

Cambridge English

Assessing Speaking Performance – Level C1

Examiners and speaking assessment in the Cambridge English:
Advanced 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 five individual criteria:

- Grammatical Resource
- Lexical Resource
- Discourse Management
- Pronunciation
- Interactive Communication.

How can I use the Assessment Scales?

Examiners use the C1 Level Assessment Scales to decide which marks to give candidates taking the *Cambridge English: Advanced* 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: Advanced* Speaking tasks
- form an impression of how ready your students are to take the Speaking test.

The Assessment Scales

The *Cambridge English: Advanced* 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: Advanced* is at Level C1 of the Common European Framework of

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Reference (CEFR), and the descriptors for band 3 and above generally indicate performance of at least C1 level.

C1	Grammatical Resource	Lexical Resource	Discourse Management	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains control of a wide range of grammatical forms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a wide range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on familiar and unfamiliar topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces extended stretches of language with ease and with very little hesitation. Contributions are relevant, coherent and varied. Uses a wide range of cohesive devices and discourse markers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is intelligible. Phonological features are used effectively to convey and enhance meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interacts with ease, linking contributions to those of other speakers. Widens the scope of the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome.
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 a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on familiar and unfamiliar topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces extended stretches of language with very little hesitation. Contributions are relevant and there is a clear organisation of ideas. Uses a range of cohesive devices and discourse markers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is intelligible. Intonation is appropriate. Sentence and word stress is accurately placed. Individual sounds are articulated clearly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiates and responds appropriately, linking contributions to those of other speakers. Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome.
2	<i>Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.</i>				
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms, and attempts some complex grammatical forms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views, but only when talking about familiar topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation. Contributions are relevant and there is very little 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.
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. Always remember that Level C1 is generally described as ‘Good operational command of the spoken language’.



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For example, under Grammatical Resource, the beginning of the first descriptor at Band 3 is the same as at Band 1 – *Shows a good degree of control....* However, Band 3 applies the notion of control to *a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms*, whereas at Band 1 the control is limited to the use of *simple grammatical forms* combined with *attempts at some complex grammatical forms*. At Band 5, the control needs to be maintained across a *wide range of 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.

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: Advanced* 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 Meritxell and Stefan taking the *Cambridge English: Advanced* Speaking test. Please note that this example is for the pre-January 2015 version of *Cambridge English: Advanced* exam.

You can find this here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPF0zUMXpI0>

The four activities use this recording to practise using the Assessment Scales.

Activity 1

1. Make a copy of the blank **Grammatical Resource and Lexical Resource** tables on pages 5 and 6. You will see that statements from the Assessment Scales have been turned into questions.
2. Watch the *Cambridge English: Advanced* Speaking video.
3. Using the *Cambridge English: Advanced* Assessment Scales to help you discriminate between Grammatical and Lexical Resources, note down examples of what Meritxell does well and not so well for each of the questions in the Comments box on the assessment sheets.
4. Compare the notes you have made with completed examples on pages 10 and 11.

Activity 2

1. Make a copy of the blank **Discourse Management** table on page 7.
2. Watch the *Cambridge English: Advanced* Speaking video.
3. Note down examples of what Stefan 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.



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Activity 3

1. Make a copy of the blank **Pronunciation** table on page 8.
2. Watch the *Cambridge English: Advanced Speaking* video.
3. Note down examples of what Stefan 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 13

Activity 4

1. Make a copy of the blank **Interactive Communication** table on page 9.
2. Watch the *Cambridge English: Advanced Speaking* video.
3. Note down examples of what Meritxell 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 pages 14.

Remember:

- In a real *Cambridge English: Advanced Speaking* test the marks awarded reflect a candidate's performance across the whole exam and not just in one part 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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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) SPEAKING GRAMMATICAL RESOURCE	
Name of student	
Does the speaker use a range of simple grammatical forms, with control?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker use complex grammatical forms? Do they maintain control?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) SPEAKING LEXICAL RESOURCE	
Name of student	
Does the speaker use a range of appropriate vocabulary?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker have the lexical resource to give and exchange views on familiar and unfamiliar topics?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) 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 any repetition? Is it well organised?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker use a range of cohesive devices? And discourse markers?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) SPEAKING PRONUNCIATION	
Name of student	
Can the speaker be generally understood?	
Good	Not so good
Is the speaker's intonation appropriate? Is it used to enhance and convey meaning?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker use sentence and word stress correctly? Is it used to enhance and convey meaning?	
Good	Not so good
Are individual sounds clear? Are they correctly produced?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) 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 expand and build on ideas and themes introduced by the other candidate? Good	Not so good
Does the speaker try to move the interaction towards an outcome? Does the speaker need any support? Good	Not so good
Comments	

