

B1 Preliminary

Assessing speaking performance – Level B1

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 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.

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B1	Grammar and Vocabulary	Discourse Management	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation. Contributions are relevant despite some repetition. Uses a range of cohesive devices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is intelligible. Intonation is generally appropriate. Sentence and word stress is generally accurately placed. Individual sounds are generally articulated clearly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiates and responds appropriately. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support.
4	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</i>			
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about familiar topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces responses which are extended beyond short phrases, despite hesitation. Contributions are mostly relevant, but there may be some repetition. Uses basic cohesive devices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is mostly intelligible, and has some control of phonological features at both utterance and word levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiates and responds appropriately. Keeps the interaction going with very little prompting and support.
2	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>			
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows sufficient control of simple grammatical forms. Uses a limited range of appropriate vocabulary to talk about familiar topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces responses which are characterised by short phrases and frequent hesitation. Repeats information or digresses from the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is mostly intelligible, despite limited control of phonological features. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains simple exchanges, despite some difficulty. Requires prompting and support.
0	<i>Performance below Band 1.</i>			

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:

- refer to the scales as you observe students carrying out a B1 Preliminary Speaking task
- note down examples of performance in terms of the listed criteria
- give students feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.
- think about whether your students are ready for the exam and how they could improve.

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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.

There is a video recording of two candidates called Kenza and Mohammed taking the B1 Preliminary Speaking test.

You can click on this link to watch the test [here](#).

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 four minutes).
3. Note down examples of what Kenza 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 2 (from about 2 minutes to about 5 minutes).
3. Note down examples of what Mohammed 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 and from about 5 minutes to about 7:40).
3. Note down examples of what Kenza 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.

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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 to about 5 minutes).
3. Note down examples of what Mohammed 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.

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GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY

Name of student: Kenza Parts 1 and 2

Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with control?

Good

I am from Algeria (Part 1)

I was a student (Part 1)

Not so good

A salon beauty (Part 1)

Does the speaker attempt to use complex grammatical forms?

Good

I generally get to work by car (Part 1)

I have finished at the university (Part 1)

Not so good

The lady which is connected (Part 2)

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

Good

She is revising (Part 2)

To achieve our objectives (Part 1)

Not so good

Reading on a book (Part 2)

in all the world (Part 1)

Comments:

Kenza has some good features of language at this level, in particular, accurate tenses and some good vocabulary. She has some errors with prepositions, word order and relative clauses, but generally her meaning is clearly communicated despite these errors.

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DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT

Name of student: Mohammed (Part 2 – Relaxing at home)

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

Good

Speaks for the full minute
and with very little hesitation.

Constructs extended contributions
and complete sentences.

*I see one man he is relaxing in his sofa
and he left his mobile on the floor because he
didn't want to distract by his mobile*

Not so good

Speaks quite quickly, possibly nervous

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

Good

Relevant and developed with little repetition

Describes the picture fully, talking about the room and the person in it

Not so good

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

Good

Organises the contribution by talking
about the room and the person in it.

He also speculates and justifies his ideas with reasons:

*Maybe he is a musician because there is one
guitar next to him*

Not so good

Slightly repetitive use of 'maybe ... because'

Comments

Generally organises answer quite well; no hesitation, extends answers and uses full time. His answers are relevant and well-constructed, though he does become a little bit repetitive in terms of cohesive devices and sentence structure.

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PRONUNCIATION

Name of student: Kenza Parts 1 and 2

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

Good

Although Kenza speaks quietly, speaking is clear throughout and can be understood

Not so good

Clearly influenced by L1 sounds but effective for this level

Is the speaker's intonation appropriate?

Good

Kenza has some variety of intonation, mostly rising at the end of each clause or sentence

Not so good

Intonation could have more variety as Kenza sounds a little bored at times.

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

Good

Although L1 interference is evident, sentence and word stress are generally clear.

Are individual sounds clear? Are they correctly produced?

Mostly good

Not so good

Final consonant sounds sometimes over pronounced: 'books', 'thinku'

Comments

Kenza's pronunciation is quite good for this level, with clear sounds and words that communicate her ideas to the listener. However, her delivery and intonation are a little murmured, with a lack of volume and varied intonation, giving the effect of a lack of confidence. However, this does not impede understanding.

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INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Name of student: Mohammed Part 3 and 4

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

Good

Mohammed initiates most of the discussion in Part 3

‘I think the calendar is perfect...’

‘But sometimes...’

‘and for this football’

Not so good

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

Good

In Part 3, he acknowledges his partner’s suggestions before adding his own.

• Yeah ...

• In Part 4 he reacts appropriately to his partner’s ideas by nodding, smiling, saying ‘yeah’ and adding his own ideas that are similar.

Not so good

He tends to dominate a little, always taking the lead and expressing his ideas first.

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

Good

Mohammed involves his partner by asking questions in Part 3:

‘What about this bag? What do you think about it?’

Not so good

Sometimes appears to answer his own questions

‘for this bear? No, because...’

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

Mohammed has no problems thinking of ideas and passing judgement on them. Showing that he understands the given task: ‘No, because...’

Not so good

Comments

Mohammed responds and reacts appropriately and effectively throughout Parts 3 and 4, perhaps overcompensating for the fact that his partner is quiet by speaking a lot. Despite this, he does display sensitivity to his partner, smiling, agreeing and asking more questions as the activities progress. He keeps the activities going, extending and justifying his answers.

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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

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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

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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

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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