



ISE: Integrated Skills in English

Understanding the rating scale

Speaking module

Responding to questions, Delivering a prepared talk
and Interacting

ISE Digital



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ISE Digital speaking task

Responding to questions

Theoretical background

The Responding to questions task assesses the candidate's ability to use language in informal, personal interactions, responding to common questions encountered in everyday social situations. These might include making small talk at social gatherings, engaging in conversations at parties or events, or meeting new colleagues or classmates.

The task reflects routine communication scenarios where individuals interact informally, exchange opinions and share personal experiences. Such interactions are a fundamental part of both personal and professional life. Successful communicators can understand and respond to questions spontaneously and naturally, expressing opinions and describing experiences effectively while adapting their responses to different social contexts.

Task description

The Responding to questions task recreates informal interactions where candidates are expected to respond appropriately to questions, using natural, conversational language.

The candidate responds to three questions in two different topic areas. The second and third questions are thematically linked, simulating turns in a conversation. Depending on the level, the questions range from personal or familiar topics and routines to expressing opinions and advice to evaluating and justifying an argument.

There is no preparation time for these questions; just as in real life, the candidate is expected to formulate a response and start speaking immediately. The candidate has 30 seconds to respond to each question.

For examples of Responding to questions, see [Appendix 2](#).

ISE Digital speaking task

Delivering a prepared talk

Theoretical background

The Delivering a prepared talk task assesses the candidate's ability to deliver a short, monologic (uninterrupted) talk, an essential skill in both educational and professional environments, where individuals are frequently required to communicate information to an audience. The task reflects real-life scenarios in which speakers are asked to speak for an extended period of time about a particular topic, with time to plan and structure their ideas beforehand. Often, speakers answer follow-up questions from the audience.

Good communicators can prepare a talk that is clear, well-organised and suitable for the audience. They carefully consider what information to include, how to organise it so that the ideas are easy to follow and how to make the message appropriate for those listening. While prepared talks often make use of more complex grammar and vocabulary, effective communicators still use natural phrasing and avoid sounding overly formal. Finally, they may use notes to help them during the talk, but they avoid reading directly from a script, as this can sound unnatural and make it harder to connect with the audience. They use natural stress and intonation to highlight important points and to keep the audience engaged.

Task description

The Delivering a prepared talk task recreates short talks or presentations typically encountered in educational and occupational settings. The candidate has two minutes to speak uninterrupted on a topic of their choice. They can use a mind map or an outline that has been prepared in advance, but they cannot read from a script.

After the talk, there is a follow-up question, simulating real-world scenarios where speakers need to engage in further discussion or provide clarification after a presentation. They have 30 seconds to respond.

For examples of Delivering a prepared talk, see [Appendix 2](#).

ISE Digital speaking task

Interacting

Theoretical background

The Interacting task assesses the candidate's ability to engage with individuals in a wide variety of settings, from their community and school to work and public spaces. These interactions can range from simple transactions to more complex negotiations, requiring the candidate to adapt their language based on the context, the relationship with the interlocutor and the purpose of the exchange. The task mirrors the unpredictability of real-life conversations, where candidates must listen carefully, acknowledge new information or shifts in the discussion and then adjust their response to address naturally what the other person has said.

Effective communicators are able to interact comfortably in both formal and informal situations, demonstrating flexibility in their responses to unexpected turns in conversation. Pragmatic skills are key here, as candidates must adjust their tone, formality and content to suit the situation and the relationship with the other person. The task focuses on using language spontaneously and appropriately to navigate real-world interactions from requests and complaints to suggestions and advice to negotiation and collaboration.

Task description

The Interacting task recreates personal interactions that occur in social, educational and occupational settings.

The candidate listens to a description of a scenario and is given two bullet points that guide what they need to achieve in their response (eg make a request, suggestion, complaint, apology). They have 15 seconds to think about their response, then they have one minute to speak.

The candidate then receives a response that introduces new or unexpected information to the interaction. The candidate must reply considering this new information in their follow-up response. They have 30 seconds to speak.

For examples of Interacting, see [Appendix 3](#).

Note: Information about the Summarising a talk or conversation task can be found [here](#).

Rating scale

Overview and general principles

Assessment foci

The speaking rating scale comprises three assessment categories:

Task fulfilment

- Assesses the ability to respond to tasks and questions with relevant details, organise ideas coherently and respond fully in the time allowed.