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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) SPEAKING GRAMMATICAL RESOURCE	
Name of student Meritxell (All four parts of the test)	
Does the speaker use a range of simple grammatical forms with control?	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>From Barcelona, a town near Barcelona, actually..</i> • <i>I was studying, but I finished my degree in June, so now I'm here learning English,</i> • <i>It's the same in the shops now</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>they use too much computer</i> • <i>they are not guilty for our mistakes</i>
Does the speaker use complex grammatical forms? Do they maintain control?	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>if you speak a lot of languages you can travel around the world, you can find a good job as well</i> • <i>The guy from the car must be really scared, 'cos it's not usual to find a bear in the middle of the road</i> • <i>Maybe we are losing our traditions, but we are gaining some different things</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think the `people now is...are losing their skills to eat properly (Are losing the habit of eating properly.)</i> • <i>He can really go fast because he doesn't want trouble with the animal (he should go/leave/get away fast, because...</i>
<p>Comments</p> <p>Generally good grammatical control. Very few errors with simple forms, but some with pronouns and plurals (something to work on). Occasionally attempts some complex grammatical forms, but perhaps could have been a little more ambitious. By 'keeping it simple' grammatically, Meritxell could give a performance which would pass at B2 level but not quite achieve C1.</p> <p>N.B. Candidates are marked on the language that they 'use' and 'attempt to use' to convey their message, so they should be encouraged to be ambitious in their use of language. However, comprehension is important so mistakes shouldn't result in their being difficult to understand.</p>	

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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) SPEAKING LEXICAL RESOURCE	
Name of student Meritxell (All four parts of the test)	
Does the speaker use a range of appropriate vocabulary?	
Good <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>scared</i>• <i>trouble</i>• <i>rubbish</i>• <i>guilty</i>• <i>diseases</i>• <i>achieve</i>• <i>spoil</i>	Not so good <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>a monument inside the water</i>• <i>he can achieve money as well</i>• <i>discover (for discovery)</i>• <i>investigation (for research)</i>
Does the speaker have the lexical resource to give and exchange views on familiar and unfamiliar topics?	
Good <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>It's not usual to find a bear in the middle of the road</i>• <i>Now we're creating a lot of rubbish and the people (from?) the future will regret it</i>	Not so good <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>He can go outside and tell al the people about the discover, so actually he can achieve money as well</i> <p>(Meritcell is talking about the diver and the sunken monument, and probably wants to say; 'he can go back to the surface and make some money from the discovery by telling people about it.)</p>
Comments <p>The basic lexical resource is sound, although there are some limitations when Meritxell talks about unfamiliar topics. She is never 'lost for words' and her lexical resource is adequate for the tasks, but she does not show an extensive range and does at times lack the correct words or phrases to express her exact meaning.</p> <p>Students at this level should be encouraged to practise 'lifting the level' of their responses away from a 'safe' B2 level towards something 'beyond B2'. This requires students to think of the Speaking test tasks as opportunities for using a range of (grammatical and) lexical resources to say something more than the basic or expected response. This 'lifting' requires practice.</p>	

