

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English as a Second Language (4ES0)
Paper 3: Speaking

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GCSE in English as a Second Language
Paper 3: Speaking
Examiner Report

Description

This speaking examination is in three parts and lasts about 12 minutes. Each candidate is interviewed individually by an Examiner. All of the Examiner's questions are scripted. The speaking examination is recorded on a memory stick or disc and assessed by an examiner.

The Examiner may only select the topics for candidates once they are in the examination room.

In Part 1, the candidate is asked a set of questions on a familiar topic. This part of the examination lasts about 3 minutes. In this session, the topics were:

- Music
- Using the internet
- Friends
- Films

In Part 2, the candidate is given a task card and speaks at length (about 2 minutes) about 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 s/he is going to say. In this session, the topics were:

- Staying healthy
- Transport in the candidate's country
- The roles of famous people and celebrities in people's lives
- Shopping in the candidate's local area

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

Generally, candidates had been very well prepared for the test and knew what to expect. However, the test is devised to become increasingly difficult and this proved to be so for less able candidates who struggled the most with Part 3.

All candidates should be able to perform adequately in Part 1; Part 3 should be more challenging for C/D candidates; and Parts 2 and 3 should be challenging for F/G candidates.

Assessment Principles

The test is assessed positively out of 20 using the grid printed in the specification:

- Communicative ability and content 5 marks
- Pronunciation and fluency 5 marks
- Lexical accuracy and range 5 marks
- Grammatical accuracy and range 5 marks

Candidates' responses

Generally, the candidates performed well on this paper. They responded well to the structure of the test and seemed engaged by the content. The topics were ones which were generally familiar to them and they could call on their life experience to answer the questions.

Topics which were particularly well received by candidates, including the less able ones, were friends (Part 1) and transport (Parts 2 and 3).

Of the four topics used in Parts 2 and 3, candidates, especially the less able ones, seemed to find the one on celebrities more difficult than the others. The question 'Do celebrities do more harm than good?' was challenging for a noticeable number of candidates.

Part One

The aim of Part One is to ask candidates about familiar topics and most were able to answer questions with ease. However, there were candidates who were monosyllabic and some Examiners did not ask the follow-up questions to help them extend their answers. These follow-up questions are an important feature of the paper and should be exploited whenever a candidate is less forthcoming.

The purpose of the questions is to encourage the candidate to generate sufficient language on which to assess their ability based on the four criteria mentioned above. In consequence, the Examiner needs to respond to how responsive the candidate is and help them to reply fully to all questions.

Examiners should also spend three minutes on this section. It should be noted that the Examiner's introductory remarks and the candidate's utterances at the very beginning of the test should not be included in the timing of this section. If the candidate answers all of the questions on one of the topics within the three minutes, a second topic should be selected until the time has elapsed.

This is the least demanding part of the examination and most candidates handled it well. In a small minority of instances candidates did not understand one or more questions.

Part Two

The aim of this section is to provide the candidate with an opportunity to speak at length on a topic for which they have been given 1 minute's preparation time. They are also required to answer a specific question.

The best candidates were able to expand on the topic in detail, giving examples and explanations to support their ideas and opinions. Their performance was also well organised and logical indicating that they had used the preparation time effectively to organise their thoughts.

The task card contains prompts to guide the candidate. These are ideas which the candidate may or may not choose to use in their response. Less able candidates tended to use these prompts as a list of items to comment on.

Part Three

The aim of this part is to establish the upper reaches of the candidate's linguistic ability and it becomes increasingly difficult. There are also follow-up questions to allow the candidate every opportunity to show the extent of their ability. Many candidates had been well-prepared and quite naturally gave their opinion and then provided more information by way of support.

Less able candidates struggled with this part of the examination. Some misunderstood questions or asked for help in interpreting certain questions.

Examiners

The Examiners play an important role in enabling the candidates to show their linguistic ability and although their performance is improving with each series, there are still problems which need to be highlighted.

Although most of the Examiners conducted the examination appropriately, there were others who did not follow the instructions contained in 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. It should be noted that all of the wording and questions were provided either in the instructions or on the frame cards, yet some Examiners did not keep to the questions both in Part 1 and in Part 3.

Those Examiners who did not follow instructions did not appear to grasp the thinking behind the structure and purpose of each section of the test. Furthermore, when they deviated from the script it made the task of the assessor more difficult.

It is also 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. Some even asked each candidate all the questions on all the cards.