Language

- Assesses the ability to use a range of grammar and lexis accurately and effectively.

Delivery

- Assesses the ability to use stress, intonation and pace appropriately for the context, audience and purpose and effective pronunciation and fluency.

General principles

Analytic scoring

Each task is awarded three different scores, one for each category. The scores are independent and do not influence each other. All criteria contribute equally to the final score.

Note: Responding to questions and Delivering a prepared talk are scored together, so a single set of scores is awarded for these two tasks. Marking the tasks together helps balance planned and impromptu speech, giving a fairer indication of authentic communicative skills.

Order of descriptors

The order of descriptors within each band indicates their relative importance. Descriptors listed first are more important than those listed at the bottom.

Best fit

Our rating uses the 'best fit' approach. Raters are trained to use the band that best matches the response overall, considering the importance of each descriptor.

Band 0

Band 0 represents 'no performance'. This means the task was not attempted, or no response is audible or the response is not in English. A score of 0 in one category automatically results in a score of 0 in all categories.

Task fulfilment

The category **Task fulfilment** is the same as in Understanding the speaking rating scale: Summarising a talk or conversation. The FAQs below are specific to the Responding to questions, Delivering a prepared talk and Interacting tasks.

The **Task fulfilment** category assesses:

The candidate's ability to answer the question with relevant details, organise ideas coherently and respond fully in the time allowed.

What is assessed:

- ▶ The extent to which the candidate responds to all parts of the question or task (all questions or bullet points addressed) and how well informed the listener is.
- ▶ The relevance of the supporting details.
- ▶ How well the ideas are organised, how easy the message is to follow.
- ▶ How well the ideas are expressed in the time allowed.

What is not assessed:

- ▶ Whether the range of language, accuracy and/or choice of language is appropriate. This is assessed in [Language](#).
- ▶ Whether the response is fluent and easy to understand. This is assessed in [Delivery](#).

Task fulfilment rating scale

Responding to questions | Delivering a prepared talk | Interacting

Score ▶ Ability to respond to task with relevant details, organise ideas coherently and respond fully in the time allowed.

Task has been comprehensively fulfilled; listener is fully informed.

5

- ▶ Response fully addresses task; all parts of task covered comprehensively.
- ▶ Ideas are relevant, clear and well supported by detail.
- ▶ Excellent coherence; response is well organised and progression of ideas is clear and logical.
- ▶ Response is comprehensive and concludes naturally in the time allowed.

Task has been effectively fulfilled; listener is well informed and is left with only minor questions.

4

- ▶ Response effectively addresses task; some minor parts of task may be missed, but response is effective.
- ▶ Ideas are relevant and supported by detail with occasional lack of clarity or irrelevance.
- ▶ Good coherence; response is organised and can be followed with ease.
- ▶ Response is complete but end may be slightly rushed or cut off.

Task has been sufficiently fulfilled; listener is informed, but is left with some questions.

3

- ▶ Response mostly addresses task; some parts more effectively covered than others, so response is not fully effective.
- ▶ Most ideas are relevant but some parts of response are irrelevant, unclear or not supported by detail.
- ▶ Adequate coherence; some lapses in organisation, but listener can follow message despite some gaps.
- ▶ Response may be incomplete and end abruptly.

Task has been partially fulfilled; listener is only minimally informed and is left with significant questions.

2

- ▶ Response addresses only some parts of task; what is attempted lacks development, so response is incomplete.
- ▶ A few relevant ideas, but vague response with limited detail and noticeable omissions.
- ▶ Limited coherence; response often lacks organisation and may cause some confusion for listener.
- ▶ Response may be short or some parts are off topic.

Task has been insufficiently fulfilled; listener is scarcely informed.

1

- ▶ Response addresses task in a very restricted way; response is brief or repetitive with limited connection to task.
- ▶ Very few relevant ideas, and supporting detail is basic or irrelevant.
- ▶ Lack of coherence; response is not organised and requires effort from the listener.
- ▶ Response short or off topic; may have misunderstood some part of the task.

0 Task is either: Not attempted **OR** not audible **OR** not answered in English.

Task fulfilment: Frequently asked questions

How much detail is needed for the top score?

