Assessing Speaking Performance – Level B2

Examiners and speaking assessment in the B2 First exam

Speaking tests are conducted by trained examiners. The quality assurance of Speaking Examiners (SEs) is managed by Team Leaders (TLs) who are in turn responsible to a Professional Support Leader (PSL), who is the professional representative of Cambridge English Language Assessment for the Speaking tests in a given country or region.

All of the examiners (PSLs, TLs and SEs) must prove each year, through a certification process, that they are competent to assess. In addition, they are regularly monitored during live testing sessions.

Although candidates take the test in pairs or groups of three, throughout the test they are assessed on their individual performance and not in relation to each other. They are awarded marks by two examiners: an *assessor* and an *interlocutor*.

The *interlocutor* awards a mark for the performance as a whole, using the Global Achievement scale.

The *assessor* awards marks for four individual criteria:

- Grammar and Vocabulary
- Discourse Management
- Pronunciation
- Interactive Communication.

How can I use the Assessment Scales?

Examiners use the B2 Level Assessment Scales to decide which marks to give candidates taking the B2 First Speaking test. Using the scales yourself during classroom speaking practice tasks will help you to:

- analyse your students' strengths and weaknesses when they do B2 First Speaking tasks

- form an impression of how ready your students are to take the Speaking test.

The Assessment Scales

The B2 First Assessment Scales are divided into six bands from 0 to 5, with 0 being the lowest and 5 the highest. Descriptors for each criterion are provided for bands 1, 3 and 5 and indicate what a candidate is expected to demonstrate at each band. B2 First is at Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and the descriptors for band 3 and above generally indicate performance of at least B2 level.

B2	Grammar and Vocabulary	Discourse Management	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
5	• Shows a good degree of control of a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms. • Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on a wide range of familiar topics.	• Produces extended stretches of language with very little hesitation. • Contributions are relevant and there is a clear organisation of ideas. • Uses a range of cohesive devices and discourse markers.	• Is intelligible. • Intonation is appropriate. • Sentence and word stress is accurately placed. • Individual sounds are articulated clearly.	• Initiates and responds appropriately, linking contributions to those of other speakers. • Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome.
4	*Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.*			
3	• Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms, and attempts some complex grammatical forms. • Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on a range of familiar topics.	• Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation. • Contributions are relevant and there is very little repetition. • Uses a range of cohesive devices.	• Is intelligible. • Intonation is generally appropriate. • Sentence and word stress is generally accurately placed. • Individual sounds are generally articulated clearly.	• Initiates and responds appropriately. • Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support.
2	*Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.*			
1	• Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. • Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about everyday situations.	• Produces responses which are extended beyond short phrases, despite hesitation. • Contributions are mostly relevant, despite some repetition. • Uses basic cohesive devices.	• Is mostly intelligible, and has some control of phonological features at both utterance and word levels.	• Initiates and responds appropriately. • Keeps the interaction going with very little prompting and support.
0	*Performance below Band 1.*			

As you look through the scales, it may help to highlight words which make one band different from another.

For example, under Grammar and Vocabulary, half of the first descriptor at Band 3 is the same as at Band 1 – *Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms.* Band 3, however, has an additional element: *… and attempts some complex grammatical forms.* At Band 5, the new elements are: *a* range *of simple grammatical forms*, and control *of … some complex grammatical forms.*

Don't worry if a lot of the terms used in the scales are new to you – in the Handbook for Teachers you will find a Glossary of Terms for Speaking.

Although all four analytical criteria are assessed across the whole test, Part 2 (the long turn) is the main opportunity for examiners to assess Discourse Management, and Part 3 tends to be when they focus most on Interactive Communication.

How can I use the Assessment Scales with students?

You could:

1. Refer to the scales as you observe students carrying out a B2 First speaking task.
2. Note down examples of performance in terms of the listed criteria.
3. Give students feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.
4. Think about whether your students are ready for the exam and how they could improve.

However, it can be difficult for a teacher to manage a speaking practice task (i.e. be the interlocutor), make notes of what the students say and refer to the Assessment Scales, all at the same time. The following activities are designed to help you get started.

On the Cambridge English TV YouTube channel there is a video recording of two candidates called Camilla and Johanna taking the B2 First Speaking test. Please note that this example is for the pre-January 2015 version of B2 First exam.

You can click on this link to watch the test:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIp8FVs8-f0

The four activities use this recording to practise using the Assessment Scales.

