

GCSE MFL

Looking back at 2023 and forward to 2024

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Overview of presentation

- National entry picture for French, German, Spanish (2023 compared with 2022 and 2019)
- Overview of AQA French, German and Spanish 2023 outcomes and grade boundaries
- Grade boundaries and awarding in 2023
- Key messages across the skills from the 2023 exams
- Areas of focus for 2024 exams and advice for students
- GCSE reform update
- Support from AQA

2023, 2022, and 2019 GCSE national entry data and cumulative percentage of grades achieved

GCSE language	Entry number	% 7+	% 4+	% 1+
2023 French	130901	26.6	71.2	98.2
2022 French	129419	32.1	78.8	98.6
2019 French	130831	24.3	70.4	98.6
2023 German	34707	28.2	77.2	98.9
2022 German	36328	35.6	83.8	99.1
2019 German	42791	24.7	76.0	98.7
2023 Spanish	125651	26.8	70.0	97.9
2022 Spanish	112845	32.1	78.0	98.8
2019 Spanish	102242	27.7	71.1	98.2

Data extracted from the 2023 JCQ GCSE data for all UK candidates: <https://shorturl.at/bpuzK>

2023, 2022, and 2019 AQA entry data GCSE French, German and Spanish

GCSE language	Entry number	Change
2023 French	97787	+1413
2022 French	96374	+1723
2019 French	94651	
2023 German	26886	-1444
2022 German	28330	-3832
2019 German	32162	
2023 Spanish	95619	+5582
2022 Spanish	90037	+15474
2019 Spanish	74563	

2023 GCSE AQA entry pattern and awarding outcomes

AQA 2023 entries by tier compared to 2022 and 2019

Tier	French			German			Spanish		
	2023	2022	2019	2023	2022	2019	2023	2022	2019
Foundation	50%	48%	48%	39.5%	38%	38%	48%	48%	44%
Higher	50%	52%	52%	60.5%	62%	62%	52%	52%	56%

2023 percentage outcomes for AQA candidates compared to 2021 and 2019

	2019 7+	2022 7+	2023 7+	2019 4+	2022 4+	2023 4+
French	24.0%	31.8%	26.2%	70.1%	78.3%	70.5%
German	24.2%	35.1%	28.3%	76.0%	83.5%	77.5%
Spanish	27.6%	32.1%	26.5%	71.1%	77.7%	69.5%

Grade boundaries and awarding in 2023

- Nearly a year ago, Ofqual [confirmed](#) that, in 2023, grade boundaries would get back to pre-pandemic standards with some protection for students.
- Along with other exam boards, we set our grade boundaries in line with this guidance from Ofqual. Any differences in results (by which we mean national outcomes for students) between exam boards are about differences in the overall ability of the cohort taking the examination, not any difference in standards between different boards.
- The Ofqual grading adjustment in 2022 to GCSE French and German to bring them into line with Spanish continues to be applied in 2023. Alongside the 2023 protection allowed by Ofqual for 2023, therefore, for both French and German there was an additional +2% increase at grades 7 and 9, and an additional +1% at grade 4, compared with 2019.

2023 GCSE Grade boundaries: French, German and Spanish

Language	Max mark	Summer 2023 grade boundaries								
		9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
French 8658F	240					158	141	102	63	24
French 8658H	240	188	166	144	129	114	99	91		
German 8668F	240					166	146	105	64	24
German 8668H	240	199	177	156	134	113	92	81		
Spanish 8698F	240					165	146	105	64	24
Spanish 8698H	240	202	178	154	137	120	103	94		

General comments

- Changes were made to the 2023 GCSE MFL papers to reflect the removal of the regulatory requirement to test vocabulary outside of the published vocabulary list for the lifetime of the current GCSE specifications.
- It was clear that most students were prepared well for the demands of the papers and teachers and students alike should be congratulated.
- Most students attempted all the questions and most responded to the questions requiring answers in English with some detail.
- The vast majority of students who sat the papers were entered at the correct tier.
- The handwriting of some students was difficult to read and from time to time it was impossible to read key elements of a response - for example with verb endings in Paper 4, which are so crucial when it comes to clear communication.

