THE COMPLEXITY OF THE MFL MARKING SCHEME IN THE UK ~WRITING~

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Abstract:This essay discusses the complexity of the assessment scheme concerning MFL testing for GCSE in the UK, in terms of the writing exam. Assessments play a very important role and are part of our teaching process. It will be annotated how assessments focus on giving the teachers and the students a real perspective of their results. By assessing, the teachers actually promote learning. In the previous study, the process of writing has been analysed, by explaining and illustrating with examples all the differences and strategies. It has been emphasized that the writing process is a complex one and, according to Harmer, it includes four major steps: planning=>drafting=>editing=>final draft. For the topic to be properly approached, Adriana Vizental's theoretical model focused on marking the writing exams will be discussed and compared with the UK AQA examination board. Equally important, this study offers a closer look to how the writing exam is marked and it highlights the elaboration of the marking scheme.

Keywords:AO-Assessment objectives, AQA-Assessment and Qualification Alliance, GCSE-General Certificate of Secondary Education, KS-Key Stage, MFL- Modern Foreign Languages

In *Strategies of Teaching and Testing English as a Foreign Language*, Adriana Vizental states:

Furthermore, testing is a complex achievement that aims to assess not only the acquisition by the students of the new material (i.e. quantitative acquisition and competence), but also the way they can use this material creatively and realistically (i.e. qualitative acquisition and performance). (Vizental, 2014:74).

In the same book, Adriana Vizental outlines the difference between the subjective testing and the objective testing. Subjective testing evaluates the productive skills. When assessing the written compositions, translations or dictations, we rely only on our personal judgment. In general, testing the writing ability is subjective because it requires the examiner's opinion on the writing level. However, in the UK, the internal regular exams (students are assessed every half term, so that means every six-seven weeks) and the mock exams (all the exams students need to sit before the actual GCSE exam; there is a mock exam in November and one in March, the actual GCSE taking place in May) are moderated by another teacher and by the head of department. That means that the written tests are being marked one more time, just to ensure that the class teacher was not subjective. An uncommon fact, compared to Romania, is that the names

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on the exam paper are not covered in the GCSE or any other formal exam. The examiners will always know the name of the students.

In the same way, Adriana Vizental explored the idea of objective testing. She referred to Robert Lado's new method of assessment.

Lado's theory relies on the "atomistic view" of the age: if the language is built up of "atoms" (i.e. letters, words, etc.), then for teaching and testing purposes it should be broken down into its components, and each item (lexical, grammatical, informational, etc.) drilled and tested separately. (Vizental, 2014:76).

Lado suggested that each student should receive a number of points for every task students need to complete, the final grade being the total of the points that the students received. However, even if this gives us a real perspective of what students are able to produce, I consider that subjective testing is better. This includes teachers spending a huge amount of time marking and writing feedback. After marking a writing test, teachers are supposed to give feedback to every single student. This helps the teachers to understand their needs and to make a new learning plan, in order to support students to achieve a better grade in the next exam.

Complementary to this, the MFL GCSE exams include questions and topics that concede students to demonstrate their capability to demonstrate their knowledge and provide complex responses.

Assessment objectives (AO) are the same across all GCSE (French, Spanish or German) specifications and all exam boards. According to the AQA exam board, the main purpose of the exams is to measure how students have achieved the following assessment objectives.

AO1: Listening – understand and respond to different types of spoken language.
AO2: Speaking – communicate and interact effectively in speech.
AO3: Reading – understand and respond to different types of written language.
AO4: Writing – communicate in writing.

As I mentioned in my previous study, students may be entered for either Foundation Tier or Higher Tier. The only condition is that they must enter at the same tier for all skills. Access to dictionaries is not permitted at any time during the test. The instructions are in English but the questions are in French/Spanish/German. Students are required to write in French/Spanish/German.

- **The Foundation Tier** can get the maximum of 50 marks and one hour to complete all tasks.
  A) If we have a closer look at how the questions are structured, we can see that question 1 is worth 8 marks for communication. Students have to produce a message which demonstrates their ability to write short sentences by using familiar language in a familiar context. For example:

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Answer the questions in the spaces provided.

