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Tips for the Speaking section

What to do in the speaking test

Before the test begins, the examiner will check your identification. For security reasons you will be asked to bring your passport or some other photographic identification. You may be asked to sign your name, which will be matched up with the photograph and signature on your IELTS application form.

The test will then be conducted in five phases, which we will now describe in turn.

Phase 1: Introduction

In Phase 1, the examiner will first introduce himself or herself and will invite you to do the same. You may be asked some general questions about your background, family, home or personal interests.

SKILL Greeting the interviewer and introducing yourself.

Phrases you could use:

- 'Good afternoon. My name is (name) .
- 'Hello. My name is (name)

Think about questions that the examiner might ask about the personal information you provided on the application form. With a partner, take turns interviewing each other with questions based on this information. Try to give full answers to each question, but say anything irrelevant.

Phase 2: Extended discourse

In phase 2, the interviewer will encourage you to speak for a longer period of time on a familiar topic. You may be asked to speak on topics related to your country, such as customs or lifestyle, and your personal involvement with these. The aim of Phase 2 is to show the interviewer that you can describe



something, tell a story, give information or directions or express your opinion without relying on the interviewer to help you through the task.

The idea is for you to talk and give as much information as you can. Do not simply answer 'yes' or 'no'. Remember, the interview should be like a conversation. Do not memorise responses. If you appear to be reciting from memory, the examiner will interrupt and ask a different question.

Before you begin preparing for Phase 2, you may wish to make a list of topics related to your country, culture, lifestyle, personal interests, etc. Once you have completed such a list, form questions that relate to each of the skills for this phase. Think about possible questions that could be asked.

With a speaking partner, practise interviewing and being interviewed. Try to give full and comprehensive answers to each question.

SKILL Providing general factual information.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'What are some important festivals in your country?'
- 'What kind of climate does your country have?'
- 'What are some of the main industries in your country?'

SKILL Expressing your opinions and attitudes.

Questions you may be asked:

- What do you enjoy about the traditional music of your country?
- 'What do you think are positive and negative aspects of your country's education system?'
- 'Would you prefer to live in the city or in the countryside and why?'

SKILL Describing a place, event or situation.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'Could you describe the village/town/city in which you grew up?'
- 'What happens during (cultural event, such as Chinese New Year/Christmas) in your country?'
- 'Could you tell me how you like to spend your leisure time?'

SKILL Comparing places, events or situations.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'How is (city where candidate is studying) different from (candidate's home city)?'
- 'What is the difference between shopping in (city where candidate is studying) and shopping in (candidate's home city)?'
- 'What do you like most about living in (country where candidate is studying)? How does that compare with (candidate's home country)?'

SKILL You should be able to give directions and instructions.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'Could you tell me, in detail, how you got from your home to the test centre this morning?'
- 'If I had to catch a train or bus in (candidate's home city) what would I do?'
- 'If I were to meet (an important older person) in your culture, how should I greet them to be polite and show respect?'

SKILL You should be able to re-tell a story or a sequence of events.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'What happens in (an important festival) in your country?'
- 'What is the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you?'
- 'What did you do when you were preparing to leave (candidate's home country) to come to (country of study)?'

SKILL Explaining how or why something is done.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'Why do people do what?'(referring to something just mentioned)
- 'Could you tell me more about the procedure involved in (the topic under discussion)'
- 'How do people celebrate the New Year in (candidate's country)?'

Phase 3: Monologue

In this part, you will be given a card with a topic on it and 1 minute to prepare a short talk. You will need to speak for 1 to 2 minutes until the examiner stops you. Make sure to use your preparation time wisely and take good notes.

Phase 4: Speculation and attitudes

In Phase 4, the interviewer will converse with you in greater depth on a particular topic. Topics that may be discussed include your plans for the immediate and long-term future and the impact that these may have on you and your family. Your opinion about, attitude towards and reasons for your particular future plans may also be discussed.

The interviewer may not understand or agree with some of your responses. You may be asked to expand or elaborate on some point that you have made, so be prepared for such a response. Being prepared, however, never means memorising set responses.

During Phase 4, the interviewer will allow the discussion to become more complex. He or she may refer to other comments you have previously made so you may have to defend your opinion or give a more detailed explanation of an idea you have already mentioned.

Before you begin preparing for Phase 4, you may wish to make a list of your future plans under the headings of academic, professional, personal and possible

consequences of these plans. Also, make a list of topics that relate to your personal interests in life as well as a wider range of topics relating to your country, profession and specific area of study.

SKILL Expressing your feelings, opinions and attitudes.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'What are your thoughts about (controversial issue)?'
- 'How would you feel if (a controversial issue) were to happen in the next three or four years?'
- 'You seem to support (a controversial viewpoint). Why is this?'
- 'Have you ever had to choose between (X) and (Y)? How did you make this decision? How did you feel as a result of your choice?'

SKILL Explaining why you made certain decisions in the past and giving reasons for your plans for the future.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'How did you know that you wanted to become a (candidate's choice of profession)?'
- 'When did you decide to study overseas? What influenced you to make this decision?'
- 'Why have you decided to study (candidate's choice of study)? How will this help your future career?'

SKILL Expressing agreement and disagreement.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'I agree with you to a point on this matter, but could you expand on it a little more, please?'
- 'I'm not quite convinced by what you are saying. Could you develop your idea more for me, please?'
- 'I'm sorry I don't quite understand what you are trying to say. Could you put it another way, please?'

Phrases you could use when agreeing:

- 'Well, of course ... Naturally ... I couldn't agree more ...'

Phrases you could use when disagreeing:

- 'I'm sorry. I can't agree with you ... I don't really think so ...'
- 'That may be so but ... Unfortunately, I have a different point of view ...'

SKILL Discussing hypothetical situations and speculating on future events.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'How do you think having a degree from an overseas university is going to help your job prospects when you return to (candidate's home country)?'
- 'Do you think that the time spent studying in a foreign country is going to benefit you personally? If so, in what ways?'
- 'How do you think your country benefits when students return from studying abroad?'

SKILL Following and responding to changes in tone and direction in the interview.

Questions you may be asked:

- 'Do you have any regrets about choosing (candidate's choice of profession) or (candidate's choice of country in which to study)?'
- 'If you could repeat the year of your life, what would you do differently?'
- 'What advice would you give other students planning on (studying overseas)?'

Phase 5: Conclusion

This is the final section of the assessment and will naturally follow on from Phase 4. The interviewer will let you know that the interview has come to an end, wish you good luck and say goodbye.

You can prepare yourself for this phase by becoming familiar with common expressions of leave-taking, noting them and practising responses to them.

SKILLS Noting that the interview is finishing and saying thank you (with a smile!).

Phrases you could use:

- 'Thank you very much.'
- 'Goodbye.'
- 'See you.'

Coping with the interview

There may be times in the interview when you may not understand what the examiner is saying because he or she may be speaking too softly or too quickly. Perhaps the examiner may be using words or phrases you do not know. At these times, do not be afraid to assert yourself. Ask the examiner to speak more loudly, more slowly or to use other words. Also, do not hesitate to ask the examiner to repeat his or her words at any time.

Phrases you could use:

- 'Could I ask you to speak more loudly please?'
- 'Sorry but I didn't catch that. Would you please repeat what you just said?'
- 'I'm not quite sure what you mean. Could you explain it to me?'



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