The level of detail expected varies depending on the task. For example, the Interacting task requires a 60-second response, which will naturally include more supporting detail than a 30-second response, such as Responding to questions. To achieve the top score, the answer does not need to be entirely comprehensive, but it should be thorough, cover all bullet points and fully inform the listener on all parts of the question.

What if a response is short and does not use the full time allowed?

There is no requirement for a candidate to use the full time allocated for each question. However, very short responses are unlikely to effectively address all parts of the task, so candidates are encouraged to start speaking promptly and to answer as comprehensively as possible.

What if the candidate does not respond to one of the questions or does not address one of the bullet points?

If all other parts of the task are addressed effectively, and the ideas are relevant with good coherence, then the listener is 'informed but left with some questions', and the response would receive a maximum band 3 score. However, if other parts of the task are not fully addressed, the score could be lower.

The Responding to questions and Delivering a prepared talk tasks are assessed together. If no talk is offered for Delivering a prepared talk, the maximum score would be band 2 as the task has not been sufficiently fulfilled.

What is the difference between 'some parts of response are irrelevant' (band 3) and 'some parts are off topic' (band 2)?

A response at band 3 contains mostly relevant information with a few unnecessary or irrelevant details, so the listener is generally informed, but the response is slightly less than complete. At band 2, the response demonstrates limited development, with few details, and may drift off topic, leaving the listener with significant questions, indicating the task has not been adequately fulfilled.

What if the response is cut off?

This can make it harder for the listener to fully understand the message, as a rushed or incomplete ending may not provide enough information, leaving the listener with questions. As a result, the score for **Task fulfilment** may be lower. Candidates are recommended to manage their time carefully so they can finish their answers in the time provided.

Language

The Language category assesses:

The candidate's ability to use a range of grammar and lexis accurately and effectively.

What is assessed:

- ▶ The extent to which the candidate uses a range of grammatical structures.
- ▶ The extent to which the candidate uses a range of lexis.
- ▶ The effectiveness and appropriacy of their grammatical and linguistic choices.
- ▶ The level of accuracy and the impact of any errors.

What is not assessed:

- ▶ Whether the language is relevant to the prompt and coherent. This is assessed in Task fulfilment.
- ▶ Whether words are pronounced correctly and the language is fluent. This is assessed in Delivery.

Language rating scale

Responding to questions | Delivering a prepared talk | Interacting

Score ▶ Ability to use a range of grammar and lexis accurately and effectively.

Communicates with flexibility and ease, distinguishing between fine shades of meaning.

5

- ▶ Range of structures used flexibly, appropriately and effectively.
- ▶ Lexically rich (including collocations, idioms, less common vocabulary); express themselves with clarity and precision.
- ▶ High degree of accuracy, response appropriate and virtually error free, although slips of the tongue may occur.

Communicates with clarity, with little need to compromise message.

4

- ▶ Mix of simple and complex structures used mostly appropriately and effectively.
- ▶ Broad lexical repertoire including some less common vocabulary.
- ▶ Occasional errors in accuracy, but with only minor impact.

Communicates sufficiently, without much sign of a compromised message.

3

- ▶ Mix of simple and complex structures; complex forms may be less accurate but do not interrupt flow.
- ▶ Good range of common lexis; some inappropriate choices when attempting less common vocabulary.
- ▶ Errors are noticeable, but do not impede understanding.

Communicates intelligibly, despite signs of a compromised message.

2

- ▶ Simple structures used effectively; complex forms, if attempted, have a poor effect on comprehension.
- ▶ Limited range of lexis; inappropriate vocabulary choices may stand out.
- ▶ Errors are noticeable and at times cause interruption or misunderstanding.

Manages to express only a simple message.

1

- ▶ Simple structures attempted but with frequent inaccuracies.
- ▶ Very limited range of lexis; often searches for words.
- ▶ Errors predominate and disrupt communication.

0 Task is either: Not attempted **OR** not audible **OR** not answered in English.

Language: Frequently asked questions

How much linguistic complexity and sophistication is needed for the top score?

Candidates should show evidence of a range of structures and precise lexical choices with few errors. For the prepared talk, candidates have an opportunity to showcase a broader range of syntax and lexis, but the language should be natural and authentic. To get full marks, candidates should use a range of simple and complex language effectively for all the responses.

Is off-topic language penalised?

