



Assessing Speaking Performance IELTS

Examiners and speaking assessment in the IELTS exam

Speaking performances are assessed by certificated IELTS examiners. All IELTS examiners hold relevant teaching qualifications and are recruited as examiners by the test centres and approved by British Council or IDP: IELTS Australia.

The examiner assesses candidates on their performance throughout the test according to the four criteria of the IELTS Speaking Test Band Descriptors:

- Fluency and coherence
- Lexical resource
- Grammatical range and accuracy
- Pronunciation

How can I use the Speaking Band Descriptors?

Examiners use the Speaking Band Descriptors to decide which bands to give candidates taking the IELTS Speaking test. Using the descriptors yourself during classroom speaking practice tasks will help you to:

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

The Speaking Band Descriptors

The IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors are divided into bands from 0 to 9, with 0 being the lowest and 9 the highest. Descriptors for each criterion are provided and indicate what a candidate is expected to demonstrate at each band.

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IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors (public version)

Band	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features develops topics fully and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately produces consistently accurate structures apart from 'slips' characteristic of native speaker speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety sustains flexible use of features throughout is effortless to understand
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction; hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language develops topics coherently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies uses paraphrase effectively as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures flexibly produces a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inappropriacies or basic/non-systematic errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of pronunciation features sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses is easy to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices uses paraphrase effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows all the positive features of Band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 8
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriacies generally paraphrases successfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility may make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers produces simple speech fluently, but more complex communication causes fluency problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice rarely attempts paraphrase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences but subordinate structures are rare errors are frequent and may lead to misunderstanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a limited range of pronunciation features attempts to control features but lapses are frequent mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks with long pauses has limited ability to link simple sentences gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances makes numerous errors except in memorised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows some of the features of Band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 4

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			expressions	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pauses lengthily before most words • little communication possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only produces isolated words or memorised utterances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot produce basic sentence forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speech is often unintelligible
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no communication possible • no rateable language 			
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not attend 			

As you look through the scales, it may help to highlight words which make one band different from another.

For example, under Fluency and Coherence Band 7 it states that the candidate *speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence*, whereas in Band 6 the candidate *is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation*

How can I use the Speaking Band Descriptors with students?

You could:

1. Refer to the descriptors as you observe students carrying out an IELTS 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 examiner), make notes of what the students say and refer to the Speaking Band Descriptors, 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 a candidate called Mariana taking the IELTS Speaking test.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcalOTRV64g>

The four activities use this recording to practise using the Speaking Band Descriptors.

You may like to start with Activity 2 since this is based on Part 1 of the Speaking Test

Activity 1

1. Make a copy of the blank **Fluency and coherence** table on page 5. You will see that statements from the Speaking Band Descriptors have been turned into questions.
2. Watch the IELTS Speaking video part 2 (from about 4 minutes 45 to 7 mins 45).
3. Note down examples of what Mariana 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 **Lexical resource** table on page 6.
2. Watch the IELTS Speaking video part 1 (to about 4 minutes 45).
3. Note down examples of what Mariana does well and not so well for each of the questions in the Comments box on the assessment sheet.

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4. Compare the notes you have made with a completed example on page 10.

Activity 3:

1. Make a copy of the blank **Grammatical range and accuracy** table on page 7.
2. Watch the IELTS Speaking video part 3 (from about 7 minutes 45 to the end).
3. Note down examples of what Mariana 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 4:

1. Make a copy of the blank **Pronunciation** table on page 8.
5. Watch the IELTS Speaking video part 3 (from about 7 minutes 45 to the end).
2. Note down examples of what Mariana does well and not so well for each of the questions in the Comments box on the assessment sheet.
3. Compare the notes you have made with a completed example on page 12.

Remember:

- In a real IELTS 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. You may also like to use the some or all of the activities again with the other parts of the test.
- Being able to refer to the Speaking Band Descriptors 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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IELTS SPEAKING FLUENCY AND COHERENCE	
Name of student	
Are the answers of an appropriate length for the task?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker speak too slowly, hesitate, repeat or make corrections?	
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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IELTS SPEAKING LEXICAL RESOURCE	
Name of student	
Does the speaker use a range of vocabulary (everyday vocabulary / less common vocabulary / colloquial expressions)?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker use the vocabulary appropriately (word form / collocation)?	
Good	Not so good
Is the speaker able to paraphrase?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

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IELTS SPEAKING	
GRAMMATICAL RANGE & ACCURACY	
Name of student	
Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with control?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker use complex structures? Are they used accurately?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

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IELTS SPEAKING PRONUNCIATION	
Name of student	
Can the speaker be generally understood?	
Good	Not so good
Are individual sounds clear? Are they correctly produced?	
Good	Not so good
Does the speaker use word stress and sentence stress correctly?	
Good	Not so good
Is the speaker's intonation appropriate?	
Good	Not so good
Comments	