Feedback from schools/colleges: common themes

- A small number of centres contacted us about the inclusion of words outside of the GCSE vocabulary lists, since the Ofqual requirement to include vocabulary outside of the lists has been removed. Our team of Senior Examiners scrutinised all 2023 examination materials and replaced items on both Listening and Reading or glossed them when this was felt to be more appropriate.
- It must also be remembered that when the current specification was being developed, common items of vocabulary (such as those often encountered in Key Stage 3 and cognates) were not included in the vocabulary lists in the specification, but exam boards still can test these items as some prior knowledge is assumed. In some cases, therefore, certain words not included in the vocabulary lists were kept in our assessment materials because to replace them with words on the vocabulary lists would have actually risked increasing the demand of the assessments. (This approach was explained in communications to schools and colleges in December 2022, as well as on the [AQA website](#).)

Feedback from schools/colleges: common themes

- We also had feedback from some schools/colleges about the demands of the Reading and Listening Higher tier papers. Ofqual had made clear that we are required to return to pre-pandemic standards and the intention in MFL was not to narrow the specification coverage. As in any year, papers must still differentiate across the full range of performance in order to avoid bunching of marks and grade boundaries. Accordingly only a small proportion of students should be able to gain full marks on high demand questions targeting grades 8-9 in the Listening and Reading Higher tier papers.
- While many schools/colleges again found the electronic portal submission straightforward and more efficient than posting materials, some schools/colleges, particularly those with large MFL entries, did raise some concerns about the time needed to upload the materials to the current version of the portal and exactly which information was required. This is being reviewed by the team managing the electronic portal with a view to making improvements to the upload process and also providing further clarity for 2024 and beyond.

GCSE French in 2023

- Unfortunately, an administrative error this year led to an incorrect sequencing chart being published initially to schools/colleges. This carried an incorrect set of combinations of Role play/Photo card/second theme to be explored in the General conversation and meant that the same theme may have been assigned both in the Photo card and the General conversation. This was discovered at the very start of the testing period - immediate corrective action was taken and schools/colleges were advised directly and issued with a replacement sequence chart. We also identified errors on Photo card I and Photo card P which were notified to schools/colleges and this notification also detailed the action to be taken for tests yet to take place. A replacement Teacher's Booklet was also provided.
- A typographical error was identified before the date of the exam in Paper 3 Higher Reading, resulting in a corrected paper being issued to centres in advance of the exam date.
- We are extremely sorry that these mistakes happened this year and know that this is not the usual quality of service you expect from us, or that we'd want to provide. We are conducting a thorough investigation to understand fully how these mistakes happened in 2023 and to help us make sure they do not happen again.

Paper 1 Listening: what went well?

- Many students were able to gain marks in most questions throughout the paper, regardless of the question type.
- There were very few instances of students not answering non-verbal questions.
- It was clear that students had been prepared well to tackle the range of questions and question types.
- The vast majority of students followed the instructions well and answered clearly.
- There were fewer answers in Section B written in English this year.
- The Higher tier papers differentiated well between lower-attaining and higher-attaining students.

