

Examiners' Report /
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

International GCSE English as a
Second Language (4ES0) Paper 03

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Examiner Report

Description

This speaking examination is in three parts and lasts about 12 minutes. Each candidate is interviewed individually by an interlocutor. All of the interlocutor's questions are scripted. The speaking examination is recorded on cassette tape, mp3 or disc and assessed by an examiner.

The interlocutor may only select the topics for candidates once they are in the examination room.

In Part 1, the candidate is asked a set of questions on a familiar topic. This part of the examination lasts about 3 – 5 minutes. In this session, the topics were what candidates do in their spare time, the internet, food candidates like to eat, and the town or city where the candidates live.

In Part 2, the candidate is given a task card and speaks at length (about 2 minutes) on the topic on the card. The candidate must answer the specific question mentioned on the task card. The candidate has 1 minute to prepare what s/he is going to say. In this session, the topics were news and current events, fashion, music and shopping.

In Part 3, the candidate discusses in more depth issues related to the topic used in Part 2. This part of the examination lasts about 3 – 5 minutes.

Generally candidates had been very well prepared for the test and knew what to expect. It is devised to become increasingly difficult and this proved to be so for lower ability candidates who struggled the most with Part 3. All candidates should be able to perform adequately in Part 1; Part 3 should be more challenging to C/D candidates; and Parts 2 and 3 should be challenging to F/G candidates.

Assessment Principles

The test is assessed positively out of 20 using the grid printed in the specification (page 17): Communicative ability and content 5 marks, Pronunciation and fluency 5 marks, Lexical accuracy and range 5 marks, and grammatical accuracy and range 5 marks.

Candidates' responses

Generally, the candidates performed well on this paper. They responded well to the structure of the test and seemed engaged by the content. The topics were ones which were generally familiar to them and they could call on their life experience to answer the questions. Topics which were particularly well received by candidates were fashion and shopping. Some candidates struggled

in Part 3, Frame 1 with questions about advertising aimed at children. However, most candidates could retell a recent news event. There was one question in Part 3, Frame 3 (music) about traditional musical instruments which candidates seemed to find a challenge to answer.

Part One

The aim of Part One is to ask candidates about familiar topics and most were able to answer questions with ease. However, there were candidates who were monosyllabic and some interlocutors did not ask the follow-up questions to help them extend their answers. These follow-up questions are an important feature of the paper and should be exploited whenever a candidate is less forthcoming. The purpose of the questions is to encourage the candidate to generate sufficient language on which to assess their ability based on the four criteria mentioned above. In consequence, the role of the interlocutor is to be aware of how responsive the candidate and help them to reply fully to all questions.

Interlocutors should also spend at least three minutes on this section. If the candidate answers all of the questions on one of the topics, a second topic should be selected.

This is the least demanding part of the examination and most candidates handled it well. In a small minority of instances candidates did not understand one or more questions.

Part Two

The aim of this section is to provide the candidate with an opportunity to speak at length on a topic for which they have been given 1 minute's preparation time. They are also required to answer a specific question. The best candidates were able to expand on the topic in detail, giving examples and explanations to support their ideas and opinions. Their performance was also well organised and logical indicating that they had used the preparation time effectively to organise their thoughts.

The task card contains prompts to guide the candidate. These are ideas which the candidate may or may not choose to use in their response. Lower ability candidates tended to use these prompts as a list of items to comment on.

Part Three

The aim of this part is to establish the upper reaches of the candidate's linguistic ability, it also becomes increasingly difficult. There are also follow-up questions to allow the candidate every opportunity to show the extent of their ability. Many candidates had been well-prepared and quite naturally gave their opinion and then provided more information by way of support.

Lower graded candidates struggled with this part of the examination. Some misunderstood questions or asked for help in interpreting certain questions.

Interlocutors

The interlocutors play an important role in enabling the candidates to show their linguistic ability and although their performance is improving with each series, there are still problems which need to be highlighted.

Although most of the interlocutors conducted the examination appropriately, there were others who did not follow the instructions contained in 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. All of the wording and questions were provided either in the instructions or on the frame cards, yet some interlocutors did not keep to the questions both in Part 1 and in Part 3.

