

Test Center Booklet

PTE General

Speaking Test Guide

Please read this booklet thoroughly before commencing any speaking tests as it contains very important information

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Version 3

1. Introduction

The Pearson Test of English General speaking test consists of a timed interaction between a test taker and an interlocutor.

The interaction should ideally be recorded in MP3 format, and returned to Pearson via Secure File Transfer (SFT). For access to this system, please consult the "Pearson secure file transfer user guide" at www.pearsonpte.com/pte-general. Alternatively, it can be recorded on a CD/USB, which is sent to Pearson at the end of the testing session.

Please return all oral exam material to the following address:

Pearson Education Ltd
Lowton House
Lowton Way
Hellaby Business Park
Rotherham
UK
S66 8SS

The purpose of this guide is to familiarise you with the format of the oral exam and to describe the role of the interlocutor (or interviewer). Additional information on the administration of PTE General can be found in the Test Centre Handbook available on our website: www.pearsonpte.com/pte-general.

2. The format of the test

At levels A1 and 1 the test has three sections. At levels 2-5 it has four sections:

- **Section 10:** Sustained monologue
The test taker speaks about matters of personal information and interest to the interlocutor.
- **Section 11:** Discussion (does not apply to levels A1 and 1)
The test taker engages in a discussion with the interlocutor on a given topic.
- **Section 12:** Describe picture
The test taker has to respond to a visual stimulus.
- **Section 13:** Role play
The test taker conducts a conversation with the interlocutor in which the test taker and interlocutor are given specific roles and a specific situation.

The time limit for each section is given in the speaking test paper. The total time limit depends on the level, as follows:

Level	Duration
A1	5 minutes
1	5 minutes
2	7 minutes
3	7 minutes
4	8 minutes
5	8 minutes

3. The role of the interlocutor

The principal function of the interlocutor is to ensure that the test takers have the opportunity to perform the various communicative tasks required by the test to the best of their ability and without undue stress, so that the assessor has a representative sample of their production on which to base a judgment. This is an important responsibility. It entails:

- managing the interaction according to the instructions set out in the speaking test paper and according to certain general principles outlined here,
- giving the test takers adequate opportunities to speak and
- keeping to the time limits.

The interlocutor must also ensure that the interaction is recorded properly.

This guide will cover the interlocutor's responsibilities in the order in which they arise.

Be prepared

Read through the test paper before you start. Note that there are two alternative sections 12 and 13, A and B. Students with odd test taker numbers must do 12A and 13A, students with even test taker numbers must do 12B and 13B.

Make sure you know what the time limits are for the sections of the test.

Remind yourself of the marking criteria for each section of the test. In Section 10, for example, the external assessor has to evaluate the test taker's ability to deliver a sustained monologue, so it is important that you give him or her the opportunity to do this. Decide which prompt you will use in Section 10.

Rehearse mentally what you will say in the role play.

General dos and don'ts

DO let the test taker do the talking as much as possible. The less you intervene the more test taker talking time there will be.

DO maintain a relaxed posture so that test taker does not feel rushed.

DO acknowledge the test taker's contributions by nods and affirmative gestures (back-channeling), but avoid giving reinforcing messages that the test taker might interpret as evaluating their performance: "Right", "OK" and "Thank you" are permissible; not "good!" or "excellent!"

DO, when you ask a question, give the test taker time to reply.

DON'T correct the test taker's mistakes (you are not teaching!)

DON'T suggest answers, provide vocabulary or expand on the test taker's responses. The more test taker talking time the better.

DON'T interrupt. However there are three exceptions to this general rule:

- In the discussion (Section 11), where you may need to interrupt in order to make your point and to move the discussion on;
- In the role play if the situation requires it;
- If at any time the test taker deviates from the topic (in some cases this may be the test taker's way of introducing a favorite topic or a prepared speech).

