



Examiner's Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2023

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In English as a Second Language (4ES1)
Paper E

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General comments

Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel as their International GCSE English as a Second Language provider. We very much hope that both our candidates and centres are delighted with their results.

The November 2023 series was very successful. The 4ES1 E paper performed well and was very similar in performance to previous series. There were no errors in the paper, no erratum notices and there were no enquiries from centres following the examination.

Centres are once again congratulated on preparing their candidates so well. As always, the responses were a pleasure to listen to and mark.

Overview

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 on the task card. Candidates have 1 minute preparation time using a prompt card that contains bullet points to help candidates 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 these 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.

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.

Assessment Principles

The total number of marks available for the Speaking examination is 40 marks in this specification, with 10 marks available for each of the following areas:

- communicative ability and content
- pronunciation and fluency
- lexical range and accuracy
- grammatical range and accuracy

Please see pages 24-25 of the specification for the assessment criteria for this unit.

Remember that this exam is externally assessed by Pearson Edexcel. All Speaking examinations must therefore be recorded and the audio files then uploaded to the Learner Work Transfer (LWT) portal. Centres should be commended for working so well with this system for submitting candidates' work.

For the November examination series, the speaking examinations may be completed from the beginning of October until the beginning of November. For the June examination series, the speaking examinations may be completed from mid-April up to, and including, the date of the last written examination in June.

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. As has been the case in previous series, 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: Favourite sport

This topic appeared to work well, with the vast majority of candidates able to specify a sport they enjoy, and the questions proved to be accessible for candidates. Popular choices of sport were football, basketball and tennis. Many candidates said that they watched their favourite sport on television and some described how they went to stadiums or other venues to watch their favourite sport in person. Some candidates effectively described the atmosphere at the venue.

Many talked about watching their favourite sport with their friends and family, and some talked about watching sport at school with their peers. The vast majority of candidates were also able to talk about a sport they do not enjoy watching, with some providing a few different sports and giving reasons for each.

In the most part, the follow up prompts were used appropriately to encourage candidates to elaborate on their answers. However, as with the other cards and as seen in previous series, some interlocutors read the follow up prompts as a matter of course, without listening to what candidates had said.

Card 2: The people you live with

This was an accessible topic with all candidates able to say who they live with. Many candidates then described the people they live with, such as their appearance and what they do (for work, for example). This was a good opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their productive skills. Some candidates did this without being prompted whilst some could have benefitted by the interlocutor using the follow up prompt 'Tell me about them'.

On the whole, candidates were able to explain what they like to do with the people they live with, both in the home and outside of the home. They were also able to identify places they like to visit with the people they live with. Responses included visiting local parks, going to local attractions and going on holiday to particular destinations.

Some candidates struggled with the last question: 'Is there anything you do not like to do with the people you live with?' It is worth reminding candidates that the speaking test is an opportunity for them to demonstrate their productive skills and they should be encouraged to show the range of vocabulary and structures of language that they can use, even if it means embellishing some of the points they make. There was, nonetheless, a range of points made by candidates in response to this question. Many talked about visiting particular relatives, going shopping or having to complete housework together.

Card 3: Favourite restaurant

This task card proved to be accessible to candidates, in a similar manner to the other tasks in Part 1. All candidates were able to specify one restaurant they like, either a local restaurant, a chain restaurant or even a fast-food restaurant. It was interesting to hear the range of dishes candidates enjoy eating in response to the second question. Some candidates were able to talk in detail about a number of dishes they enjoy eating and why.

Generally, candidates were able to talk about who they like to go to their favourite restaurant with, with the vast majority saying they go with family or friends.

The last question, 'Are there any other restaurants you like to go to?', also proved to work well, although a few candidates simply said 'no'. Nevertheless, some candidates were able to talk about a number of different restaurants they like to go to and then gave detailed reasons.

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 that 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.

As has been the case in previous series, 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 as a starting point as a step 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 having good neighbours

Candidates were often able to give detailed talks on this topic, giving a wide range of reasons as to why it is important to have good neighbours. The majority of candidates spoke about the importance of having good neighbours for social reasons, security (such as neighbourhood watch schemes or similar) and for help when needed.

The bullet points on the prompt card were used by many candidates to structure their talks. Some went through the bullet points methodically, expanding on each idea. The more successful candidates, who were awarded the higher marks, tended to talk more holistically about the importance of having good neighbours but nevertheless used the bullet points as prompts throughout.

Less successful candidates used the ideas on the card to help them but without necessarily linking the ideas more generally to the importance of having good neighbours. For example, some candidates stated 'friends', and then talked about their neighbours who are their friends, without linking this back to the topic specifically.

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

Card 2: The benefits of having pets

On the whole, candidates had lots to say on the topic of the benefits of having pets. Many candidates talked about how children can learn to look after others by looking after a pet, how pets are good for exercise (such as having to take a dog for a walk) and how they can keep you company.

