

Listening and Speaking Assessment: Task Development Guidelines

Over the last couple of years speaking and listening assessment has been included in school based assessment. In order to give you more practice in developing speaking and listening assessment tasks and to develop a bank of speaking and listening test items that can be used in secondary schools in Sri Lanka, the British Council and the Ministry of Education would like to invite you to develop two tasks that can be used as school based assessments to assess speaking and listening.

On successful submission of your tasks, these will be reviewed and if they meet the criteria they will become part of a digital assessment pack to be shared nationally. You will also receive a British Council certificate and may be invited to participate in workshops to develop the tasks further. Your entry will be judged by representatives from the British Council and the Ministry of Education. Judging will take place nationally. The winner will receive a Samsung Galaxy Tab and the runner up will win a smart phone. There will also be prizes for provincial winners. The three best from the 9 provinces will go into the national round.

Note : If you competed in the previous British Council English Language MOOC assessment competition, you can compete in this one also but you cannot submit the same entry.

Before we look at the guidelines for the assessment tasks, let's review some key points on the assessment of speaking and listening. These points will be important when developing your assessment tasks.

Speaking

In **real life** when we speak we consider three areas:

- Audience – who we are speaking to
- Reason – why we are speaking
- Social conditions – social context we are speaking in

When developing tasks for testing speaking we need to consider the same things.

Common formats and tasks for speaking assessment

The most common formats for speaking assessment are the following: -

- Interviews
- Oral presentations
- Interactive tasks
- Group discussions

The most common tasks for assessing speaking are the following:-

- Describing something (eg a picture)
- Comparing things
- Telling stories
- Giving personal information

Settings for assessing speaking can include live, recorded, face to face or remote (phone or internet). As we are focusing on school-based assessment, we need to assume a face to face setting. Descriptors have already been developed for grade 6 (see Appendix). Please keep these in mind when developing speaking tasks.

Top tips for developing speaking tests

1. As with all tests, we start by deciding what exactly we want to test; based on this, we choose the best task type.
2. Check the speaking competencies that your grade covers. Decide to focus on one of these.
3. The task must address the needs of the test, for example, if they need to practice cohesion or fluency or accuracy then the task needs to allow them to do this.
4. The task must involve students producing real speaking rather than memorised chunks.
5. Look at the descriptors that have been developed for the grade 6 assessment criteria. This will help you to consider different aspects of speaking when designing the task.
6. Make sure the **instructions** are clear, so that students know exactly what to do.
7. It's a good idea to get the test task checked by another teacher.

Listening

Listening assessments can test different sub skills of listening. The sub skills include

- Listening for gist
- Listening for specific information
- Listening for detail
- Listening for attitude
- Listening for inferred meaning

The first three tend to be tested at lower levels of proficiency while the last two are tested at higher levels of proficiency.

Task types for assessing listening

- Multiple choice questions (MCQs) or True/ False (T/F)
- Gap fills or cloze tests
- Short answer questions
- Information transfer
- Integrated tasks
- Dictation

For the purposes of this task we will focus on the first four task types.

Top tips for developing listening tests

1. Make sure that the questions used test listening skills and cannot be answered from general knowledge.

2. As with all tests, we start by deciding what exactly we want to test; based on this, we choose the best task type and, thus, the best scoring method.
3. Make sure the **instructions** are clear, so that students know exactly what to do. It's generally a good idea to include an example to avoid any possible misunderstanding.
4. It's a good idea to get the test checked by another teacher.
5. We need to decide how we are going to **score** the test, and make sure that our students understand what the criteria are. For example, we want to determine the **weighting** of the different tasks and questions. Are we going to give each correct answer 1 point regardless of the difficulty of the question or task? Or are we going to assign more points for a more difficult task?
8. If students have to write something, we need to decide how we are going to mark their answers if there is a mistake in their spelling, or grammar, or vocabulary. When deciding whether to **deduct points for grammatical or spelling mistakes**, we should always consider first the purpose of our test.
9. Scoring in a listening assessment needs to target the information that the assessor thinks is reasonable to assess for the age, level and context of the learners.
10. Scoring should allow for useful **feedback** to be provided to learners – they need to know where they made errors.
11. Generally, **punctuation** should not be considered a feature of a test of listening.