Paper 1 Listening: some areas of focus for 2024 exams

- In verbal questions requiring answers in English, the answers given by students were sometimes vague.
- In some cases basic vocabulary items (eg numbers, months, dates, age, family members...) and/or topic-specific vocabulary items do not appear to be well known by students, preventing them from both accessing the material and answering some questions correctly.
- **Listening to the whole utterance**; those who single out individual key items of vocabulary will usually not score the mark as they are likely to miss out the key idea. There will be distractors in some questions to differentiate between students of different abilities. This is particularly important in P/N/P+N questions, A/A/A+B questions.
- Ensure students answer in the **correct format** (eg using A, B, C or D or 1, 2, 3 or 4) required for the question.
- Reading the introduction to the question and the instructions carefully; students need to know exactly how to answer the question and also what the setting/context of the question is. If the student knows the focus is free time, their brains will already be geared towards listening out for vocabulary linked to hobbies and free-time activities – this is where the importance of using the 5 minutes' reading time comes in.
- If the question asks for **two** things (such as two places you can visit), do not give more than two. If students give both the correct and the incorrect answer, they cannot be awarded the mark.
- Ensure handwriting is always clear and legible.

Paper 1 Listening: advice to students

- **Maximise the 5 minutes' reading time** by highlighting key words in the rubrics and questions, identifying questions which have two parts to be answered from the same utterance (eg 6.1 and 6.2) and looking at the target language questions and options in Section B (answers in the target language).
- **Read the rubric (introduction) to the question carefully.** This will help you to give sensible answers.
- **Answer every question**, especially where you have to write a letter. If in doubt, have a guess!
- **Listen carefully to the whole utterance – don't base your answer on the first thing you hear.** There will be distractors in some questions. This is particularly important in P/N/P+N questions, A/A/A+B questions as well as in multiple-choice questions.
- **Don't give up if you find a question difficult** – some more accessible questions will come up later in the test.
- **Look carefully at the wording of the question** – are you giving the specific information required?
- If you are asked to give **one** reason or one detail, only give **one**.

Paper 2 Speaking: what went well?

- Overall student performance in Speaking was slightly improved since the previous series.
- Students were usually very well prepared for the Role Play and for the Photo card, and with less disruption this year, the increased opportunities to practise for the General Conversation have clearly had a positive impact.
- Vast majority of the tests were well-administered and the *Instructions for the conduct of the exams* observed.
- Students found ample material to describe in the photos presented.
- Mostly examiners reported a balance of time given to the exploration of the nominated theme and that of the second theme, allowing students access to the full range of marks available.
- Majority of students were entered at the appropriate tier.
- In the General Conversation, questions were consistently asked that allowed all students to give and explain opinions, necessary for achieving the higher marks for Communication.
- Some conversations were spontaneous, helped very much by teachers asking follow-up questions after a student's extended response, giving students full access to the marks for Spontaneity and Fluency.

Paper 2 Speaking: some areas of focus for 2024 exams

- **Carry out a short test recording** before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity.
- **Adhere to the script in the Role Play** - any variation is likely to result in a student's response to a particular task being discounted. It is not acceptable to repeat **part** of a prompt.
- Work on **interrogatives** - students' understanding is key to formulating a question in the question task in the Role Play (and sometimes responding appropriately in other tasks, especially in the unprepared task).
- If there is a two-part unseen question, ask the first part, wait for an answer and then ask the second part, to avoid possible cognitive overload.
- If you see that a student is starting to give the wrong answer to your question, interrupt them and repeat the question. Once the student **completes an incorrect answer**, a mark of 0 for Communication is given for that task, even if you repeat the question and a correct answer is given subsequently. Teachers are strongly encouraged **not** to use English during the course of the test itself.

Paper 2 Speaking: some areas of focus for 2024 exams

- **Practise describing common actions featured in pictures** - sometimes students tried to express their ideas in a present continuous tense, reflecting English usage (eg *ils sont regardant* in French).
- Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests and which are appropriate to their level of ability - **don't ask all students identical questions**. (A student who struggles with a fairly straightforward Theme 2 question on their home town is unlikely to cope well with an environmental question about global warming, for example.)
- **To help students access marks for Spontaneity and Fluency, follow up some student responses** by asking about what they have just told you. To give students an opportunity to demonstrate an ability to respond spontaneously in the test, try to incorporate simple queries or requests for further detail in general classroom exchanges, so that students learn to expect this approach.
- Encourage students to **vary their language structures and vocabulary** as much as possible, eg different adjectives, different ways of expressing opinions.

