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Edexcel

Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In English as a Second Language (4ES1) Paper 03:
Speaking

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Publications Code 4ES1_03_1906_ER

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General comments

This has been a really exciting year with the first examination of our new specification. Centres should be congratulated in preparing their students so well and we hope that both our students and centres are pleased with their results.

This speaking examination is a scripted interview between the student and interlocutor, which is split into three parts and should last between 9 – 12 minutes in total. The interlocutor should only select the topics for students once they are in the examination room so students do not know what the topics or questions will be.

In the first part of the examination, students are asked to respond to questions giving information and expressing an opinion on a familiar topic. This part of the exam should last between 2-3 minutes. Interlocutors are able to use more than one of the cards in Part 1 if necessary (if, for example, only brief answers are given on the first topic card). If students do not elaborate beyond one or two word responses in this part, interlocutors should use the follow up prompt questions to ask students for more detail (prompt questions on the cards are typically *Why is that?* or *Tell me about that*).

In Part 2 of the examination, students are asked to give a talk on a given topic. The student must answer the specific question mentioned on the task card. Candidates have 1 minute preparation time using a prompt card which contains bullet points to help students to consider what they might cover in their talk. Candidates are able to make notes in this time but the notes must be handed in before the talk commences. The talk should last for up to 2 minutes and the interlocutor must stop the student at the end of the two minute period if they are still talking.

In the final part, Part 3, the interlocutor leads the student in an extended discussion on the topic from Part 2, for a target time of between 5 and 6 minutes. The questions for this part are organised into three sections, with the earlier questions based on more familiar and everyday contexts, before moving on to questions on more abstract themes. In Part 3, interlocutors do not need to go through each group of three questions methodically for each student; for those students who lack the necessary linguistic skills to be able to respond to the final group of questions, the interlocutor might choose not to ask them. However, the interlocutor should aim to provide students with sufficient opportunities in order to be able to demonstrate their skills.

Both centres and students should be congratulated for how well prepared they were for this new specification. The majority of students attempted all three parts of the examination despite the increasing level of difficulty and level of unfamiliarity, of both the tasks and the questions.

Assessment Principles

The total number of marks available for the Speaking examination is now 40 marks in this new specification, with 10 marks available for each of the following areas:

- communicative ability and content
- pronunciation and fluency
- lexical range and accuracy
- grammatical range and accuracy

Please see pages 24-25 of the specification for the assessment criteria for this unit.

Remember that this exam is externally assessed by Pearson Edexcel. All Speaking examinations must therefore be recorded on a USB or CD and sent to Pearson for external assessment. For the January examination series, the speaking examinations may be completed at any time from mid-November up to, and including, the date of the last written examinations in January. For the June examination series, the speaking examinations may be completed at any time from mid-April up to, and including, the date of the last written examinations in June.

Candidates' responses

Part One

The aim of Part One is for students to acclimatise to the interview style examination and to build confidence in the early stages to develop ideas and use appropriate vocabulary, in more familiar, everyday contexts. In some instances, students provided brief, often one word responses to the questions in Part 1. The follow-up questions should be used in these circumstances to help students to extend their responses. The role of the interlocutor is to be aware of how responsive the student is and help them to reply fully to all questions, which could either be by allowing students sufficient time to speak before moving on to the next question or by asking the follow-up questions in this part.

The guide time for this section is 2-3 minutes. If the student answers all of the questions on one of the topics, a second topic should be selected. Interlocutors from a number of centres did in fact do this, which enabled students to talk about different ideas and demonstrate their accurate use of language. This is the least demanding part of the examination and most students handled it well.

Card 1: Month of the year

Most students spoke about their favourite month being the month of their birthday and gave examples about what made this month special. The other popular months given were months with cultural celebrations or religious festivals, as well as the months when the school holidays are. For the least

favourite month question, the majority of students said September – the start of the school year. Others identified a winter month because of the weather.

Some students misunderstood 'month' and referred to the seasons instead but were still able to offer a reason as to why they liked that part of the year so this did not impede student performance.

