

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2009

IGCSE

IGCSE English as a Second Language (4357)
Paper 03 - Speaking (optional endorsement)

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General Comments

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 or disc and assessed by an examiner.

In part 1, the candidate is asked a set of questions on a familiar topic. This part of the exam lasts about 3-5 minutes. In this session, the topics were school holidays, famous people, seasons of the year, and food.

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 they are going to say. In this session, the topics were visiting your country, transport in your town or country, the clothes you like to wear, and sport in people's lives.

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

Generally, the candidates responded well to the topics in this session. No one topic seemed to present any particular difficulty for candidates. The paper is designed to become increasingly difficult and this proved to be so for less able candidates who struggled the most with Part 3. Candidates seemed well prepared for the test and knew what to expect.

The performance of the interlocutors is improving with each series. However, there are still problems which need to be highlighted.

Interlocutors

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. When they deviated from the script it made the task of the examiner more difficult

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. There were also instances where interlocutors asked all the questions on the cards of candidates who were clearly struggling. Interlocutors should exercise their

judgement in such situations, only ask the first two groups of questions on the part 3 cards, and then bring the test to an end.

Further observations concerning interlocutors

- 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.
- Some interlocutors invented their own questions and/or commented on candidates answers. In such instances, this was to the detriment of the candidate.
- Some interlocutors used a limited number of frames or tended to ask male candidates questions about sports and female candidates questions about clothes. Interlocutors should use all the frames provided.
- Some interlocutors used words of encouragement such as 'that's good' and 'that's very interesting'. These should be avoided as they may mislead the candidates about their performance.
- 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.
- 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.
- Interlocutors needed to check whether a suitable recording of the candidate had been obtained before dispatching the tape for assessment. On occasion, blank discs or partial recordings were sent for assessment. Some recordings both on tape and disc were barely audible. This made the examiners' job very difficult.
- Some interlocutors marked the candidates' performances. This is not the interlocutors' role.
- Some centres did not enclose cover sheets for the candidates. This is part of the interlocutor's role.
- Some interlocutors allowed tests to go on beyond 12 minutes. It is requested that this 12 minute limit be adhered to.
- Some interlocutors spoke very slowly. They should avoid this and speak at a normal pace.

Recordings

Some of the recordings were of poor quality and it was hard for the assessor to hear what candidates were saying. 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. 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. If a candidate is speaking quietly, the interlocutor should ask the candidate to speak up.

The room selected for the examination was not always a quiet one, and many distracting noises can be heard on the tapes. Some 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.

Statistics

IGCSE English as a Second Language

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Lowest mark for award of subject grade (Paper 01 and 02 only)	88	78	68	59	52	45	39	33
Lowest mark for award of grade for Paper 03, Speaking (optional)	19	17	14	12	10	8	6	4

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