

B1 Preliminary for Schools

Assessing speaking performance

Examiners and speaking assessment in the B1 Preliminary for Schools 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 Assessment English 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 for Schools 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 for Schools Speaking tasks
- form an impression of how ready your students are to take the Speaking test.

The assessment scales

The B1 Preliminary for Schools 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 for Schools 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	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</i>			
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	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>			
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	<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 2 (the long turn) is the main opportunity for examiners to assess Discourse Management in extended speech, and Part 3 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 for Schools 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.

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 Roberto and Simone taking the B1 Preliminary for Schools Speaking test.

You can click **on this link** to watch the test.

.....
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 5. 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 3:35 minutes)
3. Note down examples of what Roberto 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 2

1. Make a copy of the blank **Discourse Management** table on page 6.
2. Watch the B1 Preliminary for Schools Speaking test video Part 2 (from 3:54)
3. Note down examples of what Simone 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 2

1. Make a copy of the blank **Pronunciation** table on page 7.
2. Watch the B1 Preliminary for Schools Speaking test video Parts 1 and 3 (from the beginning and then from 4:57).
3. Note down examples of what Roberto 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.

Activity 3

1. Make a copy of the blank **Interactive Communication** table on page 8.
2. Watch the B1 Preliminary for Schools Speaking test video Parts 3 and 4 (from 4:57)
3. Note down examples of what Simone 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 12.

Remember

- In a real B1 Preliminary for Schools Speaking test the marks awarded reflect a candidate's performance across the whole exam 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' performance, 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 for Schools SPEAKING GRAMMAR AND 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 for Schools 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 for Schools 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 for Schools 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? (<i>develop the interaction and negotiate towards an outcome</i>) Does the speaker need support?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

<p>B1 Preliminary for Schools SPEAKING GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY</p>	
<p>Name of student Roberto (Parts 1 and 2)</p>	
<p>Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with control?</p>	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I also live in Buccinasco</i> • <i>I live with my mum, my dad and my sister</i> • <i>I use it every day, I use it just to chat with my friends and maybe sometimes watch some videos</i> 	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Does the speaker attempt to use complex grammatical forms?</p>	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So, I really like my Italian teacher because she really makes us feel part of the lesson ...</i> • <i>two girls who are following a recipe on the iPad</i> • <i>They are in a kitchen and probably they are making a mess because you can see all the eggs on the table.</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There is two girls ...</i> • <i>and some jeans</i>
<p>Does the speaker use a range of appropriate vocabulary to talk about familiar topics?</p>	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>hard concepts</i> • <i>chat with friends</i> • <i>watch some videos</i> • <i>recipe</i> • <i>salt</i> • <i>sugar</i> • <i>shelves</i> 	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Comments</p> <p>Roberto briefly talks about the people's appearance but then stops too quickly. When prompted by the examiner, he continues to give more detail. Most of his language is accurate with good grammatical range. Errors are rare.</p>	

<p>B1 Preliminary for Schools SPEAKING DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT</p>	
<p>Name of student Simone Part 2 (picture of a boy watching TV)</p>	
<p>Are the answers of an appropriate length for the task? Is there much hesitation?</p>	
<p>Good Speaks at length with very little hesitation. Constructs extended contributions and complete sentences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There is a table in the middle of the living room and on the table there are some cards, a candle, a pen, papers.</i> • <i>I think he's having a really good time because I think he really likes watching a football team playing</i> 	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Are the contributions relevant? Is there much repetition of ideas?</p>	
<p>Good Relevant and developed with little repetition</p> <p>Describes the picture fully, talking about the room and the person in it.</p>	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Does the speaker organise their contributions and use cohesive devices? Is there a range?</p>	
<p>Good Simone's description of the photograph is clear and logically organised. He begins by talking about the main focus of the photograph, the person and what he is doing, using a relative clause and other cohesive devices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In the photograph I can see a boy <u>who</u> is watching a football match.</i> • <i><u>because</u> I ...</i> • <i><u>and on</u> ...</i> 	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Comments Simone speaks for a lengthy period with very little hesitation. He is relevant and clear and has some development beyond simple description. His discourse is coherent and easy to follow. His grammatical structures are all accurate and show a good range.</p>	

B1 Preliminary for Schools SPEAKING PRONUNCIATION	
Name of student Roberto (Parts 1 and 3)	
Are the answers clear? Can the speaker be generally understood?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Clear and easily understood</p>	<p>Not so good</p>
Is the speaker's intonation generally appropriate?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Intonation is good and never gets in the way of meaning</p>	<p>Not so good</p>
Does the speaker use sentence stress generally correctly? Is word stress correct?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Sentence stress is appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think that could be nice</i> <p>Word stress is appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>more entertaining</i> • <i>more interesting</i> • <i>typical</i> 	<p>Not so good</p>
Are individual sounds generally clear? Are they correctly produced?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Sounds are clear and correctly produced</p>	<p>Not so good</p> <p>the 'eh' sound is added to the ends of some words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • because(eh) • on the(eh) • and(eh)
<p>Comments</p> <p>Roberto's pronunciation is clear and his intonation patterns are appropriate. His word and sentence stress are accurately placed and individual sounds are articulated clearly with the exception of the above.</p>	

<p>B1 Preliminary for Schools SPEAKING INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION</p>	
<p>Name of student Simone (Parts 3 and 4)</p>	
<p>Does the speaker start discussions? Does the speaker introduce new ideas?</p>	
<p>Good <i>What about visiting an ancient castle?</i></p>	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Does the speaker react appropriately to what the interlocutor or other candidate says?</p>	
<p>Good In Part 3 he sometimes gives his opinion in response to his partner's suggestion: <i>because there are zoos everywhere in every city so you can't learn more about the city you're visiting</i></p> <p>Simone shows he is listening to his partner, sometimes by just saying, 'yeah' and sometimes he develops his partner's point, for example about the stadium: <i>Yeah, they can have fun, they can eat together</i> and about the bus tour: <i>It gives you the opportunity to see a city better.</i></p>	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Does the speaker keep the interaction going? Does the speaker say more than the minimum? Does the speaker involve the other candidate?</p>	
<p>Good In Part 3 he involves his partner with questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>But what about the transport museum?</i> • <i>What about the ... going shopping, going to the markets?</i> 	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Does the speaker try to move the interaction in an appropriate direction? (<i>develop the interaction and negotiate towards an outcome</i>) Does the speaker need support?</p>	
<p>Good He contributes well to the discussion and suggests a decision at the end (Part 4): <i>So I think the bus.</i></p>	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Comments: Simone responds and interacts appropriately and effectively throughout these parts and is able to develop the discussion topics with very little support. He introduces new ideas, reacts naturally and appropriately to what his partner says and involves his partner in the discussion.</p>	