Card 2: Films

This was an accessible question with the vast majority of students able to identify a film, either an international film or a film from their home country. More successful students were able to talk about the genre of the films they enjoy (or do not enjoy). Candidates were often able to talk about plot details and characters they like or do not like. Many were able to offer an opinion on why they did not like particular films, typically because of the genre or the subject.

Card 3: Hobbies

This task card provided students with the flexibility to choose a particular hobby to talk about, which could be a particular sport they partake in or watch or any other activity or past-time they enjoy doing, either at school or outside of school. Many students were able to talk about doing their hobby with friends or family, often as a bonding activity or just to have fun. Some students struggled with the question about what they do not like about their hobby, with some selecting a different hobby that they do not like.

The speaking examination is not a test of true fact or knowledge, and, although it can help students to draw on their own real life experiences, the answers students give can be from their imagination.

Part Two

The aim of this section of the examination is for students to speak at length, for between 1 and 2 minutes, on a given topic. Candidates must answer the specific question on the card the interlocutor has given them.

For this part of the examination, students have 1 minute of preparation time. During this time, students are allowed to make notes but the notes must be handed in at the end of the preparation time.

The task cards contain bullet point prompts as a stimulus for ideas for students. These are ideas which the student may or may not choose to use in their response. Many students used the bullet points this series to generate ideas and, on the whole, talks were well organised and logical, indicating that students had used the preparation time effectively to organise their thoughts.

The most successful students were able to move away from just following the bullet points on the task cards to generate ideas but nevertheless clearly used the bullet points to start with as a way of getting into the question. They were able to expand on the topics in detail, giving examples and explanations to support their ideas and opinions, often using a variety of vocabulary and language structures.

Card 1: Learning a foreign language

Candidates were often able to give detailed talks on this topic, using a wide range of examples based on their own experiences of learning a language. The majority of students spoke about learning English so this topic proved accessible as even the less successful students were able to talk about some of the things they have done to develop their English ready for this examination.

The bullet points on the prompt card were used by many students to structure their talk. Some went through the bullet points methodically talking about how learning a foreign language is important. The more successful students awarded the higher marks tended to talk more holistically about the importance of learning a foreign language but nevertheless used the bullet points as prompts throughout.

Many students had to be asked to stop at the end of the two minutes, having not reached the end of their talk; students evidently had lots to say. Do allow students to finish the sentence before asking them to stop, if two minutes have elapsed.

Card 2: Recycling

On the whole, students had a breadth of knowledge on the subject of recycling and were able to talk about recent initiatives and current issues, with many referring to local projects or high profile news stories. Many students talked about the issues with plastic and the effects of plastic on the environment.

Even the less successful students were able to express an opinion on the importance of recycling, despite some students finding this topic challenging. Nevertheless, students tended to have sufficient ideas to convey what they do to recycle and were able to explore some of the effects if we do not recycle.

Card 3: Computers in education

The topic on computers in education encouraged students to use a wide range of examples from their own, often current, experience at school or college. Many students were able to talk about how they use a computer at home. Candidates did not appear to be impeded if they did not have a computer at home as they were able to talk about how they use a computer at school or at the library. Many students spoke about the importance of the internet in their studies.

Part Three

The aim of this part of the examination is to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate the full range of language structures and vocabulary for the higher marks. The questions in this section become increasingly difficult. Like with Part 1, there are follow-up questions to allow students every opportunity to demonstrate the extent of their skills. The follow-up questions should be used as a prompt for students if they run out of ideas to say and not just read along with the initial question.

Less successful students in this part of the examination did struggle with some of the questions. Centres should be reminded that students do not need to be asked every single question in this section; the interlocutor should decide which triad of questions to ask each student individually, according to their language skills. Equally, it might be that more successful students focus on the final triad of questions, in order to demonstrate the more complex language structures and vocabulary expected for the upper marks.

Card 1: Learning a foreign language

The vast majority of students were able to respond to the questions based on familiar contexts. Some students struggled with the question about how it is possible to learn a foreign language without a teacher, although many were able to explore how technology could well, and in some cases already has, replace the need for teachers.

