

Oral Language Modifier



Handbook

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Introduction

Purpose and use

1. This document is designed for use by Oral Language Modifiers (OLMs) who are working with the awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland who offer General Qualifications (e.g. GCSE and GCE)
2. This document does not have statutory status. Rather, it provides practical guidance on how the language of examinations can be modified to give all candidates the fairest possible opportunities to demonstrate subject attainment.
3. This document gives some advice on the processes involved in Oral Language Modification. It is intended to be used with the document entitled OLM Guidance Examples.
4. This document offers a resource to reinforce good practice and support continuing professional development. Individuals can use the material in this document and in the OLM Guidance Examples to refine their own skills. Building up the knowledge and skills required to be able to adapt many different forms of examination will take some time. Maintaining the integrity of the examination while helping candidates with language difficulties achieve the best they can is a delicate balance. This set of documents is designed to help OLMs to find and keep this balance.

Expectations and challenges

5. It is expected that the role of the OLM will develop over time and that the professional development of the OLM will support the needs of an increasingly wide range of candidates who would otherwise find the language of examination a barrier.
6. The OLM will be expected to demonstrate the highest professional standards when working with candidates. The OLM should be aware of any changes made in the regulations of the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) 'Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments'.

Definition of an Oral Language Modifier

What is an Oral Language Modifier (OLM)?

The Oral Language Modifier (OLM) is a role created to provide a reasonable adjustment in examinations for candidates who require a level of language support beyond that provided by a reader.

This role was originally provided for deaf candidates whose preferred language was English. Its original title was “Oral Communicator”.

It has since been extended to provide for other candidates who have a specific reading comprehension or language difficulty.

For examinations, JCQ regulations allow an OLM to be provided for candidates in GCSE, GCE, Entry Level Certificate assessments and others listed on the first page of the regulations.

“An Oral Language Modifier is a responsible adult who may clarify the carrier language used in the examination paper when requested to do so by a candidate.”

The Oral Language Modifier must not explain technical terms or subject-specific terms. The ability to understand these terms is part of the assessment.”

These regulations may change for future examinations.

What is the role of an OLM?

The OLM is allowed to explain or re-phrase the carrier language in an examination paper to clarify the meaning for the candidate.

The OLM can check that the candidate has understood the rubric and can respond if the candidate is confused by the meaning of a particular question.

The OLM must not re-phrase or explain any subject-specific or technical term. Equally, the OLM should not change command words or source material. (See Appendix 1 of the OLM Guidance Examples)

Candidates using an OLM must be able to demonstrate the same subject skills, knowledge and concepts as other candidates. Explaining subject-specific or technical vocabulary would therefore compromise the demands of the question and may constitute malpractice.

Language modified version of examination papers

A language modified paper should be requested for candidates requiring an OLM. Usually papers are modified at source by the awarding body. In most cases, this means that a

specialist in modification will have made suggestions about language before the paper is finalised. Such a paper is thus modified for all candidates.

Language modified papers should reduce the incidence of a candidate asking an OLM for clarification, although even a well modified paper may contain carrier language that a particular candidate finds inaccessible.

What an OLM is not

The role of an OLM is different from that of a reader. A reader can only read the questions and cannot re-phrase or explain the carrier language. An OLM should only be requested if the carrier language of examinations is likely to be inaccessible even if the questions are read out aloud.

An OLM may act as a reader if the candidate requests it.

An OLM is different from a Communication Professional using Sign Language.

A Communication Professional's task is to present written information in sign language without modification or explanation. Deaf candidates who use English as their preferred language would not usually benefit from Sign Language. Many deaf candidates, however, have language difficulties and an OLM would be appropriate. The OLM appointed should speak clearly and their lips must be visible. The OLM should be someone familiar to the candidate.

If using manually coded English, an OLM must record the means of communication on the coversheet. This would include fingerspelling or Sign Supported English, but it must reflect the way that the candidate is normally taught.

Who can act as an OLM?

