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# Irish Oral

How to succeed in the Junior Cert  
Irish Oral



by **Eve L.**

*Eve L. got an A in higher Junior Cert Irish. Here she shares some tips for success in the Junior Cert Oral portion.*

The Oral Option at Junior Cert is something I would definitely recommend taking – it's easy to prep for, and will mean that you have 40% of your exam completed by June! While the idea of doing an oral now may well give you nightmares, I can assure you that by the end of this guide, you will be dead set on doing one, and doing one well! At the end of the day, the aim behind language learning is effective communication, so by doing an oral and putting to use the 'píosa Gaeilge' you have, you've succeeded!

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## Layout

- ▶ The Oral takes place over an 11-12 minute period somewhere between **mid-January and mid-March** of your 3rd year.
- ▶ As mentioned above, the optional oral for Junior Cert Irish is worth 40% of your final mark, should you elect to take it, i.e. 160 marks out of 400 in total.
- ▶ The marks in the oral are divided up into the following sections and time allocations:

Section (Cuid)	Marks (Marcanna)	Duration (Fad)
Greeting (Fáiltiú)	10	1 (minutes)
Picture Sequence (Sraith Pictiúr)	30	3
Role Play (Rólghlacadh)	40	3
Interview (Agallamh)	80	4-5
Total (Iomlán)	160	11-12

As you can see, it isn't all that long. Because it is divided up into smaller sections, you'll find the time passing by very quickly. The test increases in difficulty the further along you are into it – in my experience, this gave me the chance to warm up and become comfortable with the examiner. While you might be shaky for the greeting, you'll be flying it by the time the interview comes around!

## Greeting (Fáiltiú)



- ▶ An easy ten marker, really, even if you are nervous! I most certainly was, but this is something that is the same in practice as it is in the exam room.
- ▶ According to the syllabus, this is the aim of the Fáiltiú:  
**'Ceisteanna chun an t-iarrthóir a chur ar a shuaimhneas – e.g. ainm, scrúduimhir, dáta breithe, rang.'**
- ▶ This literally translates to 'questions to put the candidate at ease' - e.g. name, examination number, date of birth, etc. It's a given that you'll know the correct response to 'Cad is ainm duit?' so by asking you these questions, the examiner is giving you the chance to gain momentum in for the harder sections to come. Honestly, you'll easily get the full 10 here if you just listen to the examiner, take a deep breath, and give your answer.
- ▶ Worst case scenario is you are too nervous to hear/understand the question given, which is what almost happened to me! However, instead of panicking, take a deep breath and say **"Gabh mo leithscéal, a dhuine/bhean uasail, an bhféadfá an cheist a iarraidh arís le do thoil?"** (Excuse me sir/madam, could you repeat the question please?) This response shows that it is not an issue of comprehension, but rather exam nerves.
- ▶ Trust me when I say that these examiners know how nervous you are – remember that they, too, have a Junior Cert or Leaving Cert class who are also prepping for an oral!

## Picture Sequence (Sraith Pictiúr)

Another handy section! If you have older siblings, you've heard the lamentations regarding the 20 Sraith Pictiúr to be learned for the Leaving Cert Oral – I'm here to tell you now that the Junior Cert version is nothing in comparison. You have only 5 to learn, and they're all composed of just 4 pictures, each of which has to be described

in 3-4 sentences. Easy peasy!

- ▶ You'll finish your greeting and the examiner will invite you to select one of five overturned sheets of paper on their table, each of which is one of the *sraithphictiúir*. You'll make your pick and the examiner will allow you a minute or so to study the sequence of pictures and come up with your story. Luckily, these *sraithphictiúir* are all over the net, so you can practice with them in the weeks leading up to your JC. You can find **a link to the official Sraith Pictiúr for the Junior Cert on examinations.ie**
- ▶ The key to acing the *sraithpictiúr* is practice – perhaps at lunchtime you and a friend of yours could do a mock *Scrúdú Béil* with some of the picture sequences. You could also have the sentences on flashcards, record yourself speaking about them, or watch videos online, such as those belonging to **Miss**

**McConnon on Youtube**. She has recorded her own samples of the Junior Cert Picture Sequences and uploaded them to her channel.

