

Teaching guide: Individual research project

This resource gives you ideas about how to approach the Individual research project (IRP) for Paper 3 of the A-level French (7652), German (7662) and Spanish (7692) specifications.

What is the individual research project (IRP)?

The IRP is one element of the speaking component of the A-level modern languages examinations. It does not feature in the AS-level.

Students should choose a subject or a key question which interests them and which relates to a country or countries where the target language is spoken. They must select relevant information in the target language from a range of sources, including the internet. One aim of the IRP is to develop research skills. Students can show their ability to initiate and conduct individual research by analysing and summarising their findings, in order to present and discuss them in the A-level speaking assessment (Paper 3).

Selecting a suitable topic

If more than one student in the school/college selects the same general subject area, the title of their research must be different and they must work individually.

Students can choose a subject linked to one of the themes or sub-themes or to one of the works they have studied. However, they must not base their research on the same literary text(s) or film that they refer to in their written assessment.

There is no preference for one area of study over another, but the subject matter should be challenging enough to allow for at least two sources to be studied and to allow a serious discussion to take place. The A-level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) guidance states that 'topics should be suitable for an extended discussion involving the expression of views and complex arguments'.

ALCAB has published illustrative examples of individual research topics linked from alcab.org.uk. Topics they suggest include: politics, sport, the fashion industry, a historical event or building, immigration in the target language country, a political figure, a musical performer, the computer games industry in the target language country, a region, gastronomy and a specific major news event.

Other topics which students might consider could be from the fields of art, the environment and climate change, the media, voluntary organisations, economic

issues such as employment or poverty, education, science and technology, multiculturalism, law and order, health policies, agriculture, lifestyle changes, energy policy, migration, the role of the EU, housing and tourism.

Students could choose an alternative work by a writer or director they have covered with the teacher. They may also choose a general theme related to a work they have studied. For example, if a student had studied the French film *Les 400 coups* by François Truffaut, they would be able to talk about another Truffaut film or the 'new wave' of French cinema.

Further specific suggestions for each language

French

Suggested titles:

- The contribution of Francis Cabrel to modern French popular music: a study of three albums

This might include: a detailed biography, facts and figures about his record sales in France and elsewhere, musical collaborators, detailed reference to particular song styles, themes and lyrics, a discussion of a particular song. Source materials could include fan sites, online or printed biographical information, album reviews, song lyrics and music videos.

- How does French society protect its language and culture?
- How has Breton culture been defended and developed over the years?
- What did Marie Curie contribute to French science?
- What environmental challenges are faced by Paris and how is the city responding?
- The history and achievements of Les Restos du Coeur
- Why did Albert Camus write *La Peste*? An analysis of the main themes
- The history and role of rugby in France. How can it compete with other nations?
- May 1968: an analysis of its causes and consequences
- What were the origins of French impressionism and what is its artistic legacy?
- Why is the tradition of the *bande dessinée* so important in the French-speaking world? An analysis of the work of two *créateurs*
- The emancipation of women in France. What has been achieved and is there more to do?

German

Suggested titles:

- What is Germany's energy policy and how effective is it in tackling climate change?

This might include a description of current and recent policy, the political and social imperatives behind the policy, facts and figures about energy production, environmental implications, the role of coal, the policy on nuclear energy, EU policies and carbon emissions.

- Gender equality in Germany. Past achievement and future challenges
- What issues does Germany face with regard to migration? An analysis of events from 2015 onwards
- The role of Angela Merkel in modern Germany
- Why is the German international football team so successful? An analysis of the organisation of football in Germany
- What do we learn from the Günther Grass novel *Katz und Maus*?
- The development of post-war Berlin. Past achievements and future challenges
- The Bauhaus movement in German arts and architecture. What were its origins and legacy?
- What has been the contribution of Turkish *Gastarbeiter* to German society?
- An analysis of Oliver Hirschbiegel's film *Der Untergang*
- The importance of tourism to the Austrian economy: successes and challenges
- What does the car industry contribute to the German economy? An analysis of past achievements and current challenges.

Spanish

Suggested titles:

- How successful is the Spanish high speed train network? An economic and environmental analysis

This might include a description of the network and the history of its construction, the technology used, facts and figures about speeds, capacity and passenger numbers, costs, future development, its function within a Europe-wide transport network, economic and environmental benefits.