- The OLM must be appointed by the centre
- The OLM must be able to distinguish between carrier language and subject-specific language
- The OLM must be able to explain and re-phrase the carrier language of a particular question
- The OLM must be aware of the regulations and procedures relating to OLM
- The OLM should be familiar to the candidate. In some cases this may be essential. For example, a deaf candidate who relies on lip-reading a familiar face or a candidate with an autistic spectrum disorder who might be disturbed by an unfamiliar helper. (If the OLM is not familiar to the candidate, the candidate should have the opportunity of a trial presentation to get to know the appointed OLM)
- The OLM should have had training and gained accreditation in language modification. They should have some knowledge of the theories underpinning the language modification process and the strategies involved
- The OLM should have some knowledge or experience of the subject matter being assessed in the examination. This might be difficult but the OLM does need to know which words are subject-specific. Papers may be opened up to 1 hour early for subject-specific words to be highlighted.
- A qualified Teacher of the Deaf will not need further training, their initial training will have covered these areas.

Process Flowchart

Preparing for Assessment




Working with other staff

Working with the candidate

Preparing the candidate

Guiding the candidates understanding

Conducting Assessment



Original source material or question

What are the problems?

Could material be more clearly written?

How might you rephrase things?

Will this work in an oral/signing context?

Feeding back after Assessment

Who needs to know?

Using feedback to inform preparation

Preparing for assessment

Teaching role vs modifying role

It is expected that the candidate will be prepared in advance of the examination so that the candidate is aware of the different roles performed by teacher, support worker and OLM. The OLM may be involved in helping with this preparation.

Most OLMs will be familiar to the candidate as they already relate to her/him in a teaching or support role. It could be unsettling for a candidate who is used to being directed to an answer in class to be told in an examination that help can't be given (except to re-phrase a particular question). It is helpful for a candidate to know what to expect in the examination, and how support in these conditions will be different.

It is very important that the candidate knows that the same person might have different roles. The OLM might be someone who works with the learner on a daily basis. The candidate needs to understand that in exam conditions this relationship will be different from the relationship in class.

The OLM and other staff should:

- Prepare the candidate to expect change in the role and function of support staff
- Prepare the candidate to act as a candidate as well as a learner

Modification functions

- Prepare the candidate to discriminate between support functions and modification functions
- Guide the candidate to understand the impact of instructional verbs and frequently used examination words. Help them to identify common subject-specific vocabulary.
- Encourage the candidate to indicate specifically what help they need
- Make the candidate more aware of the role of source materials. (e.g. a booklet of sources for a history paper might be confusing to a candidate who is not familiar with that particular format)

How things are different at exam time

I am a different person in exams (the OLM)

- I can only help in certain ways
- I can't give you clues like I do in lessons
- I can't give you examples like I do in lessons
- I can't tell you if your answers are right or wrong
- I can't check your work to see if you have understood
- I can say the questions a different way if you are confused, but there are some words I can't change

You are a different person in exams (the candidate)

- You can't walk around
- You can't use the computer to look things up
- You have to leave your bag outside. You can only take what you need for the exam (such as a pen and pencil). No books or mobile phone
- You must be quiet and put your hand up if you need help
- It's your job to think "Do I understand?" and indicate that you need help if you're not sure what a question means

The candidate should have been taught relevant subject-specific vocabulary:

- In a Science exam, for example candidates would be expected to know the difference between a dependent and independent variable
- In Design Technology, they would be expected to know what design criteria are

The candidate should not expect to have such words and phrases explained by an OLM.

Similarly they should not expect to have source material modified. Source material tends to be original and might be an extract from a book, a letter, a leaflet etc. The candidate should be prepared by studying source material before the examination.

Applying to the Awarding Body

Contribute to the discussion of the candidate's needs

Before applying to the awarding body for an OLM, an Access Arrangements Assessor or Teacher of the Deaf will assess and discuss the candidate's needs. It may be that a reader, for example, is a more appropriate reasonable adjustment to apply for. Since the person acting as the OLM is likely to be employed at the school or centre, they should be involved in these discussions at an early stage.

