

Before the mocks

Christmas is behind us and the exams have suddenly taken on an altogether different aspect. For the first time in the school year it is difficult to pretend that the exams are a dim and distant prospect. It is really important that you do not allow the mocks to set the agenda when it comes to your over all study plan.

The mock exams should be viewed as nothing more than practise for the real thing. However, having said that, you still want to do as well as possible in these exams. Your goal over the next month should be to achieve an understanding of the paper. You need to hone your examination technique skills.

I recently surveyed a class that I am teaching and discovered that the difference between a B grade and an A grade did not lie in the students' ability in the language, but moreover in an understanding of the examination paper.

The Leaving Certificate examination in French, at both levels, is comprised of three components: an oral examination, a written paper containing both reading comprehension material and a written production section, and a listening comprehension test. The marks allocated are as follows:

Question	Higher	Ordinary
(a) Oral Examination	100	80
(b) Paper I – Reading Comprehension	120	160
Paper I – Written Expression	100	60
(c) Paper II – Listening Comprehension	80	100
Total	400	400

As you organise yourself in the lead up to the mocks, do so in a manner that targets all three areas of the examination. This means that you get a folder and you divide it under the following examination orientated headings:

- ◆ Grammar
- ◆ Informal letters
- ◆ Formal letters
- ◆ Essay questions
- ◆ Comprehensions
- ◆ Aural
- ◆ Oral

Over the course of the next four weeks you should attempt to master the five core tenses. This means that you target the present, the future, the passé composé and the conditional and imperfect tenses. As you don't have much time to spare before the mocks you should set yourself attainable goals. Try to cover one of these tenses a week.

Start with the present tense, as it is the root and branch of nearly every other tense on the syllabus. If you feel that you know these tenses very well, you should consider revising the more complex compound tenses, such as the plus que parfait and the subjunctive.

However, in my experience, students tend to be far too complacent about the basic core tenses.



A sunflower field in the south of France

Doing the write thing

Past examination questions are key to the written French test and you should aim to learn as much vocabulary from past Leaving Cert papers as possible

In order to prepare for the written examination you should focus on the past examination questions. While you should be wary of learning off large chunks of material, you must take the time to memorise useful vocabulary that can be used in similar questions. Bearing this in mind, you should try to learn at least two new sentences specific to each part of the written section every night.

Take a look at the following Leaving Certificate question. The answer is written in idiomatic French. Key phrases are highlighted and can be memorised.

Hôtel restaurant "les arcades" – Roscoff

- ◆ Cuisiniers
- ◆ Serveurs / serveuses
- ◆ Plongeurs/ plongeuses
- ◆ Femme de chambre
- ◆ Réceptionniste

Embauche immédiate

Adresser lettre, CV et photo :
Le Directeur,
"Les Arcades"
29680 Roscoff
Tél. 98 69 70 45 ou se présenter

Plongeur/plongeuse = personne chargée de laver la vaisselle

Write a letter of application in response to the above advertisement. In your letter:

- give details of your age and education;
- say which job(s) you are interested in;
- mention past work experience and your suitability for the work for which you are applying;
- say that you have spent a lot of time in France, and that you speak French well;
- mention that you are enclosing a CV and a photograph.

You are Patrick/Patricia Healy and your address is New Street, Dungarven, Co Waterford (the letter should be about 75 words).



Dungarvan, le 21 mai 1998

Patrick Healy,
New Street,
Dungarvan,
Co Waterford

Le Directeur,
Les Arcades,
29680 Roscoff,
France

Monsieur,

Suite à votre annonce, parue dans le quotidien Le Monde, j'ai appris que vous cherchiez quelqu'un pour le poste de serveur cet été, et j'ai l'honneur de solliciter cet emploi. Je m'appelle Patrick Healy, j'ai 19 ans et je viens d'Irlande. Cet été je passerai mon "leaving cert" l'équivalent du bac français.

J'ai beaucoup d'expérience dans ce genre de travail. J'ai déjà travaillé, les étés précédents, dans l'hôtellerie et je peux vous fournir des attestations de mes anciens employeurs si vous le désirez. En plus je suis quelqu'un d'avenant et surtout j'ai le souci de l'accueil.

J'ai déjà fait deux stages en France et je peux vous assurer que je parle français couramment. Veuillez trouver ci-joint mon CV ainsi qu'une photo. Si vous avez d'autres questions à me poser, n'hésitez pas à me contacter.

En attendant de vos nouvelles, je vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur, l'assurance de mes sentiments distingués.

Patrick Healy

Comprehension

The two comprehensions that appear in the exam carry almost 30 per cent of the available marks on the higher level exam paper. Your approach to the comprehensions needs to be twofold. You should aim to learn as much vocabulary from past Leaving Cert papers as possible. In my experience most marks are lost in this area through poor examination technique.

It is not necessary to know every word of the comprehension to get an A. However, it is absolutely essential that you understand exactly what each question is asking you to do. Without effective examination technique you cannot do well in this area of the examination.

The only way to hone your skills in the comprehensions is to answer every past paper you have.