Paper 2 Speaking: advice to students (Role Play)

- **Read the introduction carefully** – it's there to help you understand the scenario.
- You can **write down exactly what you are going to say** for each of the bullet points during the preparation time if you want to.
- **Prepare only the information required by each bullet point** - if it says 'one detail', only prepare **one** detail.
- **Remember: at Foundation tier** there is no need to use past or future tenses in the Role Play tasks.
- **Listen carefully to the question that your teacher asks you for the unprepared task** – it might be in two parts.
- Make sure you know **common question words** such as **when, what, how, where** in the language you are studying.
- You can ask for **repetition** of a question, but make sure it is in the target language. Practise how to do this!

Paper 2 Speaking : advice to students (Photo Card)

- Prepare answers **of at least three sentences** for **each of the three questions on the Photo Card**, using a verb in each one.
- One of the prepared questions at Foundation tier will require an answer in a time frame other than the present. At Higher tier, one question will require an answer which refers to a future event and one question will require an answer which refers to a past event.
- **Listen carefully to the unseen questions** your teacher asks you.
- If your teacher interrupts you during any of your answers to the first three questions, it's just to make sure there is time for the two unprepared questions, so don't be put off if this happens.
- **Keep to language you understand** – there are no marks in this part of the test for complex language, only for Communication, so **keep it simple and clear**.
- You can ask for repetition of a question, but make sure you do this in the target language - practise how to do this!

Paper 2 Speaking: advice to students (Conversation)

- **Ask your teacher a question during the discussion of your nominated Theme** to make sure you don't forget.
- **Try to vary the language you use**, for example
 - learn different ways of expressing opinions
 - have a bank of different adjectives
 - try and use connectives to make your sentences longer/more complex where possible.
- **Try to remember to give and justify** your opinions without always being prompted by your teacher.
- **Don't worry if you can't answer a question** – your teacher will just move on to something else.
- Work hard on your **pronunciation**.
- You can ask for **repetition** of a question if you like, but make sure it is in the target language. Practise how to do this.

Paper 3 Reading: What went well?

- Students appeared to have prepared very well for the demands of the paper and this was clear from the way the various questions were tackled.
- There were very few non-attempted questions and the vast majority of students responded to the questions fully, with a good level of detail.
- The papers proved accessible and there were many very pleasing scripts.
- The overlap questions discriminated effectively, as well as the translation task.
- In Section B, there were fewer answers given in English.
- There were very few unattempted translations, which was really pleasing as there are always some very accessible marks as well as more challenging ones in this task.
- Tasks on the topic of Environment were generally well answered, even though it is often considered to be one of the more difficult topics with the vocabulary sometimes less well known than in other topics.

Paper 3 Reading: some areas of focus for 2024 exams

- Students should ensure their answers to multiple choice style questions are as clear as possible. Sometimes a variety of upper case and lowercase letters are used. Consistent use of uppercase letters would be advantageous both for students and markers.
- In the positive and negative question task, students sometimes stopped reading after they had recognised one part of the answer and lost the mark eg in French Higher Tier Question 2.4, many stopped reading after the word *vulgaire* and assumed the opinion was negative, despite the mention of not being able to avoid watching the programme.
- In the translation task, students found the translation of various past and future tenses correctly and conveying the correct pronouns most challenging.
- Students are advised to write letters clearly when answering questions requiring non-verbal responses. If students need to change their answers they should cross out the letters they do not want examiners to mark.
- At times handwriting was poor and/or illegible. Where errors in spelling led to a failure to communicate the required information without ambiguity, marks could not be awarded.
- It is advisable to use the example, where these are included, as a guide to how much information to include.
- Students risk losing marks in questions where they must write in English or in the target language when they include additional or alternative information.