Collect, collate and store evidence

Evidence that the candidate has a significant language need should be recorded. If the candidate has a specific kind of help in class, that too should be noted as it is essential to record, file and keep for inspection information that shows that the application reflects the normal way of working. An OLM cannot be used, for example, if the candidate does not normally receive help with language/ comprehension in lessons.

The Assessor or Teacher of the Deaf must also show that the candidate has reading comprehension or vocabulary in the well below average range (69 or less standardised score) as measured by a standardised test. This must be carried out within 26 months of the final examination series.

The OLM might be involved in discussing with parents/carers the reasonable adjustments to be applied for. Parents should be assured that the adjustments will benefit their child and that final certificates will not state that an OLM has been used.

The OLM needs to understand:

- the process of using the evidence necessary
- the appropriate format for evidence
- how to make the application, using the rules and guidance to help

Knowledge of the system

- The SENCo or Specialist Teacher would be expected to identify children with special needs as early as possible, liaising with feeder schools before transition. Many centres have standardised assessments in Y7. Results from such tests could be useful to the OLM.
- The Assessor would need to choose suitable assessments for individual students and, after assessment, identify the access arrangements needed for each child with special educational needs.

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- The Assessor will liaise with the SENCo concerning access arrangements required. Usually the SENCo will apply online at 'Access Arrangements Online' (AAO) for any Access Arrangements or modified papers needed by the candidate.
 - The SENCo will receive immediate notification through AAO as to whether the arrangement has been approved. For OLM, there will be an automatic rejection. The centre must then make a referral to the relevant awarding body.
 - The Examinations Officer, on behalf of the head of the centre, appoints invigilators, readers, OLMs etc. and makes them aware of their responsibilities. It is important that the person chosen is suitably qualified, knowledgeable and has the interpersonal skills necessary for the job

For further guidance see:

JCQ regulations: Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance>

JCQ Form 8: Application for Access Arrangements

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/forms>

Making the application in time

It is essential that application for Access Arrangements and reasonable adjustments are made in time. The OLM might be involved in helping to ensure that the SENCo gets the required information well before deadlines are reached.

SENcos should apply for Access Arrangements before an examination series starts. The deadline for applications for the summer examination series in May/June is 21st February. Only if there is a genuine reason can applications be made after this date. Deadlines for language modified papers (an OLM candidate must have a modified paper) are earlier and not flexible, so the OLM and SENCo need to be aware of these deadlines.

There may also be the need for the OLM to be available when controlled or non-examined assessments are taking place.

Conducting Assessment

Carrier language and technical language

Early opening of a paper allows for subject-specific words and phrases to be highlighted. The OLM should have her/his own copy of the exam paper which can be photocopied if necessary at this time. The OLM must be quite clear what is subject-specific language and what is carrier language. If unsure, the relevant words or phrases should not be modified.

It is not always obvious which words are subject-specific:

- “Locate” can in most instances be changed to “find” but in Geography it is a subject-specific term that cannot be modified
- “Error” could sometimes be changed to “mistake” but not in subjects such as Science or Statistics where it has a different meaning and is subject-specific
- In History, a candidate should be aware of the term “primary evidence” but might be confused if this were changed to “first-hand information”

Since candidates are taught subject-specific vocabulary, the OLM could be putting a candidate at a disadvantage by changing these terms.

Equally, an OLM may be inadvertently giving the candidate an advantage by modifying subject-specific terms. Doing this could make the question invalid.

OLMs who use a sign with a candidate who is deaf must be especially careful. If, for example, the word “triangle” appeared in the modification of a Maths question, it would have to be finger spelled as the sign could give an unfair advantage. Many signs for technical

words indicate the meaning of the word - help which would not usually be available to a candidate.

OLMs may also use the early opening time to consider how they might modify carrier language they think is confusing. They must remember, however, that they cannot modify unless a candidate has indicated a need for help with the wording of a particular question.

The OLM needs to be able to:

- determine the difference between carrier language and subject-specific language in different contexts
- show how the same word can be both carrier language and subject-specific language in different contexts
- understand the purpose of source materials. These must not be modified.

