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Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
English as a Second Language  
Paper 03: Speaking

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## General comments

This was the first January series of our new specification. Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates so well for this endorsed unit and we hope that both our candidates and centres are pleased with their results.

This speaking examination is a scripted interview between the candidate 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 candidates once they are in the examination room so candidates do not know what the topics or questions will be.

In the first part of the examination, candidates 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 candidates do not elaborate beyond one or two word responses in this part, interlocutors should use the follow up prompt questions to ask candidates for more detail (prompt questions on the cards are typically *Why is that?* or *Tell me about that*).

In Part 2 of the examination, candidates are asked to give a talk on a given topic. The candidate must answer the specific question stated on the task card. Candidates have 1 minute preparation time using a prompt card which contains bullet points to help them 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 candidate at the end of the two minute period if they are still talking.

In the final part, Part 3, the interlocutor leads the candidate 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 the questions methodically for each candidate; for those candidates 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 candidates with sufficient opportunities in order to be able to demonstrate their skills.

Both centres and candidates were well prepared they were for the first January series of this new specification. The majority of candidates attempted all three parts of the examination despite the increasing level of difficulty and level of unfamiliarity, of both the tasks and the questions.

## **Candidates' responses**

### **Part One**

The aim of Part One is for candidates 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, candidates provided brief, often one word responses to the questions in Part 1. The follow-up questions should be used in these circumstances to help candidates to extend their responses. The role of the interlocutor is to be aware of how responsive the candidate is and help them to reply fully to all questions, which could either be by allowing candidates 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 candidate 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 candidates to talk about different ideas and demonstrate their accurate use of language. This is the least demanding part of the examination and most candidates handled it well.

### **Card 1: What you like to do at the weekend**

Most candidates spoke about different hobbies they like to do at the weekend and places they like to visit. Many candidates spoke of spending time with friends and family, including visiting relatives who live some distance away from them. The majority of candidates discussed the homework they have to complete at the weekend in preparation for their next week at school, with this often being cited as the part of the weekend they enjoy the least.

There was a real array of answers given by candidates in response to this card, with candidates able to express ideas and opinions on everyday contexts in their lives.

### **Card 2: Music**

The vast majority of candidates were able to identify a type of music, either internationally known or specifically from their home country. Many candidates were able to identify a specific genre of music, such as rock or dance, using appropriate language for the topic. Even those candidates not able to identify a specific genre of music were able to talk about a particular artist's or group's music they like to listen to.

Many different opinions were expressed by candidates about why they listen to music, such as to unwind after a day at school, with many talking about the influence of friends and social media in their choice of music. In some cases, candidates lacked detail in their responses but there was some effective use of the follow-up questions on the card by interlocutors to prompt candidates to provide further detail.

### **Card 3: Favourite place to visit**

This task card provided candidates with the flexibility to choose a place they like to visit either locally, somewhere they like to travel to within their country or even a favourite holiday destination they like to go to abroad.

Candidates did not have to have visited another country or have travelled expansively in order to be able to answer the questions as they could speak about a local place they like to visit, such as a park or nearby town/village. The order of the questions appeared to help candidates build upon their ideas, firstly identifying the place they like to visit and then focusing on what they like to do at the place they like to visit.

Some candidates struggled more with the final question, regarding what they do not like to do at the place they like to visit. As candidates had chosen their favourite place and therefore naturally had lots of positives to say about the place, some had to think on their feet and make up a negative point about the place. Other candidates clearly stipulated that there was nothing that they do not like about their favourite place because it is perfect, which was also a valid approach if candidates explained this instead of perhaps just replying 'no' to this question.

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

## **Part Two**

The aim of this section of the examination is for candidates 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, candidates have 1 minute of preparation time. During this time, candidates 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 candidates. These are ideas which the candidate may or may not choose to use in their response. Many candidates used the bullet points this series to generate ideas and, on the whole, talks were well organised and logical, indicating that candidates had used the preparation time effectively to organise their thoughts.

The most successful candidates 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: The importance of school education**

Candidates were often able to give detailed talks on this topic, using a wide range of examples based on their own experiences of school, drawing on how a school education has helped them. Many candidates spoke in depth about the wider benefits of a school education, such as the friendships they have forged or the opportunities they have had, including school trips and competitions.

All candidates appeared to be able to express ideas about the knowledge and qualifications a school education can provide. More successful candidates were able to talk about the wider skills and opportunities school can offer.

Many candidates had to be asked to stop at the end of the two minutes, having not reached the end of their talk, evidently having lots to say.

## **Card 2: The importance of taking part in sport**

On the whole, candidates had a breadth of knowledge on the importance of taking part in sport, with many talking about the health benefits but then also talking about other wider benefits, as prompted on the card, such as building friendships and developing skills, including team work and resilience.

Many candidates were able to use topic specific vocabulary relating to sport, health and fitness and often candidates used a range of tenses appropriately, talking about sports they have taken part in in the past as well as sports they currently partake in.

As with the other topic cards, many candidates had to be asked to stop at the end of the two minutes, having not reached the end of their talk. Do allow candidates to finish the sentence before asking them to stop, if two minutes have elapsed.

## **Card 3: The role of friends in your life**

The topic on the role of friends in your life appeared to be as accessible as the other topics. At a more straightforward level, candidates were able to talk about the role of their own friends in their life, whilst more successful candidates were able to explore the wider benefits of having friends, often at a conceptual level.