0 1 Vous envoyez une photo Whatsapp à votre ami(e) français(e).

Qu'est-ce qu'il y a sur la photo ? Ecrivez **quatre** phrases en **français.**

0 1 . 1

[2 marks]

0 1 . 2

[2 marks]

0 1 . 3

[2 marks]

0 1 . 4

[2 marks]

8

We can see that each sentence is marked individually. The criteria is that the students are given 2 marks if they communicate the message clearly, 1 mark if the message is relevant but demonstrates ambiguity and causes delay in communication or 0 marks if the message is not relevant to the picture, if it does not make sense, if the student uses second person instead of third, such as 'Tu portes un foulard' instead of 'Il/Elle porte un foulard'. The sentences can state what is in the picture and not refer to what is not in the picture. For example, if a student writes 'J'aime la photo' then he or she will get 0 marks as the message is irrelevant and does not refer

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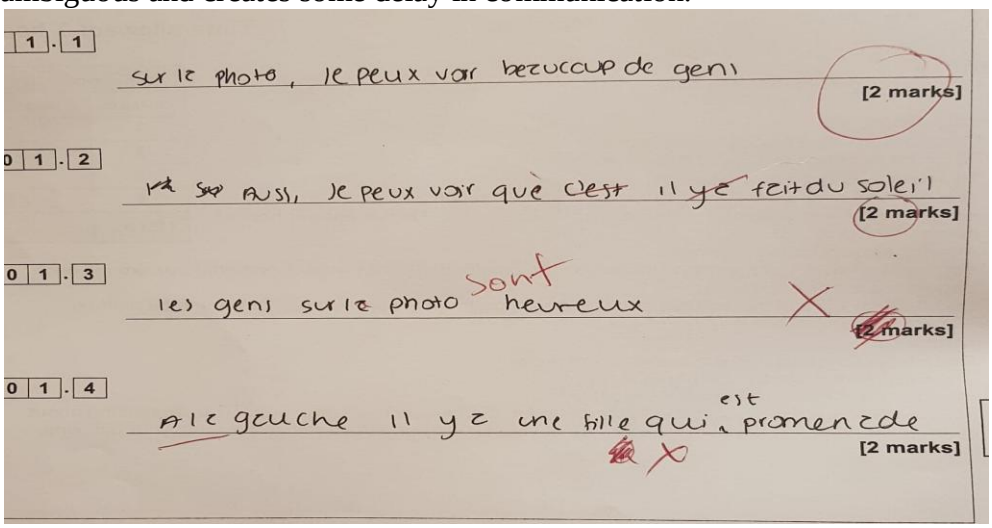
to what is in the picture. If a student writes 'Il y a une piscine', that makes the sentence false and again, no marks will be allocated to this student. Most importantly, all answers have to be in the form of a sentence. Students can write very simple sentences, as long as they make sense and as long as there is a verb in the sentence. For example: 'C'est un parc', 'Un garçon fait du vélo.' , 'Il fait beau.'. If students have lapses such as 'Il faire beau.', 'Un parc.', the examiner will still give a mark for this content, according to the AQA exam board.

The following student was given only 4 marks out of 8 because the sentences are quite ambiguous and creates some delay in communication.



B) Question 2 is worth 16 marks and it focuses on the students' ability to produce a short text by using simple or complex sentences in order to exchange information. Ideally, students include all bullet points in the paragraph.

0 2 Vous écrivez un blog sur votre collège.

Mentionnez:

- les matières
- les professeurs
- les bâtiments
- les repas.

Ecrivez environ **40** mots en **français.**

[16 marks]

In this case, 10 marks are allocated for the content and 6 marks are allocated for the quality of language. The content marks are allocated as it follows:
-9-10 marks if communication is clear and all bullet points are included in the paragraph;
-7-8 marks if almost all bullet points are included and communication is mostly clear;
-5-6 marks if there is a reasonable coverage of the bullet points and communication is quite clear;
-3-4 marks if only few bullet points are covered and messages are not conveyed;

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-1-2 marks if the bullet points are barely included in the paragraph and communication is unclear;
-0 points if no message is conveyed.