Changing letters

Make sure you write letters **clearly** when answering questions requiring non-verbal responses. **You may lose marks if letters are unclear or if you change your answers without clearly crossing out the letters you don't want examiners to mark.** Here are some examples of some good and poor practice:

Good practice

A

B

Good practice

~~FFF~~ F

~~T~~ NM

~~F~~ T

~~F~~ F

Poor practice

D E . C

B

Paper 3 Reading: advice to students

- **Read the rubric introduction** to the question carefully.
- **Read the whole of the sentence so that you can check that your first reaction is right.** If you think the answer is 'P' (positive) for example, read on in the text to make sure that the correct answer is not in fact 'P & N' (positive and negative).
- **Do not copy whole chunks of the text** because you might include the wrong answer as well as the right answer.
- If you are asked to give **one** reason or one detail, only give one.
- **Make sure you leave enough time** – manage your time across the different sections of the paper.
- **Make sure you attempt the translation** - some marks for the translation task will be more accessible than other questions on the paper.
- **Precision is essential** and the precise meaning of the whole phrase must be translated, so check your work carefully to ensure nothing is missed out. (If the text says '**my** dog', don't write '**the/a** dog' etc.)

Paper 4 Writing: what went well?

- The variety of questions in the paper provided an opportunity for all students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge.
- The vast majority of students were able to attempt all the questions and it was extremely rare to see blank responses.
- At Foundation tier, it was encouraging to see an improvement in the quality of responses for Questions 1 and 2.
- Students were able to refer to different time frames, use a variety of language and express opinions, which enabled them to meet the demands of the assessment criteria for Questions 2 and 4.
- Where students did not understand an element of the question, some had been well trained to gain some credit by writing a simple *J'aime ... / Ich finde ... gut / Me gusta ...* etc (I like ...) response, which often worked well in terms of covering the bullet point.
- Translations at both tiers and in all languages discriminated well across the ability range with the full range of marks awarded.
- Very few students did not attempt the translation, which was pleasing - there are always some very accessible marks (as well as some more demanding ones) within each translation text.

Paper 4 Writing: some areas of focus for 2024 exams

- **Practise verb formations** - inaccurate verb formations, inappropriate use of the infinitive or omission of verbs often cause a delay in communicating meaning.
- **Encourage students to stick close to the suggested number of words.** A barrier to achievement was when students wrote much longer responses than the suggested word count, creating more scope for error. Full marks can be scored without going beyond the suggested number of words, as illustrated in the mark scheme examples.
- Revise key vocabulary so students are able to respond to the targeted rubrics and bullet points.
- In Foundation tier Question 1 there are no marks for quality of language, so sentences could be very simple and repetitive in structure and score two marks each time. The best responses usually include successful use of simple phrases such as *hay / il y a / es gibt* (there is) + an understandable noun.
- **Coverage of all bullet points is key** - misinterpreting or omitting even one bullet point can cause students to lose marks – see the published mark scheme for more details. Coverage of the bullet points does not have to be equal but the students do need to say at least one thing about each.
- In the overlap question (Foundation 4/Higher 1), it is important to **identify the time frame that each bullet point targets.**
- If a question requires positive and negative/advantages and disadvantages, ensure you cover both. In a French overlap question some students failed to address both the positive and negative aspects of school, for example.
- In the Higher tier 150 word writing task, **accurate verb and tense formations** are key to the mark for accuracy.

Paper 4 Writing: advice to students (1)

- Aim to write **roughly the suggested number of words**.
- **Plan your answer** before starting to write.
- For Foundation question 4/Higher Question 1 and Higher Question 2, **choose the question where you know what all the bullet points mean**.
- Identify which bullet points target the **different time frames**.
- **Mention all of the bullet points**. Attempt to write something about them rather than omitting them.
- **Tick off the bullet points** in the rubric once you have addressed them.
- **Check each bullet point** to make sure you know which ones require reference to the PRESENT, PAST or FUTURE/CONDITIONAL. Look for clues in the bullet points (*normalement, récent, mémorable, projets pour l'avenir, etc*)
- Make sure you include **opinions/justifications** as required by the task.
- **Read your piece of writing carefully** and check that your verb formation is accurate.

