

GCSE: the pupil perspective

Year 9 student Gita Parmar tells about taking her Gujarati GCSE exam at age 12.

Five grades are given in the Gujarati GCSE: one each for reading, writing, listening and speaking, and one overall grade. Before taking the exam I had to decide if I wanted to attempt the Foundation or Higher paper, which is longer by one section – though you only get ten minutes more to complete it.

Before taking my GCSEs I was nervous, but I concentrated on learning, understanding and remembering as much as I could, using previous test papers, texts and books we were given in Gujarati classes. These helped my reading and pronunciation. As I read more, I learned which parts of sentences to emphasise and which texts were challenging. I learned how to ‘manage’ my reading pace, which

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helped me time myself better and read the exam questions properly. Experience has shown me this is very important.

The test papers supplied in Gujarati classes gave me a chance to see the layout, the type of questions, the difficulty, and the amount of marks I could gain for different questions. The layout is clear and gives lots of space to write answers.

As the day of the speaking exam approached I felt nervous and worried I might freeze up, but my parents said it would be fine and I

should just do my best. So on the day, I said a prayer to God and we all left for City of Leicester High School. We waited in the Wyvern Building reception area. The other kids were nearly all older than me, which was intimidating. But sitting there gave me a chance to observe the kids at that school and the teachers from the point of view of an outsider. It made me laugh to see what kids were doing – and made me think twice about some of the things I do.

My name was called and I was taken to a room where I gave my ID, and then to another room where I was given about fifteen minutes to read the paper. It had a picture story and I had time to think of answers I would give for a group of questions. Then, I was called into the examination room for the actual exam. The examiner explained what I had to do and the speaking test was recorded. Afterwards the examiner told me my expected grade – but not to assume that this would be the one I’d get. The Speaking exam included an oral presentation, which I had prepared on a topic I’d chosen.

On the day of the listening exam, I waited in the reception area with other candidates. Some of my friends were there and we were all nervous. We were called into a room and each told where to sit. Each desk had an exam paper on it turned face down. We waited until everyone was seated and were told to start the test. A tape recording gave us the rules and what we would need for the test. We were instructed where to write our names and candidate numbers, how to answer different questions and if answers should be long or short. Then, the test began.

We listened to the scenario and then wrote the answer to the question. In case we missed something the first time, it was played twice. Also, at the beginning of each section on the exam paper there is an example and reading this came in handy.

In the reading exam we were given short pieces of writing and had to answer questions on each. Just like in the listening exam, we were given useful examples at the top of the exam paper.

During the writing test we were given different scenarios and had to choose one and write about it. The paper had a few helpful hints to guide us on the sort of things we should include in our written pieces.

Gita’s tips

- Manage your exam preparation time well. Take time to read, understand and answer questions when you practise on old exam papers. You’ll eventually shorten the time you take to read a page and will become a more fluent speaker.
- Tell your teacher which topic you’ve chosen for the speaking test.
- Read the exam handbook carefully, especially the rules about cheating. Don’t write on your hands or put written notes in your pencil case – it might look as if you plan to cheat.
- Read the exam timetable carefully. Note what time and how long the exams are in case you need to be excused from school.
- Note where the exam centre is and make sure you know how to get there. Keep the details handy in case you need to contact the centre.
- Note your candidate number.
- Take some identification. A passport is okay, or you can give your teacher a passport-sized photo and ask them to make an ID document for you.