In terms of the quality of language, the marks are split as it follows:
-5-6 marks if the sentences are highly accurate and if the students use different grammatical structures;
-3-4 marks if students attempt to use variety and if the grammatical structures are relevant to the task;
-1-2 marks if the grammatical structures are either repetitive or very limited;
-0 marks if students do not write anything or if all sentences are irrelevant to the task.

Official examiners, when they train us, they advise us to give first the mark for content and then read a few times the paragraph and decide upon the mark for quality of language.

C) Question 3 refers to a translation from English to French and it focuses on the students' ability to apply grammatical structures but also language and vocabulary knowledge.

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0 3 Translate the following sentences into **French**.

I live in a village.

In my house there are six bedrooms and a garage.

At the weekend I play on my computer.

I adore fish because it is healthy.

Yesterday I did a lot of homework.

[10 marks] 10

For this question, 5 marks are allocated for conveying key messages and 5 marks are allocated for application of grammatical knowledge of language and structures. In terms of conveying messages, students will receive:
-5 marks if all messages are covered;
-4 marks if almost all messages are covered;
-3 marks if most messages are covered;
-2 marks if some messages are covered;
-1 mark if few messages are covered;
-0 mark if students do not translate it accordingly.

As examiners, we need to ask ourselves if a native speaker would be able to understand the content of the task and mark it accordingly.

Concerning the application of grammatical knowledge of language and structures, the students are allocated:

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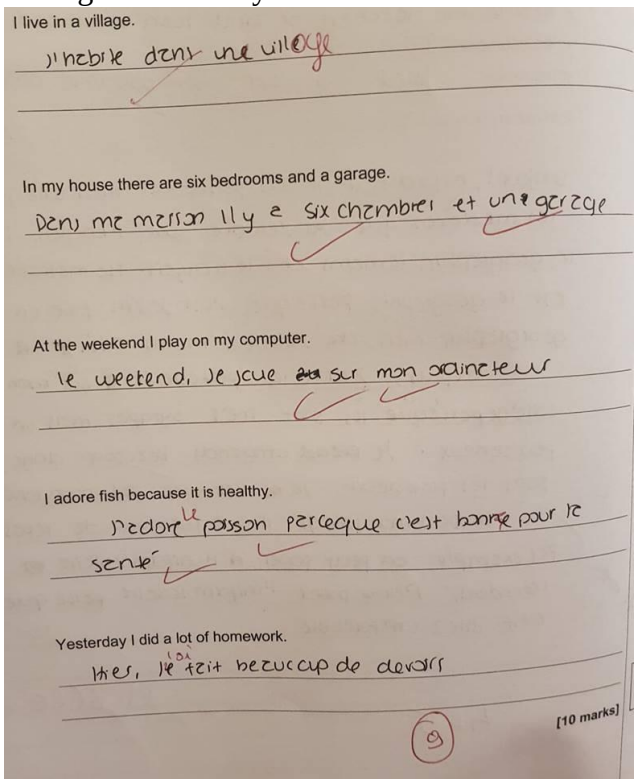
-5 marks if the knowledge is outstanding;
-4 marks if the content is generally accurate;
-3 marks if the students demonstrate reasonable knowledge;
-2 marks if they show limited knowledge of structures;
-1 mark if the content is highly inaccurate;
-0 marks if students do not apply any structures.

If the students leave any gaps, then the content should be considered inaccurate. In the following example, the same student was given 9 marks because the content is accurate and all messages are conveyed.


