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French

How to get an A in the Junior Cert
French Exam



by Eimear D.

Eimear D. got an A in her higher Junior Cert French paper. Here she shares what she learned.

For a lot of people, languages just aren't their thing, but you still have to sit an exam whether you like it or not. There's help out there for those of you who just don't get it and I'm here to give you some advice on getting the best mark. If you are a lover of languages, great. The same advice applies to you and will hopefully maximize your grade.

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The Aural Exam

- ▶ The exam starts off with the aural section in which you'll hear personal descriptions, conversations and new items that you have to answer questions about.
- ▶ You'll get time to read through the questions before the tape starts so if I were you, I'd **highlight the key words** in each questions and make sure you know what they're looking for.
- ▶ If you see a word in the question that you know the French word for, write the word above it so that you know to listen out for that word in the tape.
- ▶ I would recommend writing out only key words in your answer when you first hear the tape and then come back to it when you have time to fill in the rest of the answer because you may miss out on another question while you were writing out another answer.
- ▶ **Don't leave anything blank**, ever! If you haven't a clue what the answer should be to a question but you did understand a word or two in the sentence, write down those words, you never know what could get you marks.



The Reading Comprehension

There's 100 marks going for this section (almost 1/3 of your mark) so it's worth putting in some effort for it. There are 8 parts to it altogether which seems daunting but it actually breaks it up nicely.

▶ The first question is always just a case of putting in the right letter (A, B, C or D) into a box. This question is testing your French vocabulary, to see if you know basic French words for things such as places, shops, jobs, etc. Reading some simple French texts for beginners can help you boost your vocab here so I would recommend reading little passages here and there whenever you can.

▶ The second and third question are two comprehensions. They are similar to those that you would see in Irish and English because all you're being asked to do is read the text and answer the questions.

▶ The second question is nearly always a recipe. This is handy because even if you don't understand any of the French, you can probably guess what the recipe is saying if you're familiar with the dish in English. For example, if the recipe for lemon cake says "*pressez le citron*", you can make a

▶ Look out for the word "chaussures" in each text so you know which one it will be. It's all about keywords here,

fairly educated guess that the answer is "squeeze the lemon".

▶ **Try and use all of the question to find the answer**, it usually gives you clues as to where it is. If you can understand/translate any word in the question and try and find that within the text, the answer should be very close-by.

▶ The Question 4 is just a one word answer and it's the only one that has to be answered in French. **Even if you're just plain lost with French, at least attempt something in this section**, even if you guess you have a 1 in 8 chance of getting it right. My advice for this one would be, see what they're looking for in the question (keyword). E.g. "Write the name of the comic strip which has to do about someone who has a large collection of shoes", here, the keyword is "shoes".

make sure you **know your basic vocab** so you can spot which text they're looking for.



- ▶ Question 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 are all similar to each other and also to questions 2 and 3, they increase in difficulty as they go along though.

Again, use the keywords to your advantage.

- ▶ Worst case scenario, you haven't a clue, but ALWAYS right something down,

you never know when you might get it right. Also, you can make an educated guess to where the answer might be, judging on the question. For example, if it's the last question you're stuck on, more than likely, the answer will be somewhere at the end of the text, so you're ruling out other answers already.



The Written Expression

- ▶ For this section, you're asked to write out two separate short pieces on a given topic. It's nearly always asked that you do either a letter, a postcard, a note, and there are guidelines to follow for each.
- ▶ If you get a postcard, it's important that you **know how to lay one out**. You need to write your location and the date in the top left-hand corner to start off with, e.g. "Nice, le 26 mai" (the "le" is essential, and remember, months don't take a capital letter in French!).
- ▶ After that, you open with a classic "Cher Paul," (or whatever you want), you write the content and you sign off with a typically by saying something you've learned off like "Amitiés" or "À bientôt".
- ▶ If you get a note, you need to start off with the time you left the note, e.g. "11h30". Don't just put in any time for this though, if the prompt tells you that it's evening time, you'll have to change the time to a later hour. Write the person's name a line below that, followed by the content and sign off simply with your own name.
- ▶ You get a choice between writing a formal and informal letter. If I were you, I'd do the informal, it's nearly always easier to work around and you don't have to remember to be formal and use formal pronouns and greetings, etc.
- ▶ Again, the format for the letter is important. You'll need to write the place and date in the top left-hand corner. Start with a greeting, if it's formal, make sure to use words such as "monsieur/madame", follow up with the content and sign off accordingly, e.g. informal could be "Amitiés" or "À bientôt" but formal would have to be something such as "Cordialement".
- ▶ Make sure you **read the question thoroughly** so you don't lose marks on silly things like saying it's May when the question clearly says its March.
- ▶ For the postcard/note, there are 30 marks going; 15 for communication and 15 for language. You can get the 15 for communication by having high quality content, e.g. clearly including all the points given in the question and being able to throw in an extra sentence or two to make it flow. The 15 for language is going for your



grammar and vocabulary so spend some extra study time on these if you want the 15 marks.

- ▶ With the letter, there are 50 marks in total; 5 for format, 20 for

communication and 25 for language. As you can see, your grammar and vocab is slightly more important in this one and you're also getting 5 marks for just laying out the letter properly.



In General

- ▶ If you feel you're struggling with French, or even if you just want to improve or practise it, I really recommend **downloading the app 'Duolingo'**. It's free and there are different levels for you to complete. I found it so helpful when studying French because it was fun, easy and it kept me in practise so my grammar never went rusty. Plus it's a source of handy vocabulary that you might not get in school.
- ▶ Another big help for me, especially for the aural exams, was **listening to French radio**. This will accustom your ears to the French language and you can pick out words easier in the aural exam. You can download an app called 'TuneInRadio' that lets you listen to any radio station in the world so you have many French stations to choose from. Another great tool is **the Studyclix Aural Revision tool** that you can find if you click into the aural topic on the subject page. It makes it quick and easy to practise it so you don't waste time trying to find the CD and go back and forth between recordings.
- ▶ Finally, **organisation is key**. It's hard enough to learn a new language without having your notes completely scattered and messed up. Try to organise a French folder that has different sections for aural and written work, it will make life easier when you're studying later on.





Bon courage!
I'm sure you'll do great.

