B1 Preliminary
Assessing Speaking Performance

Examiners and speaking assessment in the B1 Preliminary 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 B1 Level Assessment Scales to decide which marks to give candidates taking the B1 Preliminary Speaking test. Using the scales yourself during classroom speaking practice tasks will help you to:

- analyse your students' strengths and weaknesses when they do B1 Preliminary Speaking tasks

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

The Assessment Scales

The B1 Preliminary 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.
B1 Preliminary is at Level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and the descriptors for band 3 and above generally indicate performance of at least B1 level.

B1	Grammar and Vocabulary	Discourse Management	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
5	• 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 familiar topics.	• Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation. • Contributions are relevant despite some 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.
4	*Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.*			
3	• Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. • Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about familiar topics.	• Produces responses which are extended beyond short phrases, despite hesitation. • Contributions are mostly relevant, but there may be 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.
2	*Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.*			
1	• Shows sufficient control of simple grammatical forms. • Uses a limited range of appropriate vocabulary to talk about familiar topics.	• Produces responses which are characterised by short phrases and frequent hesitation. • Repeats information or digresses from the topic.	• Is mostly intelligible, despite limited control of phonological features.	• Maintains simple exchanges, despite some difficulty. • Requires 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, the basic wording of the first half of the descriptor at Band 3 has the same focus as at Band 1; control of simple grammatical forms. However, at band 3 'a good degree of control' replaces 'sufficient control'– *Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms.* Band 5 has an additional element relating to the range of forms used: *… and attempts 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 3 (the long turn) is the main opportunity for examiners to assess Discourse Management in extended speech, and Part 2 and Part 4 allow a focus on a range of elements covered by 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 B1 Preliminary 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 Leticia and Manuel taking the B1 Preliminary Speaking test.

You can click on this link to watch the test:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE7saDZrYOw

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 B1 Preliminary Speaking test video parts 1 and 2 (the first five minutes).
3. Note down examples of what Leticia 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 B1 Preliminary Speaking test video part 3 (from about 5 minutes to about 7 mins 45).
3. Note down examples of what Manuel 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 B1 Preliminary Speaking test video parts 1 and 3 (to about 2 minutes 15 and from about 5 minutes to about 7 mins 45).
3. Note down examples of what Leticia 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 B1 Preliminary Speaking test video part 2 (from about 2 minutes 15 to about 5 mins).
3. Note down examples of what Manuel 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 B1 Preliminary Speaking test the marks awarded reflect a candidate's performance across the whole test and not just in one or two parts 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.

B1 Preliminary (LEVEL B1) SPEAKING GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY	
Name of student	

Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with control?

Good	Not so good

Does the speaker attempt to use complex grammatical forms?

Good	Not so good

Does the speaker use a range of appropriate vocabulary to talk about familiar topics?

Good	Not so good

Comments

B1 Preliminary (LEVEL B1) 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 of ideas?	
Good	**Not so good**

Does the speaker organise their contributions and use cohesive devices? Is there a range?	
Good	**Not so good**

Comments

B1 Preliminary (LEVEL B1) SPEAKING
PRONUNCIATION

Name of student

Are the answers clear? Can the speaker be generally understood?	
Good	**Not so good**

Is the speaker's intonation generally appropriate?	
Good	**Not so good**

Does the speaker use sentence stress generally correctly? Is word stress correct?	
Good	**Not so good**

Are individual sounds generally clear? Are they correctly produced?	
Good	**Not so good**

Comments

B1 Preliminary (LEVEL B1) 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

B1 Preliminary (LEVEL B1) SPEAKING
GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY

Name of student LETICIA (Parts 1 and 2)

Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with control?

Good	**Not so good**
I am at university (Part 1) *My degree is pharmacy* (Part 1) *I love sunny and warm weather* (Part 1) *…all the rest of the time he will be at work* (Part 2)	*I needs to go to sleep* (I need*) (Part1)* *I'm going to the swimming pool* (I go) (Part 1) *But maybe go out is a good idea too* (going out) (Part 1)

Does the speaker attempt to use complex grammatical forms?

Good	**Not so good**
In the evening, probably I needs to go to sleep because I am really tired (Part 1) *Your friend is very lucky to receive some money to spend on holidays, I think so* (Part 2)	*Especially he thought to pay in the airport for overweight* (especially if he has paid for overweight luggage at the airport) (Part 2) *He must take care all your looking for* (he must take care of his appearance) (Part 2*)*

Does the speaker use a range of appropriate vocabulary to talk about familiar topics?