What to do if the test taker does not understand a prompt

If the test taker asks for repetition in an appropriate way (“Pardon?”, “Could you repeat that, please.”), repeat once verbatim. Otherwise, or if they still don’t understand, reformulate **once** in a manner appropriate for the next lowest level (e.g. in a B1 test reformulate the prompt in a way suitable for an A2 test taker). If they still do not understand move straight on to the next prompt or (if already on the last prompt in a section) the next section.

Keep to the time limits

It is important to provide the external assessor with a sufficient sample of the test taker’s production to enable him or her to make a judgment. If necessary continue to prompt the test taker until the time is up. On the other hand try not to overrun. If you take too much time, then your tests will get behind schedule and there will be pressure to rush later test takers.

Points relating to the sections of the test

Section 10: Sustained monologue

Greet the test taker in a friendly manner. Introduce yourself and ask the test taker to state his or her name.

After you have delivered the main prompt the test taker should speak for:

- 15 - 20 seconds at Level A1
- 20 – 30 seconds at Level 1
- 40 – 50 seconds at Level 2
- 50 – 60 seconds at Level 3
- 60 - 90 seconds at Levels 4 and 5

Let the test taker speak for all of this time. Don’t interrupt. If they pause, give time to resume (prompt with “Is there anything you would like to add?”) Only use follow up prompts if they have finished speaking and the time allocated for this part of the test has not expired. Even when delivering the follow-up prompts, give the test taker the opportunity to speak for an extended turn if they are able to.

Section 11: Discussion

The interaction in this section should resemble a real exchange of views rather than a sequence of questions and answers. After the first question (“What do you think?”), the objective is not to elicit the test taker’s opinions but to argue against them, and to give the test taker the opportunity to defend his or her position. Always make statements. Avoid asking questions. Keep up your side as you would in a real discussion by challenging the points put forward by the test taker and by expressing your opinion politely but assertively.

If the test taker hedges at the beginning (“it depends...”), adopt one position strongly yourself.

Allow the discussion to take its course. Use the prompts selectively to sustain the discussion if a particular line of argument peters out.

If the test taker goes on too long, or wanders off the topic, interrupt politely. You should aim to produce at least three exchanges during the time given.

Section 12: Describe picture

The aim of this section is to assess the ability of the test taker to speak continuously in response to a visual stimulus. At levels A1 and 1 use the prescribed follow-up prompt or prompts to sustain the interaction.

At levels 2 to 3 the interlocutor script for this section always contains two prompts: one asking the test taker to respond to the picture in a relatively straightforward way (e.g. to describe what they see), and the other to expand on their reaction in some way (e.g. to express and justify a preference, or at levels 4 and 5 to consider the appropriateness of the picture for some imagined purpose). The test taker should be allowed up to half of the allotted time to respond to the first prompt before you move on to the second.

Section 13: Role play

This consists of a two-way conversation in a given situation. The aim is to assess the test taker's ability to perform language functions that may be required in situations other than a speaking test.

After reading the instructions and saying "I start/You start", go into role. There is no need to overact, but make a distinct shift of tone of voice and register (if appropriate) to signal that you are no longer the examiner. At the end of the role play switch back to examiner mode, thank the test taker and signal the end of the test.

At levels A1 and 1 the test taker has simple instructions for carrying out a sequence of conversational moves. You should keep to the script as far as possible and guide the test taker if necessary.

At levels 2 to 5 the test taker is given an objective to pursue and a degree of freedom as to how to achieve it. Use the suggested prompt selectively to sustain the interaction by co-operating or challenging the test taker, as appropriate.

At the end of the interaction

- Thank the test taker and tell them that this is the end of the test.
- Stop the CD/mp3 recording.
- After the last test has been recorded, make sure to record "That was the last test".

Contact us

For all administration enquiries relating to the conduct of PTE General please contact:

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For guidance, timetables and forms visit our pages for test centers at www.pearsonpte.com/pte-general.