There were a number of very detailed talks on this topic, with candidates evidently using their own experience of having pets or thinking about people they know who have pets. Many gave examples of relatives or friends who have pets and talked about the benefits to them specifically.

Even the less successful candidates were able to express some straightforward ideas about the benefits of having pets, despite some candidates perhaps running out of ideas about what to say. Nevertheless, candidates tended to have sufficient ideas to convey their understanding, even if some just focused on the benefits to physical health.

A few candidates went off topic slightly, talking about the disadvantages of having pets, but in such cases the majority of candidates managed to then move their talk back to the benefits. For example, some candidates spoke about the costs involved but were then able to highlight how the potential benefits outweighed the disadvantages.

Card 3: The importance of reading books

This topic proved to work well, with candidates able to draw on their own experiences of reading either in school or in their own time.

Many candidates were able to talk about the enjoyment from reading books, with a number of candidates giving specific examples of books they have read and why they enjoyed them. Other points made by candidates included the need to read books for their studies, both fiction and non-fiction, and how books can help people to learn about other cultures.

As with the other tasks, the more successful candidates tended to make the most of the preparation time, making notes about ideas they could speak about in their talk.

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 automatically with the initial question.

As has been the case in previous series, 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 having good neighbours

The vast majority of candidates were able to respond to the questions based on familiar contexts without any difficulty at all and often without any need for further prompts from the interlocutor.

There were interesting responses to the question about the qualities of a good neighbour, with many candidates reflecting on their current neighbours (how they are good neighbours or how they could be better neighbours). There were also many interesting responses to the question about who candidates would choose to have as a neighbour, with a range of responses including famous people, friends and family members.

Many candidates were able to respond to the final three questions in a successful manner. In particular, there were some thoughtful responses to the question about what candidates would do if they had a problem with their neighbour, with many saying that they would take the direct approach and talk calmly to their neighbour. Many reflected on noise or parking issues that their parents/carers have had to deal with previously and how these issues were resolved.

Card 2: The benefits of having pets

All candidates tended to have plenty of ideas in relation to the first three questions for this card. Candidates were able to describe the pets they or their family have, as well as the pets their friends have. There were a range of responses to the third question, 'What pet would you like to have?', with ideas including chinchillas, geckos and stick insects.

When responding to the second triad of questions, many candidates gave an interesting response to the question about the age from which people should have a pet, with some arguing that looking after a pet from a young age helps children to be more responsible whilst others said that young children did not have the necessary skills to look after a pet.

The questions on more unfamiliar contexts enabled candidates to express abstract ideas, with many giving insightful answers to the questions about whether pets should ever be given as a gift and whether it is cruel to keep pets.

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 otherwise 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.

Card 3: The importance of reading books

In part 3, the questions for this topic appeared to be accessible with the vast majority of candidates able to offer at least one idea in response to each question, even the questions on more abstract ideas.

It was interesting to hear the range of answers given regarding why it is important for younger children to be read to, including developing their imagination and also building relationships with others, such as parents, carers, teachers and siblings. There were a number of thoughtful responses to the question about how people can be encouraged to read more, including accessibility, cost and the need for books to be diverse in their representation.

Even the less successful candidates were able to respond to the full range of questions in this part and proved knowledgeable on this topic, showing some confidence, despite perhaps not having the accuracy of expression.

There were a number of particularly thoughtful responses to the final three questions on this card. Some candidates argued that a book's front cover is important, particularly in engaging young children. In response to the final question about whether technology replaces the need to have libraries, some candidates reflected on the enjoyment of going to a library, being able to engage with words on a page and being able to easily have a look at a selection of books before making a decision about the book you would like to read.

However, interlocutors should be reminded of the need to use the follow up prompts when candidates run out of ideas as a way of encouraging them to elaborate on their responses.

Interlocutors

Interlocutors play an important role in enabling the candidates to show their linguistic skills. The majority of interlocutors conducted the examinations 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 and thereby deprived them of an opportunity to extend their answers. Others asked particularly obscure questions that 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, 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. If candidates ask for a question to be repeated, just repeat the question and do not 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.

9. 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. Please ensure candidates have sufficient thinking time before repeating a question.
10. 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 or suggest any vocabulary.
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. Interlocutors should check whether a suitable recording of the candidate has been obtained before uploading the audio file to LWT for assessment. On occasion, incomplete or poorly recorded audio files were uploaded for assessment.
14. 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. These should be uploaded, alongside the audio files, to the LWT portal.

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. Interlocutors should also check where the microphone is placed.

Candidates should 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 opportunity for them to demonstrate the skills expected in the higher levels.

Administrative matters

1. Please remember to use the current cover sheet for this 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 published on the Pearson website.
4. Please also remember to upload the attendance register to the LWT portal. 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 for all candidates. It is recommended that the equipment, recording quality and 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.

