



Celebrating Bastille Day (July 14th) with an enormous parade on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.
Photograph: Eric Gaillard/Reuters

Devising technique and timing

If you follow this advice you should not have any difficulty on the day of the mock examination. The same approach can, of course, be used in the Leaving Cert exam.

- ◆ On the day of the examination make sure that you are well prepared. Bring a pencil, highlighter pen, eraser and plenty of spare pens.

- ◆ Start by making a note of what has been asked on the written paper. By doing this, your brain will begin to think, if only on a subconscious level, about how to answer that section.

Begin with the comprehensions. In this way you may notice phrases or vocabulary in the comprehension that could be useful to you later on in the written exam.

- ◆ Before the listening comprehension begins, you will have some time to yourself.

Rather than enter into a post-mortem about the written paper, you should take this time to listen to a past Leaving Certificate aural exam on an MP3 player.



This will get your ear in tune for the examination.

- ◆ The written paper is worth 220 marks and the listening comprehension is worth 80 marks.

You have two and a half hours to answer the written paper and 40 minutes to answer the listening comprehension questions.

TIMING SCHEME:

If you follow this timing scheme for the written paper, you will have about 15 minutes at the end of

the exam to check your answers:

- ◆ Reading comprehension one, compulsory (60 marks): 35 minutes.

- ◆ Reading comprehension two, compulsory (60 marks): 35 minutes.

- ◆ Written question one, compulsory (40 marks): 25 minutes.

- ◆ Written questions two, three and four, you must answer two out of three (30 marks each): 20 minutes each.

The A1 student



Valerie Gillespie sat her Leaving Cert at Rosses Community School, in Dunloe, Co Kerry

I don't think the Leaving Cert French exam is ever going to be easy, but I had put a lot of preparation into it beforehand and I felt confident going into it, happy coming out, and hopeful that I'd get an A1.

I never had a rigid regime. I tried to devote an equal amount of time to all my subjects. I would try to do one aspect of French every day just to keep in contact with the course. So, maybe five or six hours a week, sometimes a bit less, occasionally a little more.

Of course, coming up to the oral, I would have put a lot more preparation into that, specifically. Then, with something like the aural, we'd listen to tapes in class and do questions on them. Then when I got home, I'd listen to them again, to get used to the sounds of the voices.

Also, from fifth year, I'd always be on the lookout for new vocabulary. I had a notebook designated for that. It was really good to read through that before an exam to refresh my memory. I had another notebook for idioms, idiomatic phrases, proverbs and things like that.

Anything I came across I'd note down, then in my answering I'd use any opportunity to put them in, where appropriate, of course.

With the oral preparation, I'd never been in France, I didn't know anyone from there, but it still can be done – even if you try to speak with a French accent, it will really help. So I'd try to imitate the pronunciation of the native speakers on the audio tapes. I'd even walk around my house by myself, speaking it aloud. That was really great, actually, because I could hear my own voice and I could work on pronunciation, intonation and so on. That helped boost my confidence.

I also went for a one-hour grind on Saturdays with a retired teacher from my school, and we did a lot of oral practice there too. It was very relaxed and informal. That and another revision course I did coming up to the exam made the difference for me. But my teacher at school, Mrs Walsh, was brilliant as well, she really prepared us.

I got an A1 in the mock. That was a great affirmation that I was doing the right things. But I kept the pace up, because I don't think that you can afford to get complacent in the Leaving, even if you're doing well. I continued as I was going, it was working so I didn't see any need to change it. I wasn't overly confident, but I gave the exam my best shot and I enjoyed it, fighting for every mark.

If I was to give advice, it's that you have to work steadily through – there's no room for panic or cramming. If you're unsure of something, just ask and get it out of the way as soon as possible.

Make sure you are competent and confident with any grammar rules. Know when to use your tenses. The ability to demonstrate the correct use of grammar and incorporating idioms is the best way to reach the higher ranges of marks.



You don't have to go to France to get an A1 in your exam, but it helps