- To what extent are women equal citizens in Spanish society? Law and reality

- The Spanish Civil War: what were its causes and consequences?
- How has membership of the EU affected the development of Spain?
- What demographic challenges are faced by Mexico City and how is the city responding?
- An analysis of wind energy policy in Spain
- Bull-fighting in Spain: its origins, historical development and current debates
- The role of tourism in Barcelona: successes and challenges for the future
- An evaluation of *La sombra del viento*, a novel by Carlos Ruiz Zafón
- The rivalry between Real Madrid and Barcelona football clubs: its history and modern manifestations
- An analysis of Pedro Almodóvar's film *Volver*
- Why is Salvador Dalí so well-known as an artist? An analysis of three major works.

The scope and depth of the research

Teachers should advise students to create a specific task or title that will help them define the scope of their research project and conduct their research in an achievable and realistic way. For example, 'The life and times of key political figure X' is far too broad a topic-area, whereas 'The social reforms introduced by key political figure X and their impact on society' is more manageable and sets a clear agenda for the student.

The chosen topic may be framed as a question, eg 'How effective is drugs legislation in Spain?', 'What is the legacy of the reunification of Germany?', 'How successful has the policy been on the *banlieues* in France?' This approach has the advantage of immediately inviting an analytical discussion.

Timing

It would make sense to devote class and personal study time to the IRP during the spring term of the A-level year (Y13). You may want to encourage students to think about a topic area earlier in the year, or possibly at the end of the first year of study, to focus students on doing some initial research over the summer break.

One sensible approach would be to allocate a certain number of lessons and personal study time in the scheme of work during the spring term. The time allocated needs to allow for in-depth research and should reflect the weight of the final assessment.

Tablet computers with headphones for classroom use would be useful for students working on the IRP.

Guiding students

During this period of research for the IRP the teacher should monitor the work of the students, offering advice on sources and study techniques along the way.

It would make sense to timetable progress sessions with individual students, during which you can check how they are getting on and they can share what they have been researching.

During any one-to-one meetings you will have to carefully avoid giving advice on language or correcting any work students may have written down. You should also warn students against using English as primary sources when doing their research. You can urge them to use and adapt target language they discover in their reading or listening, reminding them that extensive reading and listening will contribute significantly to their overall language acquisition.

It would be valid to give general advice on the type of language students might use when presenting or discussing a topic, as well as advice on using correct intonation and discourse markers.

Research sources

Students need to use and reference a minimum of two and a maximum of ten sources, at least one of which must be an internet source. Students should not neglect sources of listening, both audio (eg radio archive podcasts) and video (eg YouTube, Daily Motion and the many news web sites with archived video).

For French, the [INA](#) (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel) is a useful online source of historic archived videos. For German, the [ZDFzoom](#) site has archived media reports. Spanish students might find [FilmotecaEspañola](#) useful.

Teachers can request free membership of the [FILTA](#) (Film in Language Teaching Association) a social space for educators and researchers interested in using film for teaching languages.

Preparing for assessment

It will need to be made clear to students that, although the project is not assessed in writing, a significant proportion of marks are awarded as part of the speaking assessment (Paper 3). Students will need to use language spontaneously to develop ideas and opinions independently, answer questions, express thoughts and feelings, present viewpoints, develop arguments, justify conclusions, and analyse and evaluate their chosen topic.

You will need to go through the mark scheme carefully with students, probably modelling examples of good presentational practice. You should also allow time for students to practise the presentation and discussion, with the understanding that students must not know in advance what questions they will be asked in the speaking test.

In the discussion section of the assessment, students should remember that, as well as offering factual information, they will be expected to evaluate, analyse and offer their own ideas and opinions for 9–10 minutes. Only by doing this will they be able to access the highest marks.

Students will need to provide a minimum of two sources and, if they wish, headings for the examiner in advance of the assessment, so that the examiner can prepare some possible areas for questioning. Further guidance on this will be available on the AQA website well before the first exam series in 2018.

The A-level speaking assessment

The IRP is assessed as part of the A-level Speaking assessment (Paper 3). The whole assessment lasts 21–23 minutes (including 5 minutes' preparation time).