Source materials are often used to support examination papers. They may include letters, maps, charts, extracts, etc. They are relevant to an examination task but were created for another purpose. Source material can usually be recognised by an acknowledgement that is printed next to it e.g. 'Extract from a poem by Wilfred Owen, 1917'. Source material must not be modified under any circumstances.

There will be instances where stimulus material has been written by the Principal Examiner. (This will usually be identified as "original" or simply appear without a source reference at all.) Readability should have been considered during the process of writing the stimulus material. The OLM should not modify such material, even if it is examiner-generated.

Modify the grammar of the carrier language

The OLM should be able to recognise when complex language structures exist. In turn, the OLM should be able to modify and simplify the language while retaining the level of conceptual difficulty of the question.

- The OLM must remember that a modified question should require the same subject skills, knowledge and concepts as the original question and enable the candidate to meet the same assessment objectives
- The OLM should be able to recognise grammatical structures which are difficult for weak readers. These include subordinate clauses, passive verbs, negatives, adverbial connectors and ellipses. (See examples in the accompanying OLM Guidance Examples document)
- If the OLM is required to modify, the OLM should consider the whole question, its meaning and the answer that is expected

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- The OLM should be aware that it may be necessary to modify paragraphs or full sentences, rather than individual words or phrases to make the question accessible
 - Long questions may need considerable re-structuring but the OLM must neither introduce nor interfere with question numbering
 - There is no “right answer” to a modification. The OLM is successful when able to give a modified version that the candidate understands, which does not alter the meaning and which does not unfairly advantage the candidate

Modify instructional language/command words and phrases

The OLM needs to be aware that some command words demand higher order responses than other command words.

Example

List three cities that you could visit if you were in France

This is the simplest level of demand. It requires only the recall of knowledge.

Evaluate the importance of Paris to the French people

is a question requiring the very highest order skills.

There is a well-defined hierarchy of such skills and the words associated with them. This can be found in Appendix 1 of the accompanying OLM Guidance Examples.

It is important that the OLM is aware of frequently used examination words that should not be changed. The supporting document entitled OLM Guidance Examples contain detailed information on this topic.

Summary of examination issues

For the candidate at exam time

- Is it clear which questions you have to answer?
- Is it clear what you have to do?
- If you have a choice, are you sure you have picked the best question(s) to answer?
- Make it clear to me if you are not sure what you have to do
- If you are not sure what a question means, then make clear that you need help, but remember I can't change words to do with the subject and can't help you with the answer

For the OLM at exam time

- Make sure the candidate understands what is expected and understands the rubric
- Look through the questions. You can open the paper an hour in advance to highlight subject-specific vocabulary and command words that you must not modify. It might help to work through a spare copy of the paper to, for example, identify potentially problematic language. It must be stressed, however, that an OLM can only modify in an examination if the candidate makes clear that he/she does not understand the wording of a specific question.

Consider the following:

- How might these questions be rephrased?
- Is the information separate from the question?
- Are the sentences too long? Is there any irrelevant information you can ignore? (be careful!)
- What is the examiner asking the candidate to do? What kind of answer is expected?
- Are you aware of any subject-specific language that can't be changed?
- Are you aware of any source material that can't be changed?

If a candidate indicates the need for help, make sure you are aware of what you can and cannot do to help.

Feeding Back after Assessment

Complete Modification: Coversheet

The OLM needs to be able to:

- Write accurate descriptions that reflect what has taken place
- Complete the form according to the regulations and guidance
- Ensure the Examinations Officer and invigilators understand and are aware of what has been done
- Make the coversheet available to all those who need to know (Examinations Officer; invigilator, JCQ inspector, subject staff)

Before the exam starts, the OLM should explain his/her role to the invigilator.

- During the exam, invigilators should be in a position to listen in to the modifications undertaken in order to maintain accountability. In order that a record of modifications is available for later reference by the awarding body, a copy of the completed form needs to be kept by the Examinations Officer at the centre until the closing date for reviews of marking for the respective examination series.

The OLM might find it helpful to take rough notes as they make modifications throughout the exam, and fill in JCQ Form 6A after the exam has finished.

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