I live in a village.
J'habite dans une village

In my house there are six bedrooms and a garage.
Dans ma maison il y a six chambres et un garage

At the weekend I play on my computer.
le weekend, je joue sur mon ordinateur

I adore fish because it is healthy.
J'adore le poisson parceque c'est bonne pour la santé

Yesterday I did a lot of homework.
Hier, je lui fait beaucoup de devoirs

[10 marks]
9

D) Question 4 gives students the opportunity of choosing between two options. Students need to demonstrate coherent, extended paragraphs, by giving opinions and expressing ideas. Students are supposed to refer to present, past and future tenses. This question overlaps with Question 1 in Higher Tier. The criteria for this question are different from Question 2, even if the same amount of marks is allocated. In terms of this question, examiners will focus on how reasonable are the responses, on how often students express an opinion. They are interested to check if messages break down, if there are any lapses, if the time phrases are successful, and if register and style are respected. The examiners must accept information that represents plausible answers to the task.

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Answer **either** Question 4.1 **or** Question 4.2.

You must **not** answer **both** of these questions.

Either

0 4 . 1 Vous décrivez vos vacances pour votre blog.

Décrivez:

- votre destination de vacances préférée
- le voyage pour aller à cette destination
- vos vacances l'année dernière
- votre préférence pour les vacances à l'avenir.

Ecrivez environ **90** mots en **français**. Répondez à chaque aspect de la question.

[16 marks]

or

0 4 . 2 Vous décrivez vos rapports avec les autres pour un magazine français.

Décrivez:

- votre meilleur(e) ami(e)
- des activités avec vos copains/copines
- un anniversaire récent
- votre préférence pour le mariage à l'avenir.

Ecrivez environ **90** mots en **français**. Répondez à chaque aspect de la question.

[16 marks]

	Communication	Content	Quality of Language	Conveying key messages	Application of grammatical knowledge of language and structures	Total
Question 1	8					8
Question 2		10	6			16
Question 3				5	5	10
Question 4		10	6			16
Total	8	20	12	5	5	50

- **The Higher Tier** can get maximum of 60 marks and one hour and 15 minutes to complete all tasks.
  A) As mentioned above, Question 1 in the Higher paper overlaps with Question 4 in Foundation Tier, so that means it has got the same marking criteria.

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B) Question 2 is worth 32 marks, because it requires students' capability to create independent and complex paragraphs. It gives students a choice between 2 versions. The marks are split in 15 marks for content, 12 marks for range of language and 5 marks for accuracy.

Answer **either** Question 2.1 **or** Question 2.2.

You must **not** answer **both** of these questions.

Either

0 2 . 1 Vous écrivez un blog sur l'argent et le shopping.

Décrivez:

- l'importance de l'argent dans votre vie
- une visite spéciale que vous avez faite récemment aux magasins.

Ecrivez environ **150** mots en **français**. Répondez aux deux aspects de la question.

[32 marks]

or

0 2 . 2 Vous écrivez un article sur le travail pour votre collège partenaire français.

Décrivez:

- les avantages et les désavantages d'être professeur
- vos projets futurs pour le travail.

Ecrivez environ **150** mots en **français**. Répondez aux deux aspects de la question.

[32 marks]

C) Question 3 is very different form the Foundation Tier. It represents a translation from English into French; students must write at least 50 words. This translation is in the form of a paragraph, not in the form of five different sentences. This question is worth 12 marks, 6 for conveying key messages and 6 for application of grammatical knowledge of language and structures.

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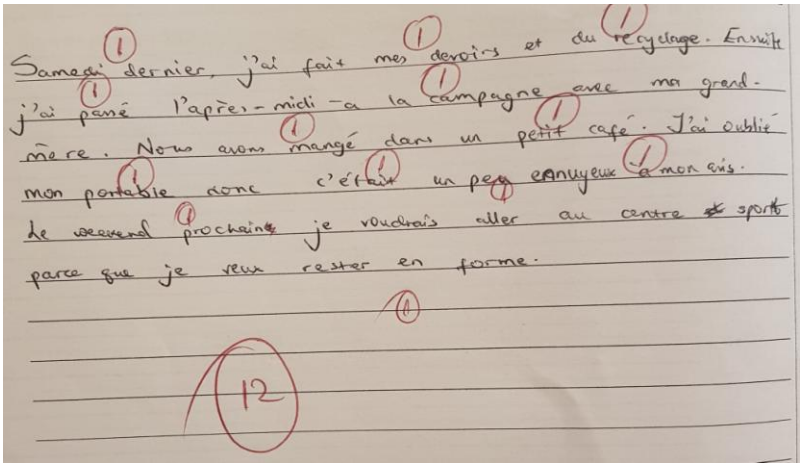
0	3

Translate the following passage into **French**.