There are 60 marks in total, representing 30% of A-level marks. There are two parts:

- discussion of a sub-theme based on a stimulus card (5–6 minutes). The student studies the card for 5 minutes at the start of the test (25 marks).
- presentation (2 minutes) and discussion (9–10 minutes) of individual research project (35 marks).

Students are not allowed access to a dictionary during the assessment, including the 5 minutes' preparation time. Assessments are conducted by either a teacher at the school/college or by a visiting examiner and are marked by an AQA examiner.

Advice for teachers conducting tests

You do not need to have any specialist knowledge about the topic area the candidate has chosen. Although you will have the candidate's headings and prepared some questions based on them, you should try to avoid going through a list of pre-prepared questions. It would be better to listen carefully to the candidate, respond and react to what they have said, returning to your prepared questions when necessary.

Your role will be that of an intelligent layperson, trying to get the candidate to describe, explain, analyse, evaluate and express ideas and opinions. You will need to try to put the candidate at their ease, give them scope to explain the findings of their research, whilst intervening during the discussion if candidates start to give prepared speeches. Only by challenging the candidates to clarify and further explain information and views will you allow candidates to achieve the highest marks.

It is best to use open-ended questions such as:

- When you say..., what exactly do you mean?
- But some people believe ... what do you think of that?

- How do you react to that?
- Do you think that is really true?
- How do you feel about that?
- What about....., for example?
- What if I said that...?

Questions which would elicit more information and views might include:

- Why did you choose this topic?
- Tell me more about...?
- What was the most interesting thing you discovered in your research?
- Where did you find your information?

If you do happen to have a close knowledge of the chosen topic, you should resist the temptation to show off what you know or to try and catch out the candidate on points of detail. Candidates might reasonably feel that this represents unfair treatment.

As with all speaking assessments you should smile, encourage and support, whilst listening carefully in order to pick up and challenge any points you find interesting. You will try to engage in a genuine, serious dialogue, whilst allowing the candidate the opportunity to do plenty of talking.

Step-by-step student checklist

Selecting a topic

- Which topic interests me most?
- Have I done some background reading in my first language and the target language?
- Have I made a list of possible topics, presented them to my teacher and discussed which ones would be the most suitable?

Suitability of topic

- Is my topic rooted completely in the target language society?
- Is it easy to access appropriate resources?
- Does the topic allow me to develop interesting information, analysis, ideas and opinions?
- Is the topic of the right scale (not too broad, not too narrow)?

Choosing sources and collecting information in the target language

- Have I kept a separate file or section within my A-level file?
- Have I identified printed and internet sources (minimum 2, maximum 10)?
- Have I checked the school or college library/resource centre?
- Have I printed off online sources to highlight and annotate?
- Have I used any audio or video sources?
- Have I noted key points and new vocabulary on printed sources?
- Have I noted key statistics, facts and/or quotations I can cite?
- Have I kept a list of references which I can refer to precisely in the speaking test?

Organising ideas

- Have I planned which parts will I include in my two minute presentation?
- Have I highlighted questions I might be asked in the follow-up discussion, bearing in mind the headings I provided?
- Have I prepared answers to the above questions?

- Have I anticipated and prepared answers to other questions which might arise?

Headings

- Are my headings for the examiner absolutely clear?

Answering questions during the discussion

- Can I support the discussion with ample knowledge?
- Can I precisely quote my sources?
- Have I focused on analysis and evaluation of information?
- Am I prepared to defend any counter arguments I may hear?
- Do I have the language needed to describe, analyse and evaluate?
- Am I prepared to give longer, developed responses?
- Do I have good 'stock phrases' to maintain the discussion? (eg 'on the one hand... on the other', 'some claim...', 'you could say...', 'according to...', 'I don't agree because...', 'in my view...', 'it is possible that...', 'I am not sure, but...', 'the figures show that...', 'if you compare...' etc)
- Am I prepared to include advanced grammatical structures and interesting idioms?

Revision

- Have I prepared notes, mind maps or a PowerPoint to organise my material?
- Have I practised with someone else (a teacher, assistant or friend)?
- Have I recorded myself speaking to check for speed, clarity, pronunciation and intonation?