentrate on technical details such as how they gathered evidence or how they went about their analysis.

Question paper 1

What guidance is there for preparing candidates for the overall purpose question?

Candidates should be encouraged to:

- ◆ give a concise and well-structured response
- ◆ draw inferences from the text and not just provide factual information or repeat previous answers
- ◆ provide key information from the text and link it to specific stylistic techniques
- ◆ draw on evidence from the text to support their opinion

Further guidance can be found by accessing SQA's secure website, previous NQs, other modern languages, Advanced Higher and Exemplification of Inferential Question.

Where can I get further information?

For more information, please visit the following SQA websites:

- ◆ Modern Languages section of SQA secure
- ◆ [Understanding Standards](#)
- ◆ Verification and Course Reports section of [Advanced Higher Modern Languages webpage](#)
- ◆ [CPD Webinars webpage](#)