Assessing Young Learners

As well as taking into consideration points specific to the skills of speaking and listening, we also need to consider the age group of the students. Young learners have different needs compared to adults, and their needs change as they get older. We can see differences in their thinking, speaking, attention span and behaviour. If we think about these differences, we can make students feel comfortable in assessments. This helps students to perform at their best. 'Young learners' usually means ages five to seventeen. Within that age range, we can think about three basic groups.

5-8 years old: At this age, students are still learning a lot in their own language, and about the world around them. They learn new words easily, often by repeating what they hear. So, testing vocabulary with pictures, for example, is a good way to start. At this age, however, testing writing skills is probably not useful.

9-12 years old: At this age, students' attention spans are increasing, but it is still important to make tasks fun, and not too long. This makes assessment feel comfortable and motivating. Doing speaking tasks with friends can work well at this age, for example: role-play tasks.

13-17 years old: This is a time of great change, and can make talking to adults feel a bit awkward. So, again, doing speaking tasks in pairs or small groups may work better than talking one-to-one with an adult teacher. Although they are becoming more mature, teenagers are not adults yet. They may need more support than adults during assessment activities, and we shouldn't expect them to know all the same vocabulary as adults .

When you write your tests, we are only thinking about **secondary** school students.

When you write your test think about your students and what you are testing and try to answer these four questions:

- Are the test tasks relevant to students' real-life language needs?
- Do the test tasks encourage students to *think* like they would in real-life communication?

- Does the test copy the social conditions in which the students will communicate?
- Do the test results give us useful information about students' ability to use the language?

If your answers to any of these are "no" then rethink your test task. *Adapted from the British Council English Language Assessment MOOC December 2020*

You will need to complete a table as below. This is a sample of completed listening and speaking tasks summary..

	Listening	Speaking
Grade	6	6
Age	10-11	10-11
Competency (-ies) level	3.3 Listens to a simple text for specific information	8.3 -Describes objects, animals, people using simple sentence patterns
Learning outcome	Students will be able to listen to and find specific information such as names of persons, animals places, dates, days, months, years, etc;	Students will be able to speak about cat, dog, parrot, butterfly, my pet etc;
Construct (sub-skills)	Listening for specific information, listening for detailed information	Fluency; appropriate vocab grammar and pronunciation
Task type	(MCQ) Listen and underline/ select	Describing a picture
School term	3	3
Textbook Unit	09	11
Time for task	10 minutes	3 minutes
Interaction	Individual	Individual
Materials needed	Script of a simple story, task sheets of a table; answer key	Pictures

Appendix one:

Testing Speaking Skills in English – Grade 6

Category	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Above Satisfactory
Accuracy in Pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary	<p>1 mark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates with frequent grammar mistakes Frequently mispronounces key words Uses very limited vocabulary 	<p>2 marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates with occasional grammatical slips; attempts self-correction Speaks clearly, with occasional mispronunciation of few words Uses vocabulary appropriate to the task 	<p>3 marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates precisely with minimal grammar mistakes Speaks clearly and distinctly with minimal mispronunciation Uses wide range of vocabulary
Interactive communication	<p>1 mark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less interaction, rare turn taking, mostly one way communication 	<p>2 marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiates and continues the conversation with appropriate turn taking 	<p>3 marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continues the conversation freely using spontaneous utterances and appropriate paralinguistic features
Fluency	<p>1 mark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses fragmental utterances 	<p>2 marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates with some hesitation Flow is mostly smooth 	<p>3 marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates confidently Very good flow with appropriate linkers
Task completion	<p>1 mark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to communicate but does not complete all tasks 	<p>2 marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completes the task competently 	<p>3 marks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completes the task more than competently
Total	4	8	12