Many candidates followed the order of the bullet points on the card to structure their talk, which is a valid approach to take. The bullet points are there as a stimulus to help candidates think of appropriate ideas to explore.

There were some particularly effective talks where candidates clearly used the preparation time to think of a range of vocabulary and ideas which would allow them to use a range of tenses and structures of speech.

## **Part Three**

The aim of this part of the examination is to provide candidates 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 candidates every opportunity to demonstrate the extent of their skills. The follow-up questions should be used as a prompt for candidates if they run out of ideas to say and not just read along with the initial question.

Less successful candidates in this part of the examination did struggle with some of the questions. Centres should be reminded that candidates do not need to be asked every single question in this section; the interlocutor should decide which triad of questions to ask each candidate individually, according to their language skills. Equally, it might be that more successful candidates 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: The importance of school education**

The vast majority of candidates were able to respond to all the questions based on the more familiar contexts. There were some candidates who struggled when responding to the question about the best place to study at school, but most candidates appropriately identified the library. It can often be helpful for interlocutors to repeat the question so that candidates are able to affirm in their mind what they are being asked.

There were interesting responses to the questions about whether students should have to do homework and whether exams are important, with, perhaps surprisingly, an even number of candidates for and against.

Candidates responded well to the final triad of questions, particularly whether the internet is taking away the need for a school education, as many candidates were able to talk about the delivery of lessons over the internet which is happening in some institutions already. However, candidates then often spoke about how impersonal this approach would be.

### **Card 2: The importance of taking part in sport**

The questions on everyday contexts were answered well as candidates were able to talk about sports they do and do not enjoy based on the sports they either play or watch, either at home or at school. Many candidates were also able to speak confidently about current popular sports, with responses often depending on the country the candidate is from, but often tending to be football or boxing.

The second triad of questions did not appear to pose any difficulties to candidates. Often candidates were able to relate to real-life experiences with friends and family, such as with the questions regarding why people choose not to take part in sport and how to encourage people to take part.

The questions on more unfamiliar contexts enabled candidates to express abstract ideas, with many giving insightful answers regarding whether professional sports players are always good role models and whether professional sports players get paid too much.

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

### **Card 3: The role of friends in your life**

The topic on the role of friends in your life appeared to be as equally accessible as the other topics. With the first questions on the card, all candidates appeared to be able to talk about a best friend and what they like to do with them.

In response to the question about the best way to make new friends, some candidates talked about places to make friends, such as at school or by joining a sports team, whilst others talked about skills needed, such as the need to be confident and not shy or being able to initiate conversations about topics of shared interest.

In response to the final question in the second triad, candidates were often able to give an example of a disagreement they have had with a friend, thereby proving

that you do not always have to agree with friends. It is clear that candidates were able to draw on real life experiences to help generate ideas to express.

There were some particularly insightful responses to the final question on the card, regarding what makes friends different from family, with some candidates arguing that you can be yourself more with friends as you choose them, with others saying that there is no difference between friends and family.

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

## **Interlocutors**

The interlocutors play an important role in enabling the candidates 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 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 1, several questions had a follow-up prompt to encourage candidates 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 candidates, 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 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, as with Part 1.

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.

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 candidates taking the speaking examination.
2. Check what the format of the examination is before commencing the Speaking test. In some instances, candidates were left waiting whilst the interlocutor was trying to ascertain what the next part of the examination was. This can be unsettling for candidates.
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 candidate for their name and candidate number, interlocutors should repeat the candidate's name and candidate number for clarity. Remember to use the candidate's name as recorded on the attendance register, not their 'English' name. Several interlocutors did recognise the need for this and asked the candidate to state their full name when it was the candidate who gave only an 'English' name.
5. All candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates about their performance.
8. A calm, steady tone of voice used by the interlocutor conducting the speaking examination will put candidates more at ease throughout.
9. If candidates 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 candidate specifically asks for clarification of a question or word from a question, interlocutors should give a brief explanation.
10. 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 any difficulty independently. Interlocutors are reminded that they should never correct a candidate's use of language.
11. Interlocutors should listen to what candidates are saying to avoid irrelevant or repetitive questions from being asked. On occasion, interlocutors asked a question that the candidate 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.

12. Interlocutors are reminded that Part 2 is designed to elicit a 'long turn' from the candidate 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 candidate.
13. In Part 2, the stipulated 1 minute preparation time should be adhered to. Centres should time this to ensure that all candidates are treated fairly.
14. Interlocutors should check whether a suitable recording of the candidate has been obtained before dispatching the audio file for assessment. On occasion, incomplete or poorly recorded audio files were sent for assessment.
15. Please remember to complete an assessment cover sheet for each candidate. 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 candidates, perhaps nervously, spoke so fast it was difficult to determine meaning at times. It is worth reminding candidates 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 candidates to speak for a minimum amount of time, please be aware that candidates will need sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their linguistic ability, especially for the higher marks. Where candidates 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 candidate 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 candidate's performance. This unit is externally assessed by Pearson.
3. The deadline for candidates 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 candidates' work. This allows examiners to see which candidates 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 candidates were saying at times. 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 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 candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates for this advice to be followed.

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

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