ASSESSING SPEAKING

[Assessing Speaking: 5'38"]

If you need to assess your students' speaking skills there are a number of factors you need to consider. These include considering the test taker and their needs, the kind of information you want to know about their speaking skills and the most appropriate ways to elicit and assess these skills so that your test is appropriate and accurately scored.

A. BEFORE YOU WATCH

1.   **Why do we communicate with others? What kind of things are we trying to achieve?**

For example: We communicate with others for a range of reasons: it could be interactional or transactional. Interactional communication is for social purposes (exchange of news or catching up). There is no real aim for the conversation except to be friendly. In transactional communication, the conversation has an aim, for instance buying something or asking about specific information. There are also presentations and monologues, which have functional purposes, for example, to persuade or complain.

2.   **What is involved in the speaking skill?**

For example:

- *Getting a message across*
- *Organising a message for the listener*
- *Using a range of language for different purposes*
- *Being accurate so there are no misunderstandings*
- *Being fluent so a listener is not 'waiting'*
- *Being intelligible*
- *Contributing to keeping the conversation going*

3.   **What do you think the issues might be in assessing speaking?**

For example:

- *Being objective*
- *Giving reliable assessment across different test takers*
- *Timing*
- *Making a task clear and unambiguous*

B. WHILE YOU WATCH

A test of speaking needs to be as close to the context we are interested in as possible, so it is important to consider what is assessed and how.

What are we assessing?

4a. **What are the different dimensions we need to consider about speaking?**

A. *Audience*

B. *Reason*

C. *Condition*

4b. **What aspects of speaking must any assessment attempt to replicate?**

A. *Brain activity*

B. *Social conditions*

How are we assessin?g

5. **What are the different exam formats we can use to assess speaking?**

Format	Number of test takers
Interview	*One (with one or more examiners)*
Oral presentation	*One (speaking to a real or imagined audience)*
Interactive task	*At least two or more*
Group discussion	*Four to six*

6. **What are some of the different tasks we can use to assess speaking?**

Task	Example
Describing something	*A picture, a place, a person or an action*
Telling a story	*Based on a single picture or a series of pictures, or invented*
Comparing things	*Real objects, photographs, artwork or abstract concepts*
Giving some personal information	*Talking about your family, hobby, hometown or some experience you've had (such as a holiday)*

7. What are the different settings we can use to assess speaking?

A. Performed live in front of one or more examiners

B. Recorded and evaluated later by one or more examiners

C. Talk over the phone to an examiner or to a recording device

D. Communicate via a computer or tablet, with the examiner either live or working from a recording

Scoring and grading

8. How do examiners award scores?

Based on what they have *observed* and using a *rating scale* (a set of descriptors of what to expect at different levels of ability).

9. What is the advantage of each rating scale an examiner might use?

A. Simple scale – advantage: *simple to design and simple to use*

B. Complex scale – advantage: *assesses more areas of the speaking skill*

10. How can technology improvements help test design? Tick the appropriate boxes.

(✓)

Shorter tests	
Automated scoring	✔
Simpler development	

C. AFTER YOU WATCH

11. **Read the information about these learners.**

Learners are a class of 14 year olds studying general English. They are currently at B1 level of the CEFR.

Which task would you use? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each task? Why?

Task A: In pairs, describe two pictures and say what the differences are.

OR

Task B: Individually, look at a photograph: (a) describe the photograph; (b) talk about an aspect of the photograph relevant to your experience; (c) elaborate by talking about the same topic in more general terms and providing an opinion with reasons and justification.

Probably the second task (B), as it provides an opportunity to assess a wide range of the candidate's speaking skills.

	Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Task A	- *Suitable for lower levels* - *Practical: two test takers at a time* - *Good reliability: easy to assess*	- *Low content validity: only tests vocabulary and simple functions (I see, there is/are, …)* - *Two test takers doing the same task (no collaborative work) means one can dominate the task or one can repeat what the other is saying*
Task B	- *Good face validity* - *Good content and construct validity: tests a range of skills (vocab, grammar, etc.)* - *Opportunity for personalisation*	- *Not very practical: may take a lot of time, especially as it tests one candidate at a time* - *Potentially lower reliability: more difficult to assess so scale must be clear*

12. **Which features would you need to assess for these learners? Why?**

☐ Grammar range and accuracy

☐ Vocabulary range and accuracy

☐ Task fulfilment

☐ Fluency

☐ Pronunciation

In Task A: vocabulary range and accuracy, task fulfilment and pronunciation.

In Task B: all of them.

*NB: The above descriptors match the APTIS speaking scale, and Task B reflects an APTIS task.

APPLY >>>>>>>>>>>

THE TASK

13.   Think about your own learners:

A. What kind of speaking do they need to do?

B. Who are they usually speaking to?

C. How can you make sure a speaking task for them is fair?

RATING

14.   What kind of rating scale do you need?

Think carefully about the kind of information you or the learners need to know.

Consider the level of detail you need to report on.

For more information on rating scales, see:

Assessment Criteria – rating scales (2016):
http://www.ealta.eu.org/events/Summer_school_2016/06_EALTA%20SuSch%202016_Rating%20criteria%20scales.pdf

and

Appendix H in the APTIS General Technical Manual (p61):
https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/aptis_general_technical_manual_v-1.0.pdf

To learn more about issues to consider when developing a test of speaking, you may access Appendix E in the APTIS General Technical Manual (pp. 52–55)

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/aptis_general_technical_manual_v-1.0.pdf