There were interesting responses to the question about whether everyone in the world should speak the same language, with many students discussing the importance of tradition and identity.

The final question about advice to someone learning a new language was generally accessible to all learners, as even the less successful students were able to talk about something they had done in preparing for this exam.

Card 2: Recycling

Many students in this part used an impressive range of subject specific vocabulary. The topic proved to be one of current interest to many of the students, in centres all around the world, which certainly appeared to help equip students with plenty of ideas to express.

The questions on everyday contexts were answered well on this subject although some did struggle with things which cannot be recycled. It is worth noting that a positive approach is taken in the application of the mark scheme; marks are not specifically deducted for occasional slips or errors and a holistic approach is taken in assessing what ideas and skills students demonstrate.

The questions on more unfamiliar contexts enabled students to express abstract ideas, with many giving insightful answers regarding what would happen in the future if we do not recycle.

If students struggled to talk for the duration of 2 minutes for the talk in part 2, the questions in part 3 tended to provide students with the opportunity to convey ideas they might not have thought to say. In many cases, students had the appropriate ideas and vocabulary but they just needed to be prompted, through the questions, to express them.

Card 3: Computers in education

In part 3, the questions for this topic appeared to be accessible with the vast majority of students able to offer at least one idea in response to each question, even the questions on more abstract ideas. It was really interesting to hear how strongly some students felt about how essential computers are in education and there were some really insightful arguments from students regarding the dangers of computers and the internet.

As with the recycling task, many students were able to discuss topical issues and refer to recent news stories. Even less successful students were able to respond to the full range of questions in this part and proved knowledgeable on this area, showing confidence, despite perhaps not having the accuracy of expression.

Interlocutors

The interlocutors play an important role in enabling the students to show their linguistic skills. The majority of interlocutors conducted the examination in an appropriate manner and should be praised for their professional manner.

Nevertheless, some interlocutors 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. Please do remember to follow the precise wording in the Handbook and question cards.

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. Whilst the interlocutor may have been endeavouring to make the exchange seem more natural, it is felt that on occasion they disadvantaged students by asking closed questions thereby depriving them of an opportunity to extend their answers. Others asked particularly obscure questions which were very difficult for students to answer. In Part 1, several questions had a follow-up prompt to encourage students to extend their answers. Some interlocutors did not use this prompt whilst others tagged it on to the original question thus extending the question and making it more difficult for less successful students in particular to understand.

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 students to build on their ideas as this part of the test progresses. In Part 3, several questions had a follow-up question to encourage students to talk more. Some interlocutors failed to ask the second part of the question, and this prevented students from developing their ideas more fully and thereby displaying their ability to use more complex language, as with Part 1.

A number of interlocutors did not ask an adequate number of questions in Part 3; this also prevented students from displaying the full range of their language abilities.

It is hoped that the advice below will act as useful guidance for interlocutors in fulfilling their role in the speaking examination.

Recommendations for interlocutors:

1. Remember to follow the instructions and script in the Handbook and question cards, exactly as they appear. This is to ensure consistency for all students taking the speaking examination.
2. Check what the format of the examination is before commencing the Speaking test. In some instances, students were left waiting whilst the interlocutor was trying to ascertain what the next part of the examination was. This can be unsettling for students.
3. Read through the questions before the start of the examination to increase familiarity with the questions and to rehearse accurate intonation and pronunciation ready for the examination.
4. At the start of each recording, in addition to asking each student for their name and student number, interlocutors should repeat the student's name and student number for clarity. Remember to use the student's name as recorded on the attendance register, not their 'English' name. Several interlocutors did recognise the need for this and asked the student to state their full name when it was the student who gave only an 'English' name.
5. All students must be asked the questions on the cards (for the current series), in the order in which they appear. Interlocutors must not devise their own questions.
6. The follow-up questions (which appear in brackets) on the cards should only be asked when necessary, to encourage students to elaborate on their ideas. They should not just be tagged on to the original question as a matter of course. Interlocutors should exercise their professional judgement as to when the follow up questions should be used.