Activity 1
1. Make a copy of the blank **Grammar and Vocabulary** table on page 4. You will see that statements from the Assessment Scales have been turned into questions.
2. Watch the B2 First Speaking video part 1 (about 3½ minutes).
3. Note down examples of what Camilla does well and not so well for each of the questions in the Comments box on the assessment sheet.
4. Compare the notes you have made with a completed example on page 8.

Activity 2:
1. Make a copy of the blank **Discourse Management** table on page 5.
2. Watch the B2 First Speaking video part 2 (from about 3 mins 25 to 7 mins).
3. Note down examples of what Johanna does well and not so well for each of the questions in the Comments box on the assessment sheet.
4. Compare the notes you have made with a completed example on page 9.

Activity 3:
1. Make a copy of the blank **Pronunciation** table on page 6.
2. Watch the B2 First Speaking video (from about 10 mins 30 to the end).
3. Note down examples of what Camilla does well and not so well for each of the questions in the Comments box on the assessment sheet.
4. Compare the notes you have made with a completed example on page 10.

Activity 4:
1. Make a copy of the blank **Interactive Communication** table on page 7.
2. Watch the B2 First Speaking video (from about 7 mins to 10 mins 30).
3. Note down examples of what Johanna does well and not so well for each of the questions in the Comments box on the assessment sheet.
4. Compare the notes you have made with a completed example on page 11.

Remember:

- In a real B2 First Speaking test the marks awarded reflect a candidate's performance across the whole exam and not just in one part of it. As you become more familiar with the assessment criteria and gain more experience in analysing your students, you will find it easier to focus on all of the criteria during classroom practice tasks.

- Being able to refer to the Assessment Scales will help you to analyse your students' strengths and weaknesses and to estimate whether they are ready for the Speaking

test. However, it won't necessarily give you an accurate prediction of the marks that your students will achieve in a real test, as the candidate may be affected by other factors such as nervousness.

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English Qualifications

B2 First (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING
GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY

Name of student

Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with control?

Good	Not so good

Does the speaker use complex grammatical forms?

Good	Not so good

Does the speaker use a range of appropriate vocabulary? (everyday situations / familiar topics / wide range of familiar topics?)

Good	Not so good

Comments

| **B2 First (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING** |
| **DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT** |

Name of student

Are the answers of an appropriate length for the task? Is there much hesitation?

Good	**Not so good**

Are the contributions relevant? Is there much repetition? Is it well organised?

Good	**Not so good**

Does the speaker use a range of cohesive devices? And discourse markers?

Good	**Not so good**

Comments

Cambridge

English Qualifications

B2 First (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING
PRONUNCIATION

Name of student

Are the answers clear? Can the speaker be generally understood?

Good	Not so good

Is the speaker's intonation appropriate?

Good	Not so good

Does the speaker use sentence stress correctly? Is word stress correct?

Good	Not so good

Are individual sounds clear? Are they correctly produced?

Good	Not so good

Comments

| **B2 First (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING** |
| **INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION** |

Name of student

Does the speaker start discussions? Does the speaker introduce new ideas?

Good	Not so good

Does the speaker react appropriately to what the interlocutor or other candidate says?

Good	Not so good

Does the speaker keep the interaction going? Does the speaker say more than the minimum? Does the speaker involve the other candidate?

Good	Not so good

Does the speaker try to move the interaction in an appropriate direction? ('develop the interaction and negotiate towards an outcome') Does the speaker need support?

Good	Not so good

Comments

B2 First (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING
GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY

Name of student CAMILLA Part 4 (cities)

Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with control?

Good	**Not so good**
• _I like relaxing_ • _London is too big_ • _actually, I've never been there_	• _it was so <u>much</u> people_ (there were so many people) • _it was a lot of noise_ (there was a lot of noise)

Does the speaker use complex grammatical forms?

Good	**Not so good**
• _I could live in a big city in Norway 'cos they are not that big_ • _when I went to bed at the hotel … I couldn't sleep_ • _I heard that it's a really beautiful city so I would like to see it_	• _it's not that big <u>to be</u> a capital_ (it's not that big for a capital) • _if you <u>have half an hour to</u> your nearest neighbours_ (if you're half an hour away from your nearest neighbours)

Does the speaker use a range of appropriate vocabulary? (everyday situations / familiar topics / wide range of familiar topics?)

Good	**Not so good**
• _a lot of pollution_ • _noise pollution_ • _nightlife_ • _one million inhabitants_ • _cosy and charming_	

Comments

Generally good grammatical control. Very few errors with simple forms, only with pronouns (something to work on). Attempts some complex grammatical forms, but perhaps could have been a little more ambitious. Demonstrates a range of appropriate vocabulary on the familiar topic of cities, though again could perhaps have been more ambitious.