In Part 3, several Examiners 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 Examiners 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 Examiners did not ask an adequate number of questions in Part 3; this also prevented candidates from displaying the full range of their language abilities. Some Examiners asked only the first three questions on the card. This made assessment of more able candidates particularly difficult.

Others asked only the last three questions on the card regardless of the level of the candidate. This made assessment of less able candidates particularly difficult.

Other observations concerning Examiners:

1. Some Examiners needed to prepare more for the examination and have a clear idea of how the exam was organised and what the questions were before they started. In some instances, there were long pauses during the examination as Examiners tried to work out what the next section entailed. This situation must be avoided as it is potentially unsettling for candidates.
2. There were instances where the Examiner turned off the recording equipment during the test. This must not happen. The equipment must continue to record throughout the entire test, even during the preparation time for Part 2.
3. Candidates are to be recorded once only. The only exception to this requirement is when the recording is subsequently found to be faulty or of poor quality. Where candidates are recorded a second time, the Examiner must select different frames from the ones used in the first recording. A letter explaining the reasons why a second recording needed to be made must also be sent to the examination board.
4. At the start of the examination the Examiner (not the candidate) must repeat the candidate's name and number for clarity.
5. The Examiner must ensure that the correct name and number are stated for each candidate.
6. Some Examiners invented their own questions and/or commented on candidates answers. In such instances, this was to the detriment of the candidate. Examiners are required to adhere strictly to the questions on the card, in the order in which they appear.
7. Some Examiners used a limited number of frames. Please note that they are requested to use all the frames provided.
8. Some Examiners 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.
9. Some Examiners 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, Examiners provided vocabulary or even ideas when candidates faltered, not allowing time for candidates to overcome any difficulty independently.

10. Some Examiners gave more than a minute's preparation time. For reasons of fairness, all candidates should be given the same amount of preparation time.
11. Some Examiners used timers during the test. Although this is to be encouraged particularly in Part 2, there were instances where a beeper was used to cut the candidate off in mid-sentence. Examiners should not interrupt candidates in this way as it can be off-putting. It is recommended that once 2 minutes has elapsed, Examiners should bring the section to an end at an appropriate point, for example, at the end of a sentence.
12. Examiners needed to listen to what the candidates were saying to avoid irrelevant or repetitive questions from being asked. Furthermore, there were instances in Part 2, where the Examiner was heard writing or rustling papers as the candidate was speaking. This is clearly off-putting. Examiners are asked to pay full attention to the candidate during all parts of the examination.
13. Examiners needed to check whether a suitable recording of the candidate had been obtained before dispatching the disc/memory stick for assessment. There were several occasions this year of blank discs, partial recordings or almost inaudible recordings being sent for assessment.
14. Some Examiners did not include candidate cover sheets with the recordings. Examiners are reminded that each recording must be accompanied with one of these.

Candidates

If a candidate is speaking quietly, the Examiner should ask her/him to speak up.

Length of the test

Examiners are reminded that the test should last about 12 minutes. It would appear that Examiners are spending less time on Part 1. This section should last about 3 minutes (please note - this timing does not include the introductory remarks of the Examiner and candidate). Examiners are requested to use additional frames if necessary in order to extend the length of this part of the test. Furthermore, they are reminded that Part 3 should last in the region of 5 minutes.

Administrative matters

Examiners are reminded to use the latest student cover sheet. They should complete one for each student and include the following:

- Centre Name
- Centre Number
- Candidate Name
- Date of test

- Name of interlocutor
- Details of the recording
- Frames used in the test

Examiners are not required to mark the candidate's performance.

This year, several discs arrived which had been broken or snapped in transit. It is requested that care be taken when wrapping these items prior to dispatch.

Several centres were received late this year. Centres are reminded that the Paper 3 (Speaking) examination must be conducted up to and including the date of the written examinations (Paper 1 and 2) and must be dispatched within 48 hours of completion of examining.

Equipment

Some of the recordings were of poor quality and it was very difficult if not impossible 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 Examiner 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.

Examiners 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.

The Room

The room selected for the examination was not always a quiet one, and many distracting noises can be heard on the tapes such as traffic and people moving about outside. On occasion a room was selected which had such poor acoustics that it affected the quality of the recordings.

It is requested that a quiet room with good acoustics be used for the examination. 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.

Mobile Phones

Examiners should remind all candidates to switch off their mobile phones before entering the exam room. It is also requested that Examiners do the same.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>