- ▶ The important thing with the *Sraith Pictiúr* is not to come across as having learned them off by heart – while every school in the country does this, (including the examiners school, mind you!) marks are given for Language Proficiency, not memorisation. That is, if you learn sentences off by heart, there's always a chance you could forget on the day and be completely stumped.
- ▶ Just have a good idea of what you would say, but don't restrict yourself to what you've written on flashcards; be able to describe what you see in a number of ways. Lastly, don't study 1 or 2 in detail and leave the rest to chance – there are



only 5! There's a 20% chance that any of them could come up, so study each of them with equal

attention and don't try to take any shortcuts!

## Role Play (Rólghlacadh)

- ▶ This section is a little harder than the Picture Sequence, but not by much. You'll study a few notices/posters (8) and choose one at random on the day. You'll have a minute or so to study it, and then you must ask the examiner 10 questions regarding this poster/notice - each of which will be answered by the examiner.
- ▶ The advice I will give you for this section is highly similar to the Sraith Pictiúr: Practice frequently, but don't rote learn. Miss McConnon also does a great series on the Role Plays on her channel.



## Interview (Agallamh)

While many people fear this section above all the others, I found it the most enjoyable. Here, you simply chat with the examiner about a range of topics found on the curriculum, e.g. hobbies, sports, family, school, etc. They're not going to ask you about anything too complex, such as Brexit or global warming – so there's no need to panic! You just need to be able to talk about yourself (in Irish, of course!)

- ▶ The **examiner will not officially know whether you are a Higher or Ordinary Level Student.**

Consequently, the list of sample questions given to the examiner by the SEC contains only the questions deemed suitable for all candidates. In this way, **the oral is a really fair game.**

- ▶ The Agallamh lasts a maximum of 5 minutes, and if you play your cards right, you can determine the direction it takes. If, for example, you could talk forever about your drama club, but don't play a single sport (like me!), make sure you manipulate your answers to reflect this. I was

asked if I played a lot of sports, and in my answer, I said that I liked watching sports games, but my true passion is drama. While I could have just said 'Níl' and moved on to the next question, I used the question as an opportunity to showcase an area I was strong in.

- ▶ In this section, they really just want to see that you have enough Irish to have a conversation. If you give one sentence answers for everything, it shows you comprehend the question, but you don't have the skills to develop your answer. Having



this skill really separates the grades – and it's not that hard to acquire. All you have to do is **answer the question and find a way to link it in to a topic you can talk about really well.** I'm pretty sure my examiner asked me only about 3 questions because I spent so long elaborating on each answer!

- ▶ While the examiner isn't told your level at any stage, they'll catch on pretty quick. This is no reason to panic – if you demonstrate a high proficiency at speaking Irish, the examiner may ask one or two slightly advanced questions towards the end. This isn't to catch you out; it is rather **to give you full opportunity to express your abilities in Irish.** If you get asked a hard question, it's a very good sign, as it means you have impressed so far! The

same rules apply for answering one of these questions, and if you don't understand, ask to repeat!

- ▶ Once again, practice makes perfect. Learn the necessary vocab to discuss different aspects of your life, and try to practice speaking, if at all possible. It won't be comprehension that will hold you back, as the questions are accessible; however, if you haven't enough practice done, your answers won't accurately reflect your abilities.
- ▶ Ag deireadh an lae, in the Agallamh, you're being tested **on language (30) and communication (50).** Practice hard, listen well, and find ways to talk about what you know best, and you will be fine.





## Final Tips

If I were to give you the Golden Rules of Success in the oral, they'd be something like this:

1. Answer 'Dia Dhuit' with '**Dia is Muire Dhuit!**' – people often forget this- and if you do, it's not going to make a huge difference - but it will **make a good first impression!**
2. If you don't understand the full question, but hear one familiar word, don't belt ahead and start talking! Ask for the question once more to make sure you know exactly how you're going to answer.
3. If you blank on a word, don't fret – **just come around the answer in another way**. If you forget the word 'sister', for example, and you're talking about your family, give their name rather than sitting there in agony! There's always a way around things, and if you're really stuck, the examiner will give you the word and you can just keep going.
4. Seize every opportunity you get to talk about your favourite topics, and don't stop until the examiner asks you to.
5. Never respond with 'Sea'. The answer to 'an bhfuil...?' is '**Tá.**'

If you follow this advice and keep your head, you'll have no trouble at all. Getting top marks in the Junior Cert Oral is very achievable with the right mindset and the right approach!





*Go n-éirí an t-ádh leat!  
You'll be wonderful!*