Last Saturday I did my homework and some recycling. Then I spent the afternoon in the countryside with my grandmother. We ate in a small cafe. I forgot my mobile, so it was a bit boring in my opinion. Next weekend I would like to go to the sports centre as I want to stay fit.

[12 marks]



Possible answer:

Adriana Vizental has a very similar scheme of marking, that can be compared to the one used in the UK. For a random task like writing a letter to parents describing impressions while visiting a foreign country, Adriana Vizental has suggested the following marking scheme:

1. Content – 1 point

- if the content corresponds to the assignment: the letter must provide information concerning the life and eating habits of the Romanians and nothing else;
  0.30 points
- enough details and illustrations to make the letter believable; if the presentation is dramatic, exciting; **0.30** points
- the organization, structure and coherence of the letter, the logical flow and progression of the ideas; etc.;
  0.40 points

2. Language – 1 point

- accuracy of grammar
- word choice, correct spelling, etc.:
  0.05 points for each small mistake
  0.10 points for each serious mistake (each mistake counted only once)

(Vizental, 2014:349).

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3. Text – 1 point

- stylistic appropriacy: level of formality adapted to the addressee and the relationship between interlocutors (written by teenager to teenager); to discourse type, (e.g. formal or informal letter); **0.40** points
- exceptional achievement, e.g. poetic, witty, etc.; **0.30** points
- aspect: written paralanguage: the students must observe the layout and format characteristic to letter-writing; the teacher should also punish sloppiness and reward elegance or inventiveness of display. **0.30** points

(Vizental, 2014:350).

To illustrate their results, after the mock exams, students receive a review sheet. They need to fill it in and evaluate their success. Based on that, the teacher meets the students and they discuss the next steps until the actual exam. (See Annex 1)

Conclusions

To conclude, by looking at the scheme of assessment concerning the MFL writing exam, we can see that the students' capability is analyzed in detail and it includes rather an objective perspective, and not subjective, as we would expect. Prior to this, I discussed how Lado divided testing into subjective and objective.

I also related the idea of students being divided in different levels, Higher and Foundation, depending on their ability. In contrast, in Romania, all students at KS4 have the same test, regardless their knowledge or level.

