

SPEAKING TESTS. ORAL INTERVIEWS

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To make speaking tests less intensive it is advisable to forestall them with oral interviews. Many teachers think of the interview as simply a series of questions and answers. And some amount to no more than that: «What is your name? How old are you? ». But the whole thing is held together by the constant interaction of the interviewer and the student. Instead of simply reciting information, the student is actually talking with someone! The oral interview can provide a genuine sense of communication. For this reason rapport is important. Most of us remember being ineffectual on occasion when feeling threatened or talked down. The good interviewer is neither harsh nor familiar, condescending nor intimidating. A sincere, open, supportive manner is most effective. For this reason a guided oral interview is recommended. Your cues for the interview need to be prepared in advance. Parts of the interview - especially the initial warming up - can appear so relaxed that the student may not even be aware that he is being evaluated at that moment. If you know something about the student you can tailor and personalize the questions. A variety of question types is used, especially when testing new students whose skills we are not sure of. Early in the interview we may ask yes / no questions. More demand is placed on the student when we use an information (wh-) question. Appropriate responses to statements are still more demanding. It is important when using statements as cues to pause briefly and look at the student as though expecting a response. Otherwise examinees may not feel that any response is needed.

Items on the guided interview will vary in difficulty, with easier questions coming earlier. However, after a rather challenging item or two, it is good to insert one or two easy questions. This can help relieve tension and allow the student to regain confidence. The level of difficulty of items should vary both to maintain student confidence and the flow of the interview and also provide an opportunity for the teacher to see how competent the student really is. For upper-intermediate to advanced students the interview can be concluded with a challenging item on some contemporary social issue.

Finally, the interview should not be limited to just questions or statements. Visuals and paraphrase techniques can be used.