N.B. Candidates are marked on the language that they 'use' and 'attempt to use' to convey their message, so they should be encouraged to be ambitious in their use of language. However, comprehension is important so mistakes shouldn't result in their being difficult to understand.

![Cambridge English Qualifications]

B2 First (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING
DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT

Name of student JOHANNA Part 2 (rivers)

Are the answers of an appropriate length for the task? Is there much hesitation?

Good	**Not so good**
speaks for the full minute	• some hesitation e.g. *I think er … people enjoy …* • speaks quite slowly

Are the contributions relevant? Is there much repetition? Is it well organised?

Good	**Not so good**
• well organised with little repetition • says something about both pictures • says what people are enjoying and why • says which place she would prefer	could make more explicit comparisons – e.g. *this waterfall is very popular with tourists whereas this other river is an ordinary place where local people might go*

Does the speaker use a range of cohesive devices? And discourse markers?

Good	**Not so good**
• (discourse marker) <u>*Well,*</u> *the first picture you see a big … er … waterfall* • (cohesive device / linking word) *it's amazing to be there <u>so</u> they are full of people* • (discourse marker) <u>*then, on the second picture*</u> *you see …* • (linking word and reference pronouns) *people enjoy the picture one <u>because it</u>'s new, it's tourist, <u>they</u>'ve never seen it before*	could use more sophisticated ways of connecting what she says – e.g. *on the other hand, whereas*

Comments

Speaks for the full minute so appropriate in length, though a little slow and hesitant at times. Relevant and well organised, though could compare the pictures in a more explicit way. Coherent and easy to follow, though could use more sophisticated connecting devices.

B2 First (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING

PRONUNCIATION

Name of student CAMILLA (all four parts of the test)

Are the answers clear? Can the speaker be generally understood?

Good	**Not so good**
Clear and easily understood at all times.	

Is the speaker's intonation appropriate?

Good	**Not so good**
Intonation is generally good and never gets in the way of the meaning.	(Part 1) *I'm playing football*
	(Part 2*) it's very cosy and you can relax and* ↗ ↗
	have a good time, there's not much people
	(Rising intonation at the end of each phrase comes from the speaker's first language – falling intonation would normally be used in a neutral statement like this.) ↗

Does the speaker use sentence stress correctly? Is word stress correct?

Good	**Not so good**
Sentence stress and word stress is nearly always correct.	Stress on the second syllable of *café* rather than on the first syllable as in standard English.

Are individual sounds clear? Are they correctly produced?

Good	**Not so good**
	(Part 1) *cold* pronounced /kɔ:lt/ as in *caught*
	(Part 2) *chefs* pronounced /tʃefs/ with the first consonant sounding like *cheap* rather than *sheep*
	(Part 3) *done; love; photo; coming* – the *o* sound in each of these words is pronounced /ɒ/ as in *on* rather than /ʌ/ as in *up.*

Comments
Pronunciation is clear and natural sounding all through the test. Certain individual sounds and intonation patterns are unusual, but they never cause misunderstanding.

B2 First (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING
INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Name of student JOHANNA (things that can help people to enjoy city life)

Does the speaker start discussions? Does the speaker introduce new ideas?

Good	**Not so good**
- *Where shall we start?* - *OK, it's a stadium* - *OK, then we have the dance* Johanna shares responsibility with her partner for introducing new ideas.	

Does the speaker react appropriately to what the interlocutor or other candidate says?

Good	**Not so good**
- *oh yes, of course* - *yeah, you love sports* - *me too so …* - *yes, sitting in the sun* - *actually, we went in Cambridge to the salsa classes*	

Does the speaker keep the interaction going? Does the speaker say more than the minimum? Does the speaker involve the other candidate?

Good	**Not so good**
- *Where shall we start?* - *Is it baseball maybe?* - *You don't have it in Norway?*	Johanna is very good at involving her partner but her own contributions tend to be quite short.

Does the speaker try to move the interaction in an appropriate direction? ('develop the interaction and negotiate towards an outcome') Does the speaker need support?

Good	**Not so good**
I think important is time with your dog alone and spend some time at the café with your friends This answers the second task question but only after her partner has asked her directly about it.	Most of what Johanna says is about what she likes rather than the more general question of what's important in a city. Her partner moves the discussion in that direction towards the end of this part.

Comments

Introduces new ideas, reacts naturally and appropriately to what partner says, involves partner in discussion. Contributions, while relevant, tend to be quite short. Mostly comments on what she likes, and only addresses more general questions in response to her partner's prompting.