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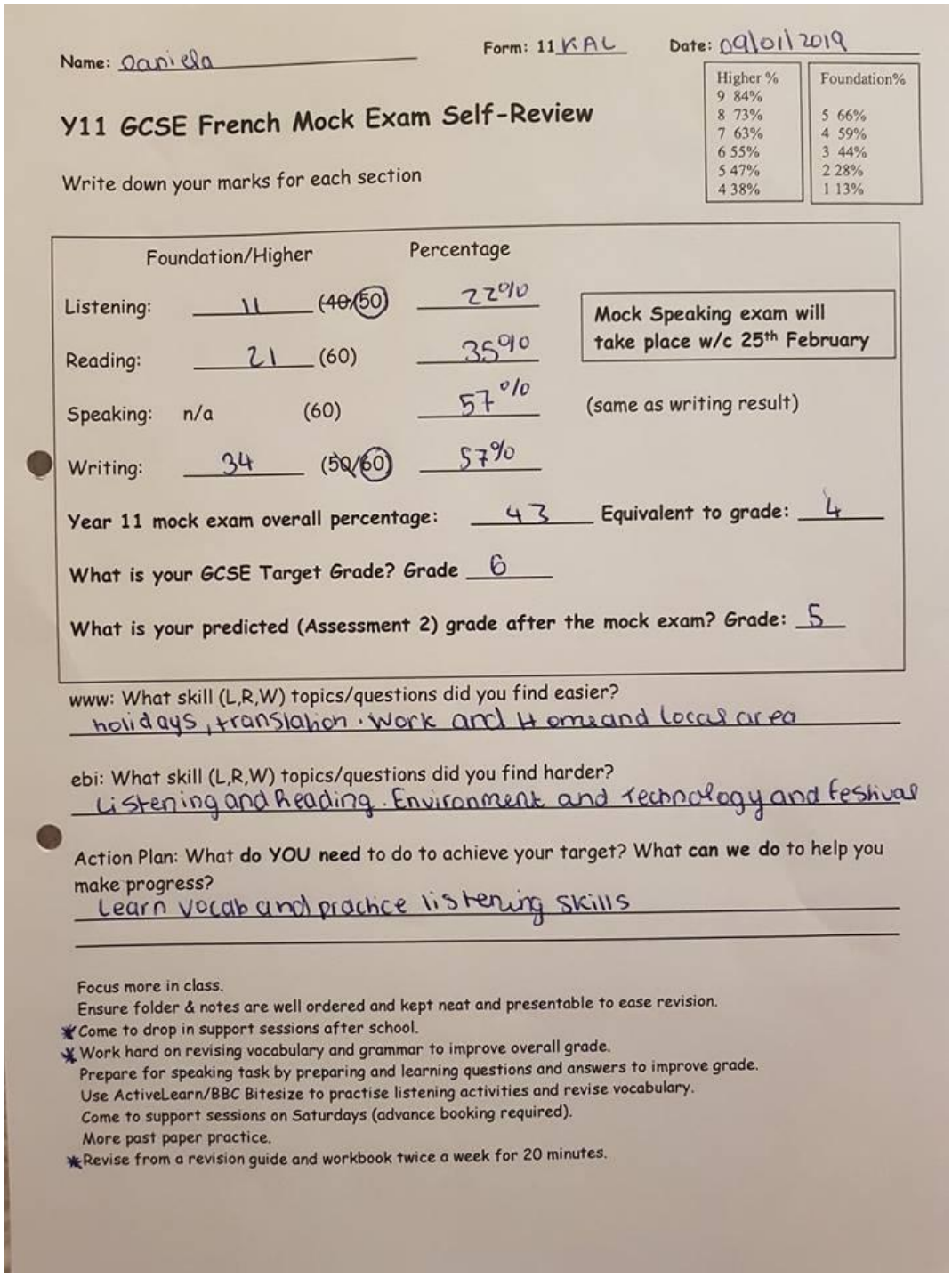
Annex 1



Name: Daniela Form: 11 KAL Date: 09/01/2019

Y11 GCSE French Mock Exam Self-Review

Write down your marks for each section

Higher %	Foundation%
9 84%	
8 73%	5 66%
7 63%	4 59%
6 55%	3 44%
5 47%	2 28%
4 38%	1 13%

	Foundation/Higher		Percentage	
Listening:	11	~~(40/50)~~	22%	Mock Speaking exam will take place w/c 25th February
Reading:	21	(60)	35%	
Speaking:	n/a	(60)	57%	(same as writing result)
Writing:	34	~~(50/60)~~	57%	

Year 11 mock exam overall percentage: 43 Equivalent to grade: 4

What is your GCSE Target Grade? Grade 6

What is your predicted (Assessment 2) grade after the mock exam? Grade: 5

www: What skill (L,R,W) topics/questions did you find easier?
holidays, translation · Work and Home and local area

ebi: What skill (L,R,W) topics/questions did you find harder?
Listening and Reading · Environment and technology and festival

Action Plan: What **do YOU need** to do to achieve your target? What **can we do** to help you make progress?
Learn vocab and practice listening skills

Focus more in class.
Ensure folder & notes are well ordered and kept neat and presentable to ease revision.
- Come to drop in support sessions after school.
- Work hard on revising vocabulary and grammar to improve overall grade.

Prepare for speaking task by preparing and learning questions and answers to improve grade.
Use ActiveLearn/BBC Bitesize to practise listening activities and revise vocabulary.
Come to support sessions on Saturdays (advance booking required).
More past paper practice.
- Revise from a revision guide and workbook twice a week for 20 minutes.

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