

Assessing Speaking Performance – Level A2

Examiners and speaking assessment in the A2 Key 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 three individual criteria:

- Grammar and Vocabulary
- Pronunciation
- Interactive Communication.

How can I use the Assessment Scales?

Examiners use the A2 Level Assessment Scales to decide which marks to give candidates taking the *Cambridge English: Key Speaking* test. Using the scales yourself during classroom speaking practice tasks will help you to:

- analyse your students' strengths and weaknesses when they do *Cambridge English: Key Speaking* tasks
- form an impression of how ready your students are to take the Speaking test.

The Assessment Scales

The *Cambridge English: Key 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. Cambridge English Key is at Level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and the descriptors for band 3 and above generally indicate performance of at least A2 level.

A2	Grammar and Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
5	<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 everyday situations. 	<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"> Maintains simple exchanges. Requires very little prompting and support.
4	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.</i>		
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows sufficient control of simple grammatical forms. Uses appropriate vocabulary to talk about everyday situations. 	<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.
2	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>		
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows only limited control of a few grammatical forms. Uses a vocabulary of isolated words and phrases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has very limited control of phonological features and is often unintelligible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has considerable difficulty maintaining simple exchanges. Requires additional 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 focus of the first bulleted descriptor at Band 3 is the same as at Band 1; the control of grammatical forms. However, at Band 3 'sufficient' replaces 'only limited' – *Shows a sufficient control*, and the range of expected forms has been extended from *a few* to *simple grammatical forms* in general. In Band 5, the focus on control has changed to include 'a good degree of control' – *Shows a good degree of control of simple 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.

All three analytical criteria are assessed across the whole test. In Part 1 the candidates interact with the Interlocutor and in Part 2 they talk to each other, using prompt cards to ask and answer questions.

How can I use the Assessment Scales with students?

You could:

1. Refer to the scales as you observe students carrying out a *Cambridge English: Key* 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 video recording of two candidates called Luis and Gustavo taking the *Cambridge English: Key Speaking* test.

You can click on these links to watch each part of the test.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D8_X5PzUpQ

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 *Cambridge English: Key Speaking* test video part 1 (to about 4 minutes 30).
3. Note down examples of what Gustavo 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 7.

Activity 2:

1. Make a copy of the blank **Pronunciation** table on page 5.
2. Watch the *Cambridge English: Key Speaking* test video part 2 (from about 4 minutes 30).
3. Note down examples of what Luis 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 3:

1. Make a copy of the blank **Interactive Communication** table on page 6.
2. Watch the *Cambridge English: Key Speaking* test video.
3. Note down examples of what both Gustavo and Luis do 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 pages 9 and 10.

Remember:

- In a real *Cambridge English: Key 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, 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.

Cambridge English: Key (LEVEL A2) SPEAKING GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY	
Name of student	
Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with sufficient control?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker use appropriate vocabulary to talk about everyday situations?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

Cambridge English: Key (LEVEL A2) SPEAKING PRONUNCIATION	
Name of student	
Are the utterances mostly clear? Can the speaker be mostly understood?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker show limited control of intonation?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker show limited control of word and sentence stress?	
Good	Not so good
Are individual sounds mostly clear?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

Cambridge English: Key (LEVEL A2) SPEAKING INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION	
Name of student	
Can the speaker maintain simple exchanges with the interlocutor (Part 1)?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker react appropriately to what the interlocutor or other candidate says?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker need any prompting or support?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

Cambridge English: Key (LEVEL A2) SPEAKING GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY	
Name of student GUSTAVO (Part 1)	
Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with sufficient control?	
Good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm from Brazil</i> • <i>I don't know...I like</i> • <i>I study law</i> • <i>How? ... Can you repeat it?</i> 	Not so good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I student Brazil</i>
Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control?	
Good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I would like to be a lawyer</i> • <i>No, I'm staying at Oakington, so it's a little far of here.</i> • <i>My father is a lawyer, my sister a vet. My brother is studying and he is younger and studying at school</i> • <i>My mother has...my mother's 42 years old and my father 56 years old.</i> 	Not so good
Does the speaker use appropriate vocabulary to talk about everyday situations?	
Good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Law, lawyer, vet, studying at school</i> 	Not so good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My mother is an acted</i> • <i>I come here by tax</i>
Comments Gustavo has a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms and he is very easy to understand. He uses appropriate vocabulary when talking about everyday situations (<i>law, lawyer, vet, studying at school</i>) but does not show evidence of a range of vocabulary at the level.	

