



Preparing for oral exams: video tutorial

<http://www.screencast.com/t/uaV2M1jBhDtx>

Transcript

Welcome to this tutorial on preparing for oral exams for languages, from the University of Reading's Study Advice team. The tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace, and you can pause it at any time.

What is an oral exam?

Oral exams are sometimes referred to as vivas – from the Latin viva voce which means 'live speech'. They might be used to test your ability to quickly recall knowledge on a subject, or to give you a chance to expand on and defend a piece of written work – as in a thesis defence, or to demonstrate your language ability. This tutorial is going to focus on preparing for oral exams for languages.

Preparing for an oral exam

Immerse yourself in the language – listen to foreign-language radio or television programmes, spoken-word versions of books or newspapers.

Get used to reading language texts aloud. This will help you to naturally assume the rhythm of speech in that language.

The exam will involve interacting with other speakers, so practise with a friend or group of friends. Have a 'no English allowed' hour with a set of forfeits to choose from every time one of you speaks in English.

Don't get hung up on being perfect – after all, you probably don't always use perfect English grammar and syntax! Confidence and fluency are the most important things. Remember it's all about being able to communicate!

In the exam room itself

You need to think of the oral exam a bit like a presentation, like a public performance. So here are some strategies that can help you feel calmer and help you to achieve your best results.

Firstly act confident even if you don't feel it. Smile when you enter the room and shake hands with the examiner. Make eye contact during the exam. Remember to ask questions as well as responding to them. Thank the examiner when you leave.

Breathing deeply and regularly can help to calm nerves. Take a bottle of water in case your mouth is dry - slightly warm is better than ice-cold.

Take your time! Don't rush into giving an answer before you've thought about what you want to say - you will get confused and make mistakes. Take a breath and think before you speak.

Listen to the whole question carefully before you start constructing your answer. It's tempting to latch on to one word that you recognise and start thinking of your answer, but don't do that - you may miss an important part of the question.

Know how to say "Could you repeat that please?" in the language you are being examined in. Then if you missed part of a question or didn't understand it, you can ask for it to be repeated.

Summing up

So to sum up, preparing for an oral language exam involves:

- Immersing yourself in the language
- Practising your speech as much as possible
- Thinking ahead about strategies for the exam itself

If you do all these things, you will be well on the way to success.