



STUDY NOTES

EPISODE 7: THE SPEAKING TEST

THE SPEAKING TEST

The purpose of the speaking test is to determine your ability to communicate socially and whether you have the kinds of speaking skills needed for work or study. So, you will be required to speak on a variety of topics ranging from the general and personal to the more abstract, using both formal and informal language.

IELTS Tip

Listen carefully to the questions being asked so that you respond appropriately. Try to use a wide range of grammatical structures and vocabulary. Speak clearly, evenly and at a natural pace.

Be positive and trust in your ability!

Procedure

At the beginning of the interview an examiner will greet you and invite you into the examination room. You will be seated facing the examiner with a desk between you. The examiner will then begin recording the one-to-one interview. The purpose of the recording is to ensure the test is to standard, and conducted fairly for all candidates around the world. The interview will last between 11 and 14 minutes. The examiner times each section.

The Three Parts of the Interview

There are **three parts** to the test. Each part has a particular purpose and covers particular question types and communication patterns.

Part One – Introduction

(approximately 4-5 minutes)

Procedure

The examiner will introduce him/herself and then check your identification.

In the first part of the test you will be required to answer some general questions about yourself. These will be personal in nature and cover 2-3 familiar topic areas. Simple questions on familiar topics should be easy to answer, and so will help you to relax into the interview.

Topic areas

The topic areas covered may include:

- hometown
- studies
- work
- travel
- sports
- family
- hobbies/interests/leisure
- food
- entertainment
- shopping



- the Internet
- films

The questions are of a general nature such as:

Travel

1. When was the first time you travelled abroad?
2. Which countries have you visited?
3. Which one was your favourite? Why?
4. Did you like the local food?
5. Where would you like to go next?

Sport

1. What sports are popular in your country?
2. Which do you play?
3. How often do you play?
4. Where do you play?
5. Who do you play with?

These are **wh-type** questions: **who, what, when, why, which, where, how**. In response to these types of questions you would be required to provide simple details. You are not expected to give in-depth answers at this stage of the interview but you should extend your answer with one to two compound/complex sentences with explanations and examples.

Skills

In asking these questions the examiner is assessing a variety of skills or language functions, including:

- describing (eg. your flat, room)
- identifying (eg. music)
- expressing likes, dislikes and preferences (eg. foods)
- comparing or contrasting (eg. city vs. the countryside)
- expressing your opinion (eg. weather)
- speculating (eg. future plans)
- giving a reason (eg. studying a second language)
- explaining changes (eg. clothing)

For example, the set of questions below tests the following skills:

Skills/Language functions	Topic
	Music
identifying	What kinds of music do young people like in your country?
expressing a preference	What kind do you like?
giving a reason	Why do people listen to music?
expressing an opinion	Is it important to know how to play a musical instrument?



Language Structures

A range of verb tenses is tested in Part One. There are certain language structures used for particular skills. It is helpful to practise using a variety of these structures. Here are some examples:

Skill/ Language functions	Grammatical Structure	Example
describing	simple present tense	It <u>is</u> a small unit overlooking a park.
talking about a habit	present tense	I <u>usually go out</u> with my friends.
speculating about the future	future tense	I <u>will</u> enrol in an MBA. I <u>am planning</u> to study engineering
comparing	comparative	Studying abroad is <u>far better</u> than learning English at home.

Tips

Part One is not only the beginning of the test but also the stage where you are creating a first impression. Show that you are confident. It is helpful to maintain eye contact with the examiner. Try to relax.

Here are some strategies to use:

- develop vocabulary around the topic areas
- know how to describe, compare, contrast, give a reason, explain changes
- practise expressing your opinion on a variety of different topics
- practise delivering answers confidently, fluently, clearly and accurately
- use every opportunity to practise

Part Two – Individual Long Turn

(3-4 minutes including 1 minute preparation)

Procedure

The examiner will introduce Part Two of the interview by saying that you'll be given a topic and will need to talk about it for one to two minutes. S/he will give you some paper and a pencil, and one minute to make some notes. After one minute you will be asked to start speaking. The examiner will follow up your short talk with a question.