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Cambridge English: Key (LEVEL A2) SPEAKING	
PRONUNCIATION	
Name of student LUIS (Part 2)	
Are the utterances mostly clear? Can the speaker be generally understood?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Mostly clear and easily understood.</p>	<p>Not so good</p> <p>Occasional difficulty for the listener</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>He was (wants) to have a football club afternoon school</i>
Does the speaker show limited control of intonation?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Intonation is generally good and never gets in the way of the meaning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The library where? (rising intonation for question)</i> • <i>In the library CDs? (rising intonation for question)</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <p>Question intonation is not consistent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>And library computers? (sounds like a statement)</i>
Does the speaker show limited control of word and sentence stress?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Sentence stress and word stress is nearly always correct.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mister Tom Cooper</i> • <i>The teacher is English and French</i> • <i>Oh, sorry, I don't know.</i> • <i>computers</i> 	<p>Not so good</p>
Are individual sounds mostly clear?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Most sounds are clear and L1 interference does not have a negative effect on communication.</p>	<p>Not so good</p> <p>Some words are articulated less clearly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>tames (times)</i> • <i>leebrary (library)</i> • <i>ee see see (ICC)</i> • <i>was (wants)</i>
Comments	
<p>Luis' pronunciation is mostly intelligible, and there are no times when it is impossible to understand him. He has some control of phonological features at utterance and word level and he stresses most words correctly. He relies on rising intonation when asking his questions rather than question word order, although this is not consistent and he has a few problems with individual sounds.</p>	

Cambridge English: Key (LEVEL A2) SPEAKING INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION	
Name of student GUSTAVO (Parts 1 and 2)	
Can the speaker maintain simple exchanges with the interlocutor (Part 1)?	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm from Brazil</i> • <i>No, I'm staying at Oakington</i> • <i>How? ... Can you repeat it?</i> • <i>I don't know...I like. My father is a lawyer and I like...I would like to be a lawyer</i> 	<p>Not so good</p>
Does the speaker react appropriately to what the interlocutor or other candidate says?	
<p>Good</p> <p>All his questions and answers communicate appropriately</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What the name of the new teacher?</i> • <i>And what does he teach?</i> • <i>Yes, they have computers on the fourth floor.</i> <p>He sometimes repeats what he has heard before answering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My family. My father is a lawyer...(P1)</i> • <i>Opening times. Monday to Saturday...(P2)</i> • <i>OK, and where's he from? (P2)</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <p>He doesn't respond to his partner's wrong answer to his question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When did he start? ICC College</i> <p>and the Interlocutor intervenes to ask him to repeat the question again.</p>
Does the interaction break down? Does the speaker need prompting or support?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Gustavo does not need prompting. He is able to ask for repetition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How? Can you repeat?</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <p>See above.</p>
Comments	
<p>Gustavo is able to maintain communication in simple exchanges both with the interlocutor and his partner. He does not need prompting but does not attempt to repair communication when his partner does not answer his question appropriately. He is able to ask for repetition and he reacts naturally to his partner when exchanging information about the new teacher.</p>	

Cambridge English: Key (LEVEL A2) SPEAKING	
INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION	
Name of student LUIS (Parts 1 and 2)	
Can the speaker maintain simple exchanges with the interlocutor (Part 1)?	
<p>Good</p> <p>He answers the questions briefly but appropriately</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I'm student</i> • <i>3 days</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <p>When asked why he likes his school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My teachers and my friends, yes, my school</i>
Does the speaker react appropriately to what the interlocutor or other candidate says?	
<p>Good</p> <p>He communicates his questions using intonation to overcome language limitations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The library, where?</i> • <i>In the library, CDs?</i> <p>and answers most of his partner's questions appropriately:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mr Tom Cooper</i> • <i>From Canada</i> <p>He apologises for misunderstanding a question in Part 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Oh, sorry, I don't know....Oh sorry, from next Monday.</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <p>He answers his partner's question <i>When did he start?</i> inappropriately:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ICC College</i> <p>Although he does maintain the interaction by explaining</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Oh, sorry, I don't know.</i> <p>He has difficulty with the question <i>Is he play sports?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No...yes...he was to have a football club, afternoon school</i> <p>His response to the question <i>What do you think of Cambridge?</i> seems to indicate that he hasn't understood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I don't know</i>
Does the interaction break down? Does the speaker need prompting or support?	
<p>Good</p> <p>In most of the test interaction is maintained.</p>	<p>Not so good</p> <p>The interaction breaks down when he gives an inappropriate answer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When did he start? ICC College</i> and he needs prompting by the interlocutor.
Comments	
<p>Luis is generally able to maintain communication in simple exchanges with both the interlocutor and his partner, although he has some difficulties, as mentioned above. He communicates all his questions to his partner, but relies heavily on the prompt card throughout.</p>	