Good	**Not so good**
Swimming pool (Part 1) *Nice beach* (Part 1) *Spend money on magazines* (Part 2)	*Bring some books* (take) (Part 2)

Comments

Leticia has generally adequate grammatical control with a range of simple forms. However, she has some problems with subject/verb and pronoun agreement. When she attempts more complex forms, she tends to lose control and her meaning can sometimes be lost. She uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about familiar topics.

B1 Preliminary (LEVEL B1) SPEAKING
DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT

Name of student MANUEL Part 3 (people at home)

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

Good	Not so good
Speaks for the full minute and with very little hesitation.	Tends to speak in short bursts with pauses between them.
Constructs extended contributions and complete sentences.	
• *We can see a girl in a chair with a beautiful picture in front of her and she reading a book and looking the forest and the sky because is a good day*	

Are the contributions relevant? Is there much repetition of ideas?

Good	Not so good
Relevant and developed with little repetition	
Describes the picture fully, talking about the room and the person in it	

Does the speaker organise their contributions and use cohesive devices? Is there a range?

Good	Not so good
Organises the contribution by talking about the room and the person in it.	Tends to use '*and*' as the main linker. He needs to try and vary his connectors more.
(Basic cohesive devices) He joins his ideas together at the end of his turn	
• *and…so I think that she was tired…*	
(Discourse marker and reference pronoun)	
• *This photograph, I think that it was taken…*	

Comments

Manuel speaks for the full minute so his long turn is appropriate in length, and with very little hesitation. He is relevant and clear, with minimal repetition and some development beyond simple description. His discourse in this part is coherent and easy to follow, though he could use more of a range of cohesive devices instead of relying almost exclusively on '*and*'.

B1 Preliminary (LEVEL B1) SPEAKING
PRONUNCIATION

Name of student LETICIA (Parts 1 and 3)

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

Good	**Not so good**
Mostly clear and easily understood.	Occasional difficulty for the listener
	• *The …?... (scene?) is like a big room, I think* (P3)
	• *I think there aren't a lot of ..?.. (light?) in their room* (P3)

Is the speaker's intonation appropriate?

Good	**Not so good**
Intonation is generally good and never gets in the way of the meaning.	

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

Good	**Not so good**
Sentence stress generally appropriate: • *but maybe go **out** is a good idea too.* Contrasting stress with '*go to sleep*' (P1) *uni**ver**sity* (P1) *Word stress generall appropriate* • ***phar**macy* (P1) • *com**pu**ter* (P3)	1

Are individual sounds clear? Are they correctly produced?

Good	**Not so good**
Most sounds are clear and correctly produced	• *pace* (piece) (Part3) • *pint* (paint) (Part 3) • *lie* (light) (Part 3) • *chile* (child) (Part 3)

Comments

Leticia's pronunciation is mostly intelligible in these parts, although there are times when it is not so easy to understand her. Her intonation patterns are generally appropriate, despite a rather flat delivery, and her word and sentence stress are generally accurately placed. Most individual sounds are articulated clearly, with a few exceptions (see above).

B1 Preliminary (LEVEL B1) SPEAKING	
INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION	
Name of student Manuel (Parts 2 and 4)	

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

Good	**Not so good**
• *I think that is a good idea to buy some magazines …* • *Or maybe buy some clothes because…* • *Or maybe cut her hair…* Manuel introduces most of the ideas for discussion in Part 2.	

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

Good	**Not so good**
In Part 2, he acknowledges his partner's suggestions before adding his own. • *Yeah …* • *Maybe …* At the end of Part 2, when his partner asks him to make a decision, his response is appropriate In Part 4 he reacts appropriately to his partner's questions about where he lives and who he lives with and to the interlocutor's prompt about the rooms in his house.	He tends to introduce new ideas in Part 2 rather than develop what his partner has said.

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**
He always elaborates on his ideas with a reason for his opinion in Part 2. He involves his partner with questions in Part 4. • *And what about you?* • *Where are you at university?* • *And you're studying a degree?* • *You live alone or with some friends?*	

• *Which colour is the walls of your house….of your room?*	

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**
Manuel picks up the prompt about haircut from the interlocutor's hand gesture in Part 2 and responds to his partner's negotiation of an outcome with a suggestion (*clothes?*). In Part 4 he asks questions to develop the interaction (see above).	

Comments

He responds and interacts appropriately and effectively throughout these parts and is able to develop the discussion topics with very little support. He is able to keep the discussion going in both parts without dominating the interaction. He introduces new ideas, reacts naturally and appropriately to what his partner says and involves his partner in the discussion. He is sensitive to turn-taking and invites his partner to comment by pausing or using eye contact.