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IELTS SPEAKING	
FLUENCY AND COHERENCE	
Name of student MARIANA PART 2	
Are the answers of an appropriate length for the task?	
Good Speaks for the full two minutes	Not so good
Does the speaker speak too slowly, hesitate, repeat or make corrections?	
Good Speaks at a natural pace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>but actually it wasn't VIP at all</i> • <i>and went out to dinner in an Indian restaurant</i> • <i>he advised us on some places to stay while we were waiting for the visa</i> 	Not so good Tends to get more hesitant as she progresses and less coherent, self-corrects and uses – er- for hesitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to the – er – next border</i> • <i>he – er – informed us that we couldn't – would not be allowed</i> • <i>in the – on the internet</i>
Does the speaker use a range of cohesive devices and discourse markers?	
Good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>while we were waiting</i> • <i>actually it wasn't VIP at all</i> • <i>even gave us lunch</i> 	Not so good Some overuse of <i>so</i> and <i>and</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>so...we were in South-East Asia</i> • <i>so...we were in Vientien</i>
Comments	
<p>Speaks for the full two minutes so appropriate in length, and generally at a natural pace. She does, however, become rather hesitant at times and is rather repetitive towards the end of her turn. Relevant and generally well organised, though it would have been improved by more use of sequencing devices (after, then, when etc.). Coherent and easy to follow, although there is a tendency to overuse <i>so</i> and <i>and</i>, rather than a variety of connecting devices.</p>	

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IELTS SPEAKING LEXICAL RESOURCE			
Name of student MARIANA Part 1			
<p>Does the speaker use a range of vocabulary (everyday vocabulary / less common vocabulary / colloquial expressions)?</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>surfing</i> • <i>go out with my friends</i> • <i>quit the gymnastics</i> • <i>print them</i> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>around 12 till 16</i> (from 12 to 16) • <i>a photo camera</i> (a camera) • <i>come back to home</i> (go back home) </td> </tr> </table>		<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>surfing</i> • <i>go out with my friends</i> • <i>quit the gymnastics</i> • <i>print them</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>around 12 till 16</i> (from 12 to 16) • <i>a photo camera</i> (a camera) • <i>come back to home</i> (go back home)
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<p>Does the speaker use the vocabulary appropriately (word form / collocation)?</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>historical places</i> • <i>pretty warm</i> • <i>panoramic views over the sea</i> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>make an internship</i> (do an internship) • <i>knowing some other places</i> (getting to know some other places) • <i>charge them into my computer</i> (load them onto my computer) • <i>put them in a portrait</i> (put them in a frame) </td> </tr> </table>		<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>historical places</i> • <i>pretty warm</i> • <i>panoramic views over the sea</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>make an internship</i> (do an internship) • <i>knowing some other places</i> (getting to know some other places) • <i>charge them into my computer</i> (load them onto my computer) • <i>put them in a portrait</i> (put them in a frame)
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<p>Is the speaker able to paraphrase?</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Good</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Not so good</p> </td> </tr> </table>		<p>Good</p>	<p>Not so good</p>
<p>Good</p>	<p>Not so good</p>		
<p>Comments</p> <p>Despite inaccuracies in word choice and collocation, the speaker is able to speak at length on a variety of topics and to communicate reasonably clearly. Although she does not use paraphrase explicitly, she is able to express her ideas through the choice of clear, if sometimes inaccurate, expressions.</p>			

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IELTS SPEAKING	
GRAMMATICAL RANGE & ACCURACY	
Name of student MARIANA (Part 3)	
Does the speaker use simple grammatical forms with control?	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>they collect the money and buy a chair</i> • <i>parents should encourage them</i> • <i>those are the most common</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>that must came</i> (that must come) • <i>that's our duties</i> (those are our duties) • <i>my brother and their friends</i> (my brother and his friends) • <i>since 16 – we have to have 16</i> (from 16 – we have to be 16) • <i>I think the most popular are..</i> (is)
Does the speaker use complex structures? Are they used accurately?	
<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>encourage them to help other children</i> • <i>the different opportunities that we have today</i> • <i>to collect some money to give to the poor</i> • <i>they can be changed or help to buy a new chair</i> 	<p>Not so good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>other children that needs more than them</i> (other children that need more than them) • <i>helping doing their homework</i> (helping to do their homework) • <i>know what is being part of society</i> (know what it is to be part of society) • <i>help them who needs our help</i> (help those who need our help)
<p>Comments</p> <p>Generally fairly good grammatical control. There are errors in simple forms in agreement and verb form. There is a variety of structures and complex grammatical forms, but there is limited flexibility and errors often occur.</p>	

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FCE (LEVEL B2) SPEAKING PRONUNCIATION	
Name of student MARIANA (Part 3)	
Can the speaker be generally understood?	
Good Clear and easily understood most of the time.	Not so good <i>Heelchair</i> (Wheelchair) – although it is not clear whether this a pronunciation or lexical error
Are individual sounds clear? Are they correctly produced?	
Good Individual sounds are generally clear	Not so good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ospital</i> (hospital)
Does the speaker use word stress and sentence stress correctly?	
Good Word stress is correct. Sentence stress is nearly always correct. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>or help</i> to buy a new chair 	Not so good Uncertain delivery at times interferes with natural sentence stress with a tendency to give equal stress to each word <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>need – more – than - them</i>
Is the speaker's intonation appropriate?	
Good Intonation is generally good and never gets in the way of the meaning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>From the parents</i> □, from the schools □ 	Not so good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>the little ones</i> □ • <i>relate to others</i> □
Comments Pronunciation is clear and natural sounding. Certain individual sounds and intonation patterns are unusual, but they never cause misunderstanding. There is a rather sing-song intonation at times with overuse of a rising intonation. When the speaker is less sure what to say, this can affect the rhythm of the delivery.	