Those interlocutors who did not follow instructions did not appear to grasp the thinking behind the structure and purpose of each section of the test, and when they deviated from the script it made the task of the assessor more difficult. Indeed, it is felt that on occasion they disadvantaged candidates by asking closed questions thereby depriving them of an opportunity to extend their answers. Others asked particularly obscure questions which were very difficult for candidates to answer.

In Part 3, several interlocutors did not ask questions in groups as indicated on the frame card but selected questions somewhat haphazardly. The questions in Part 3 are grouped together thematically and aim to become increasingly difficult. This allows candidates to build on their ideas as this part of the test progresses. In Part 3, several questions had a follow-up question to encourage candidates to talk more. Some interlocutors failed to ask the second part of the question, and this prevented candidates from developing their ideas more fully and thereby displaying their ability to use more complex language. A number of interlocutors did not ask an adequate number of questions in Part 3; this also prevented candidates from displaying the full range of their language abilities. Other interlocutors asked only the last three questions on the card regardless of the level of the candidate. This made assessment of lower ability candidates particularly difficult.

There were instances where interlocutors allowed candidates to make notes before answering questions in Part 3. The only section of the examination where candidates prepare their questions is Part 2. All paper and pens should be taken away from the candidate before the start of Part 3.

Other observations concerning interlocutors:

1. Some interlocutors needed to prepare more for the examination and have a clear idea of how the exam was organised and what the questions were before they started.
2. There were instances where the interlocutor turned off the recording equipment during the test. This must not happen. The equipment must continue to record throughout the entire test, even during the preparation time for Part 2.
3. Candidates are to be recorded once only. The only exception to this requirement is when the recording is subsequently found to be faulty or of poor quality. A letter explaining the reasons why a second recording needed to be made must also be sent to the examination board.
4. At the start of the examination the interlocutor (not the candidate) must repeat the candidate's name and number for clarity.
5. Some interlocutors invented their own questions and/or commented on candidates answers. In such instances, this was to the detriment of the candidate. Interlocutors are required to adhere strictly to the questions on the card, in the order in which they appear.
6. Some interlocutors used a limited number of frames and they are requested to use all the frames provided.
7. Some interlocutors did not give candidates' time to formulate their response to a question or paraphrased the questions before they were asked to do so by the candidate. On occasion, interlocutors provided vocabulary or even ideas when candidates faltered, not allowing time for candidates to overcome difficulty independently.
8. Some interlocutors gave more than a minute's preparation time. For reasons of fairness, all candidates should be given the same amount of preparation time.
9. Interlocutors needed to listen to what the candidates were saying to avoid irrelevant or repetitive questions from being asked.
10. Interlocutors needed to check whether a suitable recording of the candidate had been obtained before dispatching the tape for assessment. On occasion, blank discs, partial recordings or recordings at the wrong speed were sent for assessment.
11. Interlocutors must complete the candidate cover sheets appropriately and send them off with the recordings.

Candidates

If a candidate is speaking quietly, the interlocutor should ask her/him to speak up.

Equipment

Some of the recordings were of extremely poor quality and it was very difficult if not impossible for the assessor to hear what candidates were saying. This applies to both tape and disc recordings. Sometimes there was a lot of machine noise, particularly when the recording level was set too high. On occasion, the interlocutor was more audible than the candidate. This could be

due to two factors: the position of the microphone and/or the volume of the recording. Interlocutors must ensure that good quality recordings are obtained of all candidates. It is recommended that the equipment, recording quality and level as well as positioning of microphone be checked carefully before the start of the examination to ensure that the best possible recording of the candidate is obtained.

Room

The room selected for the examination was not always a quiet one, and many distracting noises can be heard on the tapes such as traffic, building work and lawn mowers. On occasion a room was selected which had such poor acoustics that it affected the quality of the recordings. It is requested that a quiet room with good acoustics be used for the examination. Candidates were also distracted by people moving in/out or around the exam room. This situation is always disadvantageous to the candidate and must be avoided.

Mobile Phones

Interlocutors should remind all candidates to switch off their mobile phones before entering the exam room. It is also requested that interlocutors do the same. In some instances, signals from mobile phones interfered with the recording and made assessment difficult. It is therefore in the interests of candidates for this advice to be followed.

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