Paper 4 Writing: advice to students (2)

- In some cases, you can **adapt the language of the bullet points** to help you write a successful response. (For example, in French 2022 paper Foundation Question 4.2/Higher Question 1.2, the second bullet point ‘**votre** *transport préféré pour aller en ville*’ is easily adapted to produce ‘**mon** *transport préféré pour aller en ville est...*’)
- **Practise writing in three different time frames.** Pick a theme/subject and write the same sentence in 3 time frames.
For example: ***D’habitude... / normalement...*** (Usually/normally...)
Letzte Woche ... / Gestern... (Last week/yesterday ...)
En el futuro... / La próxima semana... (In the future/next week ...) etc

Enhanced results analysis

- You can find out how well your students performed in key aspects of the examinations in 2023 by using the Enhanced Results Analysis (ERA) tool. We have produced a [guide](#) to help you get the most out of ERA.
- ERA is accessed via [Centre Services](#) and you can access it using a password provided by your exams officer.
- ERA provides you with data for your students who took the exams and can be viewed by question, Assessment Objective or topic. You can also view a breakdown of marks for the Speaking test for each student.
- ERA provides a national comparison, as well as data for similar schools.
- The data from ERA can be exported so you can use it alongside your own summative assessment data.

Assessment materials – what’s available when?

Summer 2023 exam series

Assessment material	Qualification type	Available on Centre Services	Available on AQA website
Question papers	AS and A-level, AQA Certificate Level 3 Applied General, EPQ, GCSE, ELC, FCSE, Functional Skills, Level 1 and 2 Certificate	10 days after exam	12 July 2024
Mark schemes	AS and A-level, AQA Certificate Level 3 Applied General, EPQ, GCSE, ELC, FCSE, Functional Skills, Level 1 and 2 Certificate	Results day (August)	12 July 2024
Reports on the exam	AS and A-level, AQA Certificate Level 3 Applied General, EPQ, GCSE, ELC, FCSE, Functional Skills, Level 1 and 2 Certificate	August to September	12 July 2024

[AQA | Exams admin | Exams | Assessment materials: what's available when?](#)

We’re unable to provide reports on the exam for a small handful of subject components with minority entries.

Most past papers and mark schemes will be available on our website for a period of **three years**. This is due to copyright restrictions.

Support from AQA

- **Examiner's reports** are available in Centre Services on results day for GCSE MFL specifications - full of really helpful advice and key reading for MFL teachers.
- We encourage schools/colleges to access breakdown of marks for Speaking tests for all GCSE languages on ERA to help with decisions around possible Reviews of marking (via our Post-results service).
- **Published mark schemes** available in Centre Services
- **Training for conduct of speaking tests** for all languages available on the subject pages under Paper 2 in the Assessment tab.
- [2024 Instructions for the Conduct of the exams](#) available on AQA website on subject pages in Assess tab.

Support from AQA

- **Feedback meetings were held in Autumn 2023** for GCSE French, German and Spanish – materials can be found here: [AQA | Professional development | Course finder](#)
- **GCSE and A level conduct of the speaking tests** – online events for each level available to book here [AQA | Professional development | Course finder](#)
- **GCSE MFL Supporting student exam preparation** – repeat from Spring 2023 – available for booking now [AQA | Professional development | Course finder](#)
- **Exampro Question Bank** www.exampro.co.uk – 2022 GCSE and A-level exam questions now added, 2023 questions to be added in Spring 2024
- Please remember that materials on Centre Services are securely protected for the benefit of all AQA schools and for mock exams in particular. **Please do not share them in any form, particularly on social media.**



Contact us

We're here to support you throughout the year, answer your questions and always provide up-to-date, expert advice.

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Thank you