

# Guide to the A level speaking assessment

**Information and tips for teachers – please consult the specification for full details of the speaking assessment.**

## **1. What does the speaking assessment involve?**

The speaking assessment involves two tasks. Task 1 is a discussion on one of the sub-themes from any of the four themes, and Task 2 is the presentation and discussion of the student's independent research project (IRP).

## **2. When do the speaking assessments take place?**

The speaking assessments take place within a 5 week assessment period prescribed by Pearson during April and May.

## **3. How long do students have to prepare for the assessment?**

Students have 5 minutes to prepare Task 1. The preparation must be supervised by an invigilator and takes place immediately before the examination. Students aren't allowed dictionaries or any other resources during the preparation time but they are allowed to write notes up to a maximum of one side of A4 paper. They can take these notes into the examination and refer to them during the assessment. They must hand them in to the examiner at the end of the exam, together with the stimulus card.

## **4. Do students have a choice about the sub-theme for Task 1 of the assessment?**

There is a set order of cards, which is prescribed by Pearson in a sequencing grid. For Task 1 the invigilator will offer the student a choice of two sub-themes according to the sequencing grid, for example *You may choose music or media*. The student doesn't see the cards but chooses the sub-theme and is then given the relevant card by the invigilator. The students may not change the card once it has been handed to them.

## **Task 1**

### **5. What is the student required to do in Task 1?**

The card for Task 1 contains two statements offering different views on a sub-theme each with two prompts for the student to consider. The student selects one of the two statements. At the start of the examination the student tells the examiner which statement they have chosen. In part 1 of the ensuing discussion the examiner asks the 2 compulsory questions on the Examiner card. The student should lead the discussion with the examiner helping to develop the discussion by asking appropriate follow-up questions.

In part 2 of Task 1, the examiner broadens the discussion to cover other aspects of the overall theme. The questions asked should enable the student to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the cultural and social context and to analyse aspects of the theme by allowing them to develop and justify arguments and form conclusions.

### **6. How will the examiner know which questions to ask?**

The questions are set on the Examiner instruction card. They must be asked as presented in the correct order. They may be repeated but not rephrased. Optional generic questions are provided by Pearson to support the examiner in the follow-up discussion.

### **7. How long should Task 1 last?**

Task 1 lasts approximately 6 to 7 minutes.

## 8. How is Task 1 assessed?

Task 1 is worth 30 marks. The marks are divided between 3 assessment grids.

The first grid is out of a maximum of 12 marks and assesses the student's ability to communicate information about different aspects of the target language culture and society. Students are assessed on whether they can respond critically by selecting relevant material, presenting and justifying points of view, developing their arguments and drawing appropriate conclusions based on their understanding.

A second grid with a maximum of 12 marks rewards students for their ability to use a range of structures and vocabulary and for accuracy in their application of grammar, as well as their pronunciation.

The final grid, which is worth 6 marks, assesses their ability to interact with the examiner by responding to what they have heard, initiating communication and eliciting points of view from the examiner.

## Task 2

### 9. What is assessed in Task 2?

Task 2 assesses the student's independent research project.

### 10. What is the student required to do in Task 2?

Task 2 has two parts:

Part 1 – the presentation, the student introduces the topic they have researched and must mention two written sources they used as part of their research. The student should outline the authors' main ideas and give a personal response to what they have read. The student may refer to their *Independent research form (RP3)* during this part of the task. The presentation mustn't exceed two minutes.

Part 2 – the examiner broadens the discussion to a wider exploration of the student's presentation and research. The examiner uses the key findings and list of resources on the student's *RP3 form* to formulate questions and engage the student in discussion. The questions should enable the student to give examples and information to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the social context. They should also analyse aspects of the topic by developing and justifying arguments and forming conclusions.

Further guidance on the independent research project can be found in the specification.

### 11. How long should Task 2 last?

Task 2 lasts 10 to 11 minutes.

### 12. How is Task 2 assessed?

One mark grid is used to assess the presentation of part 1 of Task 2. It assesses the student's ability to summarise information from the written sources used for their independent research.

Three further grids are applied to part 2 of Task 2 to assess the students' knowledge and understanding of society and culture, their accuracy and range of language and their interaction. These grids are identical to those used in Task 1.

In both Task 1 and Task 2, students are expected to ask questions that elicit opinions as part of the natural discourse and to confirm that their own points of view have been understood. They are expected to take the lead in discussions.



### **13. What tips can teachers give their students?**

Teachers should encourage students to develop as natural a conversation as possible with the examiner. They should not prepare banks of answers to questions but practise skills which allow them to give relevant impromptu responses. Developing communication strategies, which allow students to rephrase what they wish to say even when they do not know the exact vocabulary, is another important skill. During the course of the discussion they should elicit the examiner's view on the subject matter by asking them their opinion about the issues being discussed. A thorough knowledge of the social and cultural context of the target language countries is another important feature, but students should be aware that, whilst accuracy is important, they are not expected to produce perfect, error-free speech in order to access the top bands in the assessment grids.