



## Guidance Notes for Teachers of Candidates with Special Requirements: Cambridge Assessment English Speaking Tests

Please read through the following information about versions of Cambridge Assessment English Speaking Tests for candidates with special requirements and make sure your student:

- is familiar with the tasks and task instructions in these versions
- practises with any sample material available.

Further advice and support can be obtained through your local Centre Exams Manager, or by contacting the Helpdesk (<https://support.cambridgeenglish.org>).

## Special Requirements versions of Speaking Tests

### What happens?

There are four ways in which candidates may take Special Requirements versions of Speaking Tests:

- in single-candidate format (where the candidate takes the Speaking Test alone). This is available for *Key*, *Key for Schools*, *Preliminary*, *Preliminary for Schools*, *First*, *First for Schools*, *Advanced* and *Proficiency*
- with a partner who has the same, or similar, requirements
- with a partner who is acting as a 'dummy partner'
- with a partner who is also a candidate but who has no special requirements. (In this case both candidates use the same special requirements version of the Speaking Test.)

### What is a single-candidate format Speaking Test?

This is a specially-adapted version for a single candidate. There are two examiners, an assessor (who marks the Speaking Test) and the interlocutor (who speaks to the candidate), even though the candidate is taking the Speaking Test alone. The interlocutor will take the role of the second candidate for parts of the Speaking Test.

### What is a 'dummy partner'?

A 'dummy partner' is a stand-in candidate whose performance is not assessed. Centre Exams Managers are responsible for arranging and getting permission for a dummy candidate from Cambridge Assessment English.

### Who can be a 'dummy partner'?

In order to ensure the 'live' candidate is not disadvantaged, a 'dummy partner' should be:

- a speaker of English whose **age** and **level** are appropriate to the relevant examination
- someone who is familiar with the format of the relevant Speaking Test.

They might have already taken the Speaking test in the same session, but a candidate still waiting to take the test must not be used as a 'dummy partner'.

## Blind candidates

### What material is used with blind candidates?

Many Speaking Tests use pictures, photographs or other visual material as a stimulus for interaction. For blind candidates, a Braille version of the Speaking Test is produced. The candidate is asked to read brailled sentences and texts and these act as a stimulus for the various tasks.

Here are some examples of brailled sentences (called 'written prompts') for a *First* task titled: 'Happy at Work'.

Description 1	A female flight attendant on a plane is serving lunch to a passenger.
Description 2	A chef in a restaurant is surrounded by the dishes he has prepared.
Description 3	A man is repairing a washbasin in a bathroom.
Description 4	A male hairdresser is cutting somebody's hair.

Speaking Examiners are given adapted scripts (called 'interlocutor frames') to use with brailled material. They are asked to study this material before the exam. There are different scripts for candidates who are taking the exam alone, and with a partner.

Where material is provided for a candidate in Braille, it is supplied on separate sheets, clearly labelled 'Task 1' etc. A print version of the Braille prompts is also supplied for the examiner. If the partner of a blind candidate is sighted, s/he is given a print version of the Brailled material supplied to the blind candidate.

## Candidates with other visual difficulties

**What material is used with candidates who have other visual difficulties (e.g. partial sight)?**

Enlarged material is available for candidates with visual difficulties, as well as candidates who have a physical difficulty which makes it difficult for them to read smaller print or focus on pictures/photographs. Candidates with specific learning difficulties e.g. dyslexia, may also request enlarged material.

**What kind of enlarged material can be supplied?**

Candidates can choose either **enlarged visuals** or **enlarged written prompts, printed in an A3-sized booklet**:

- visuals (pictures and photographs) are enlarged to A3 size
- written prompts are enlarged to 18 point Arial font (bold).

Below is an example of enlarged written prompts:

### **DESCRIPTION 1**

**A female flight attendant on a plane is serving lunch to a passenger.**

### **DESCRIPTION 2**

**A chef in a restaurant is surrounded by the dishes he has prepared.**

### **DESCRIPTION 3**

**A man is repairing a washbasin in a bathroom.**

### **DESCRIPTION 4**

**A male hairdresser is cutting somebody's hair.**

NB If the candidate is taking the Speaking Test with a partner, both candidates use the same format i.e. either visual or written prompts).