The Individual Long Turn

In part two of the interview you will be speaking on your own without any prompting. This part requires you to:

- speak at length on a given topic
- organise your ideas coherently
- use appropriate language



Skills

This part of the interview mainly focuses on your **communication skills**:

- fluency – speaking without too many pauses
- coherence – linking your ideas logically and using language appropriately

Topics

The topics you may be asked to talk about are of a general nature and should be familiar to you.

Here are some sample topics:

- Describe a subject you enjoyed at school.
- Describe your favourite teacher.
- Talk about an object that is very important to you.
- Describe a celebration you attended.
- Talk about a film you enjoyed.
- Describe your favourite restaurant.
- Talk about a television program you like.
- Describe an interesting building.
- Describe an important festival in your country.

It is important to use the one minute for preparation effectively and plan an answer.

Here is a sample prompt card and some strategies to use in preparing.

Describe a holiday you took in your country.

You should say:

- where you went
- who you travelled with
- what you did
- and explain why you enjoyed your vacation.

Preparing notes

Read through the prompt card carefully. Make sure you understand the topic and the points you need to talk about.

Think of 2 or 3 things to say about each prompt and write down key words that will help remind you of what to say. Don't try to write full sentences or worry about grammar. Your notes need to be clear and brief.

On the following page is a plan for the sample verbal prompt. It is detailed. You, of course, will not have time to write such detailed notes in the interview but it is helpful when practising to think of several possible answers. The other choices may be useful for other questions.



Bullet	Describe a holiday you took in your country.	
Bullet 1	where you went	Pacific Ocean, countryside, mountains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • popular spot • 5 hour drive north of city
Bullet 2	who you travelled with	friends, family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engineering friends from university • celebrating the end of exams • school holiday with parents
Bullet 3	what you did	outdoor activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • water sports: swimming, scuba diving, fishing • volleyball, bush walking, hiking in the mountains
Explain	explain why you enjoyed your vacation	quality time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enjoying each others company • relaxing • beautiful scenery • new experiences

You should begin your talk by introducing your topic, for example

- *I'm going to talk about my holiday*
- *The person I'm going to talk about is*
- *I'd like to describe my ...*

Following the order of the prompts will help with the logical organisation of your talk. There would usually be more to say about the third and fourth prompts so leave enough time to cover those points. Remember to link your ideas.

Tips

- practise talking on a **range of topics**
- practise **timing** yourself
- practise **organising** your ideas logically
- practise **linking** your ideas
- practise speaking for **2 minutes**

Do not memorise an answer. You will lose marks for a memorised answer.

Part Three – Two-way Discussion (approximately 4-5 minutes)

In the final part of the interview you will need to engage in a discussion on more abstract issues that are linked thematically to the topic in Part Two.

The examiner will be assessing your ability to develop and expand on your ideas in some depth. You are also expected to take the initiative in the discussion, so try to develop the topic as far as you possibly can.



Topics

The topics are of general interest and focus on current issues in society, such as:

- challenges facing young people
- problems affecting the environment
- the impact of technology
- issues affecting the family and family relationships
- influence of the media
- transportation issues in the future
- primary, secondary and tertiary education

Skills/Language functions

In the course of the discussion the examiner will ask questions to elicit language structures relating to a variety of skills or language functions, including:

- describing
- explaining
- evaluating
- speculating and predicting
- giving an opinion
- making suggestions
- comparing or contrasting
- identifying

Language functions and questions

Here are some sample questions and the skill or language function tested. It is helpful to listen out for the question key word so that you respond appropriately and accurately.

Skill/Language function	Question
comparing	What is the benefit of travelling abroad compared with travelling in your home country?
describing	What is the best way to travel?
giving an opinion	Do you think it is important to travel?
speculating	How will people travel in the future?

Tips

- acquaint yourself with current issues in society by watching programs on current affairs, listening to talk back radio
- practise discussing topics that are current and of general interest
- practise giving your opinion, offering suggestions, giving explanations
- focus on the key words in the question so that you answer the question accurately and appropriately
- be prepared to develop and expand on your ideas
- record yourself and listen to yourself
- listen for how often you stop and start

Take time to practise!

Remember:

The more you practise, the more confident you will be.
The more confident you are, the better you'll do in the Speaking Test!