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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) SPEAKING	
DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT	
Name of student Stefan (All four parts of the test)	
Are the answers of an appropriate length for the task? Is there much hesitation?	
<p>Good</p> <p>Nearly all Stefan's contributions are of an appropriate length, and made with very little hesitation.</p>	<p>Not so good</p> <p>Stefan sometimes misses the chance to take the lead in discussions. This may have been a mark of courtesy towards Meritxell ('ladies first').</p>
Are the contributions relevant? Is there any repetition? Is it well organised?	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>you can make people happy with flowers, especially women for example, when you give some flowers to them it has very beneficial effects...</i> • <i>social networks for example, you can stay in contact with people from Spain or from all over the world</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Here you can see that a castle, built from ice, and it's very difficult to build such a building because you need very good skills, you have to be very... yeah</i> (In this response Stefan becomes repetitive because he is struggling to find the language to fully express his ideas. Finally he stops mid sentence.)
Does the speaker use a range of cohesive devices? And discourse markers?	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (cohesive device / linking word) <i>I think on the other hand it has beneficial effects, because...</i> • <i>On the other hand, there's a lot of dangerous stuff on the internet</i> • (discourse marker) <i>then, in the second picture you see ...</i> • <i>I think I can't speak for other people but, yeah, what is important, I think people <u>know</u> what is important...I disagree with this statement!</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <p>Throughout the test, Stefan makes little use of discourse markers.</p>
<p>Comments</p> <p>Coherent and easy to follow. One strength of Stefan's discourse management in this performance is that he does seem to have clear ideas on the topics discussed and is prepared to develop them (e.g. on 24 hour shopping and on positive aspects of the 21st century). However, at times he does not express himself with ease, or finishes talking about ideas quickly. Also he could, perhaps, have taken the lead in the discussion more often.</p> <p>Students need to be trained to extending their contributions and to develop ideas across a number of turns.</p>	

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Cambridge English: Advanced (LEVEL C1) SPEAKING	
PRONUNCIATION	
Name of student Stefan (all four parts of the test)	
Can the speaker be generally understood?	
Good Clear and easily understood at all times.	Not so good
Is the speaker's intonation appropriate? Is it used to enhance and convey meaning?	
Good Intonation is generally good, albeit rather monotonous at times, and never gets in the way of the meaning.	Not so good At times there is an over use of rising intonation used at the end of neutral statements and phrases
Does the speaker use sentence and word stress correctly? Is it used to enhance and convey meaning?	
Good Sentence stress and word stress is nearly always correct. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We really should stop this.</i> • <i>For the people who work in the shop</i> One very good and revealing example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think I can't speak for other people but, yeah, what is important? I think people know what is important. I disagree with this statement!</i> 	Not so good



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Are individual sounds clear? Are they correctly produced?

Good

Generally, individual sounds are produced correctly

Not so good

Some sounds are not well produced

- **CH**ermany (Germany)
- **en**choy ((enjoy)
- **dis** (this picture)...
- **verk** (work)
- **wery** (very)

Comments

Pronunciation is clear all through the test. Certain individual sounds are unusual and there is some mis-use of intonation, but this never causes misunderstanding.



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INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION	
Name of student MERITXELL (all four parts of the test)	
Does the speaker start discussions? Does the speaker introduce new ideas?	
<p>Good In Parts 3 and 4, Meritxell usually takes the initiative in introducing new ideas and when responding to her partner and the interlocutor.</p>	<p>Not so good</p>
Does the speaker react appropriately to what the interlocutor or other candidate says?	
<p>Good Meritxell reacts appropriately throughout the test and links her contributions to those of the interlocutor and Stefan.</p>	<p>Not so good Meritxell occasionally responds inappropriately, as when she responds to Stefan's point about people sleeping at night with 'it's the same in the shops'</p>
Does the speaker keep the interaction going? Does the speaker expand and build on ideas and themes introduced by the other candidate?	
<p>Good Meritxell keeps the interaction going and is sensitive to turn-taking. She says more than the minimum and is always ready to support her opinions. She does not dominate the conversation.</p>	<p>Not so good Meritxell is very good at involving her partner but at times her habit of usually responding first leaves Stefan with the task of adding ideas to her opinions rather than being able to respond initially with new opinions of his own.</p>
Does the speaker try to move the interaction towards an outcome? Does the speaker need any support?	
<p>Good Meritxell does not need support.</p>	<p>Not so good Meritxell (and Stefan) devote the whole discussion to talking about the topics illustrated, without moving the discussion towards the outcome of a decision.</p>
<p>Comments Introduces new ideas, reacts naturally and appropriately to what partner says, involves partner in discussion. Contributions, while relevant, tend to be opinions, statements about the topic, and the interaction pattern with Stefan is usually (1) she states an opinion/responds to the question (2) Stefan responds to her statement (3) she agrees/disagrees, then moves on. The key feature missing from her performance is 'development'—the ability to develop the interaction and negotiate towards an outcome. One way of practising this is to set up a task in which students start with the outcome and work backwards; e.g. photos A and F were chosen: why do you think this was, and if you don't agree, which two would you have chosen?</p>	



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