

Guide to the AS Speaking Assessment

Information and tips for teachers

1. What does the speaking assessment involve?

The speaking assessment at AS level involves two tasks, both with stimulus cards. Task 1 requires candidates to respond to two texts based on sub-themes from the content of Theme 1. Task 2 requires candidates to discuss one of the sub-themes from Theme 2.

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 candidates have to prepare for the assessment?

Candidates have a total of 15 minutes to prepare for both Task 1 and Task 2.

4. How should the preparation time be organised?

The preparation must be supervised by an invigilator and takes place immediately before the examination. Candidates are not 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 for both tasks. They take these notes into the examination and can refer to them during the assessment. They must hand them in to the examiner at the end of the exam together with the stimulus cards.

5. Do candidates have a choice about the sub-theme for the assessment?

For both tasks there is a set order of cards, which is prescribed by Pearson in a sequencing grid. Candidates do not have a choice about the sub-theme for Task 1. For Task 2 the invigilator will offer the candidate a choice of two sub-themes according to the sequencing grid, for example *You may choose music or media*. The candidate does not see the cards but chooses the topic and is then given the relevant card by the invigilator. Candidates may not change the card once it has been handed to them.

Task 1

6. What are the themes for Task 1?

Task 1 is based on the three sub-themes of Theme 1. These differ for each language.

7. What is the candidate required to do in Task 1?

Task 1 requires candidates to read two short texts based on one of the sub-themes. Question 1 requires the candidate to summarise the first text. Question 2 is a comprehension task on the first text. Question 3 requires the candidate to respond to information in either the second text or both texts. Question 4 will stimulate wider discussion of the social and cultural context of the sub-theme beyond the focus of the texts on the stimulus card.

8. 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. Once the set questions have been asked the examiner must broaden the discussion and ask follow-up questions on any other aspect or aspects of the sub-theme for the remainder of the task.

9. Will there be any advice about the follow-up questions issued by Pearson?

Optional generic questions will be provided by Pearson to support examiners with this part of the task. The follow-up questions need to allow the candidate to demonstrate understanding of the cultural and social context. The questions should encourage the candidate to express relevant ideas, information and opinions and provide a critical response to issues relating to the sub-theme being discussed as applicable to France, Germany or Spain, according to the language being assessed.

10. How long should Task 1 last?

Task 1 lasts approximately 7 to 9 minutes.

11. How is Task 1 assessed?

Task 1 is worth 42 marks. Four mark grids are used to assess the candidate's performance. Candidates are rewarded up to 12 marks for responding to written language in speech, up to 12 marks for their knowledge and understanding of society and culture, up to 12 marks for accuracy and range of language and, finally, up to 6 marks for interaction.

Task 2

12. What are the themes of Task 2?

Task 2 is based on the sub-themes of Theme 2 in the French, German or Spanish speaking world.

13. What is the candidate required to do in Task 2?

The candidate's card contains a statement relevant to one of the sub-themes from Theme 2 as a springboard for discussion and two points for the candidates to consider in their preparation time. The candidate can choose to agree or disagree with the statement during the discussion. There are then two parts to the task. In the first part of the task the candidate is asked two questions by the examiner which are based on the points for consideration on the candidate card. The examiner then develops the discussion by asking appropriate follow-up questions still focussing on the subject matter of the stimulus card. In the second half of the allocated time the examiner broadens the discussion by moving on to any other aspects of the same sub-theme.

14. How will the teacher/examiner know which questions to ask?

As with Task 1, the two compulsory questions are on the Examiner card and optional generic questions will support the teacher in the follow-up discussion in part 1 and part 2 of the task. The nature of the questions asked must allow the candidate to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the cultural and social context, and to give critical responses to issues.

15. How long should Task 2 last?

Task 2 lasts 5 to 6 minutes.



16. How is Task 2 assessed?

3 mark grids are applied to the assessment of Task 2 and are worth 30 marks in total. Candidates are rewarded up to 12 marks for their knowledge and understanding of society and culture, up to 12 marks for accuracy and range of language and, finally, up to 6 marks for interaction.

17. 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 for 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 marking grid.