## Candidates with Hearing Difficulties

Candidates with hearing difficulties may apply to take a Speaking Test with a 'dummy partner' or take the Speaking Test in single-candidate format (see above: 'What happens?')

If the hearing difficulty is not severe, (for example, the candidate can hear reasonably well using a hearing-aid), examiners may be asked to allow candidates extra time to absorb what they have heard and to give their responses. If the candidate relies partially (or completely) on lip-reading, they may need extra time to 'process' what is being said to them. In all cases, examiners will be sympathetic and patient.

Teachers of candidates with hearing difficulties should contact their local exam centre to discuss arrangements. It will be useful to let examiners know:

- the degree of hearing loss in either ear
- whether the candidate is able to lip-read in English or not.

Remember that candidates with very severe hearing difficulties may opt for exemption from the Speaking Test. The local exam centre will be able to supply further details.

### What material is used with candidates who are deaf or hard of hearing?

Candidates who are deaf or hard of hearing are usually tested using the standard visual material.

## Candidates with Speaking Difficulties

If a candidate has a speaking difficulty, there are various special arrangements which can be approved before the day of his/her Speaking Test.

If the speaking difficulty is not severe, or if time pressure or nervousness, for example, makes the difficulty worse, examiners may be asked to allow candidates extra time to speak. In all cases, examiners will be sympathetic and patient.

Candidates with more severe speaking difficulties, which might have an adverse effect on a partner, may apply to take a Speaking Test with a 'dummy partner' or to take a Speaking Test in single-candidate format.

Remember also that candidates with very severe speaking difficulties may opt for exemption from the Speaking Test. The local exam centre will be able to supply further details.

### What material is used with candidates who have speaking difficulties?

Candidates who have speaking difficulties are usually tested using the standard visual material.

#### **Important note:**

Once special arrangements have been made, candidates with hearing difficulties or speech difficulties are assessed **in exactly the same way as other candidates**; they are not marked 'more leniently' because they have difficulty hearing or speaking.

## Candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. dyslexia)

Candidates for Speaking Tests with specific learning difficulties may apply to take the Speaking Test:

- with a non-assessed (dummy) partner
- using written prompts (enlarged if necessary)
- in single-candidate format.

Candidates are given extra time throughout the Speaking Test (see 'Extra Time', below).

## Extra Time

Candidates with special requirements are not given a **fixed** amount of extra time. They are given extra time **throughout** the Speaking Test to read and process text, to process spoken instructions and to produce their utterances. The amount of extra time is at the examiner's discretion. Care is taken not to increase the pressure on the candidate by giving too much extra time.

## FAQs

### Should my student choose a single-format or paired-format Speaking Test?

It depends; for candidates with some types of difficulty, the advantages of taking the standard, paired test will be outweighed by the disadvantages. For example, if a candidate relies on lip-reading, it is often better for them to take the Speaking Test in the single format, as that means they only have to concentrate on one speaker. However, some candidates with speaking or hearing difficulties may prefer to take the Speaking Test in the paired format and interact with another student with whom they have been practising.

### **How long do single-format Speaking Tests last?**

Single-format Speaking Tests are timed to last approximately as long as standard Speaking Tests.

### **Can sign language be used in a Speaking Test?**

No variety of deaf sign language is permitted to be used in Speaking Tests, either by examiners or candidates. Signing is not allowed because, on the whole, deaf sign languages are independent of oral languages and follow their own paths of development, including having a different grammar to the equivalent hearing language. For example, [British Sign Language](#) and [American Sign Language](#) are quite different and mutually unintelligible.

<b>Preparation Tips for Teachers for all Special Requirements versions Speaking Tests</b>
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1. Make sure your student practises with sample material so they are familiar with:
  - the format of the Speaking Test
  - the material which will be used (i.e. written or enlarged visual prompts).
2. Print versions of sample material can be converted to Braille using a Braille embosser, or accessed in Braille via a Braille display linked to a computer.
3. Students should use the verbal prompts or visuals as a starting point and say as much as they can about the topic.

Currently available sample material can be downloaded from:

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/help/special-requirements/>