7. Try to avoid using positive words of encouragement such as 'that's good', 'OK' and 'that's very interesting', as such phrases may mislead the students about their performance.
8. If students ask for a question to be repeated, just repeat the question and do not just paraphrase the question as a matter of course. Nevertheless, if a student specifically asks for clarification of a question or word from a question, interlocutors should give a brief explanation.
9. Some interlocutors did not give students time to formulate their response to a question, or paraphrased the questions before they were asked to do so by the student. On occasion, interlocutors provided vocabulary or even ideas when students faltered, not allowing time for students to overcome any difficulty independently. Interlocutors are reminded that they should never correct a student's use of language.
10. Interlocutors should listen to what students are saying to avoid irrelevant or repetitive questions from being asked. On occasion, interlocutors asked a question that the student had just answered in their development of the previous question. In such cases, interlocutors should move on to the next question rather than ask a redundant question. This would not be seen as deviating from the script.
11. Interlocutors are reminded that Part 2 is designed to elicit a 'long turn' from the student and that the interlocutor should not speak during this turn. Interlocutors should not indicate orally that they are listening as this could potentially interrupt the student.
12. Interlocutors should check whether a suitable recording of the student has been obtained before dispatching the audio file for assessment. On occasion, incomplete or poorly recorded audio files were sent for assessment.
13. Please remember to complete an assessment cover sheet for each student. The latest cover sheet can be found in the most recent version of the Handbook.

Candidates

Candidates should be reminded to speak as clearly as possible during the examination. Whilst it was evident that some learners had a naturally quiet speaking voice, this did sometimes make it difficult to ascertain precisely what was being said. Candidates should also be reminded to speak at a suitable pace, as some students, perhaps nervously, spoke so fast it was difficult to determine meaning at times. It is worth reminding students that pace and fluency form part of the assessment criteria.

Length of the test

Interlocutors are reminded that the test should last between 9 and 12 minutes. Although there is no set requirement for students to speak for a minimum amount of time, please be aware that students will need sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their linguistic ability, especially for the higher marks. Where students do not speak for the time suggested, there is less of an opportunity for them to demonstrate the skills expected in the higher levels.

Administrative matters

1. Please remember to use the updated cover sheet for this new specification, which is available in the accompanying Handbook. One cover sheet should be included for each student and the following details should be included:
 - Centre Name
 - Centre Number
 - Candidate Name
 - Date of test
 - Name of interlocutor
 - Frames used in the test
2. Interlocutors are not required to mark the student's performance. This unit is externally assessed by Pearson.
3. The deadline for students to complete the Speaking exam is the date of the last written exam (Paper 1 or Paper 2 - whichever comes last in the series). The Speaking examination must be dispatched to the centre's designated examiner within 48 hours of completion of the examination.
4. Please also remember to send the attendance register to the examiner with students' work. This allows examiners to see which students were present to complete the examination.

Equipment

Whilst in general recording quality was good, some of the recordings were of poor quality and it was difficult for the assessor to hear what students were saying at times. Interlocutors must ensure that good quality recordings are obtained of all students. 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 student is obtained.

Room

The Speaking exam should be conducted in an appropriate setting, away from possible distractions caused by noise, such as traffic, music or people

moving about outside the room. It would be worthwhile for centres to try recording in the examination room before the live examination just to check the acoustics of the room, as this sometimes affected the quality of recordings. A room in a quiet location with good acoustics allows students more of an opportunity to focus on the questions they are asked and for them not to be distracted in any way.

Mobile Phones

Interlocutors should remind all students to switch off their mobile phones before entering the exam room. It is also requested that interlocutors do the same. Signals from mobile phones can interfere with the recording and make assessment difficult. It is therefore in the interests of students for this advice to be followed.

We would like to thank you for entering students for this unit which recognises the fundamental importance of speaking skills. We wish you every success in future series for this qualification.