Language is assessed independently from the other categories, so the score for Language is not influenced by the relevance of the response. Relevance, or lack of it, is assessed in Task fulfilment.

What if a response is very short?

There is no requirement for a candidate to use the full time allocated for each question. However, very short responses are unlikely to demonstrate a wide range of grammar and vocabulary, so candidates are encouraged to answer all questions as comprehensively as possible.

What happens if there is repetition of language?

Repetition limits the range of language shown. Responses with a wide variety of vocabulary and grammar will score higher than those which repeatedly use the same words or structures.

What if the language produced for Responding to questions is substantially different from Delivering a prepared talk?

The mark for Language reflects the balance between the two tasks, not one or the other. For example, if the language used in Delivering a prepared talk is highly sophisticated and accurate, but in Responding to questions the responses only show simple grammar and vocabulary with noticeable errors, it will likely receive a mid-range score (eg band 3). Candidates are advised not to memorise language that is far beyond their level, as this can make the language sound unnatural. Attempting to use overly complex language is unlikely to improve their Language score significantly and may even lower it if it leads to errors.

What if the language produced is inappropriate?

Appropriacy depends on the context, the relationship with the interlocutor and the purpose of communication. Because of this, it can be viewed as a continuum rather than a fixed standard, and different types of language may be acceptable in the same situation. However, when grammatical or lexical choices are clearly unsuitable for the context (eg using slang or overly casual language in a formal meeting with a manager), this will affect the Language score. Likewise, pragmatically inappropriate choices (eg impolite or rude language) may lower the Task fulfilment score if they prevent the message from achieving the communicative purpose of the task, for instance, when apologising.

For further information on appropriacy in speaking, see Appendix 1.

Delivery

The category **Delivery** is the same as in Understanding the speaking rating scale: Summarising a talk or conversation. The FAQs below are specific to the Responding to questions, Delivering a prepared talk, and Interacting tasks.

The **Delivery** category assesses:

The candidate's ability to use stress, intonation and pace for the demands of the context, audience and purpose; effective pronunciation and fluency.

What is assessed:

- ▶ The extent to which the candidate uses stress, intonation and pace to convey meaning and the impact on the listener.
- ▶ The extent to which the candidate's pronunciation of individual sounds, words and phrases is clear and comprehensible.
- ▶ The extent to which pauses, hesitations and speed of delivery impact the listener.

What is not assessed:

- ▶ The candidate's accent. The candidate's pronunciation is only assessed on how comprehensible it is.

Delivery rating scale

Responding to questions | Delivering a prepared talk | Interacting

Score ▶ Ability to use stress, intonation and pace for the demands of the context, audience and purpose; effective pronunciation and fluency.

Virtually no effort required from listener to understand response.

- ▶ Stress, intonation and pace used effectively to convey key points and add meaning.
- 5** ▶ Clear, accurate pronunciation.
- ▶ High degree of fluency and natural pace; speech flows naturally with hesitations and pauses used to enhance response.

Minimal effort required from listener to understand response.

- ▶ Stress, intonation and pace consistent and used to good effect; easy to understand.
- 4** ▶ Clear pronunciation with occasional errors which do not affect understanding.
- ▶ Fluent with only minor lapses or slow speech; occasional hesitation or pauses to find words.

Occasional effort required from listener to understand response.

- ▶ Generally appropriate stress, intonation and pace but some inconsistency.
- 3** ▶ Mostly clear pronunciation; incorrect pronunciation of individual sounds may distract the listener, but comprehensible.
- ▶ Reasonable fluency, but hesitations, pauses, false starts can make response seem disjointed.

Some effort required from listener to understand response.

- 2** ▶ Issues with stress, intonation and pace (including slow or fast speech) affect comprehension.
- ▶ Pronunciation errors can be intrusive and at times may cause difficulty for listener.
- ▶ Occasional fluency, but hesitations, pauses and false starts impede the response.

Considerable effort required from listener, and some parts of response unintelligible.

- 1** ▶ Inaccurate stress, intonation and pace cause difficulty for the listener.
- ▶ Mostly inaccurate pronunciation frequently causes difficulty for the listener.
- ▶ Fluency not maintained; hesitations, frequent pauses and false starts make some parts of the response unintelligible.

- 0** Task is either: Not attempted **OR** not audible **OR** not answered in English.

Delivery: Frequently asked questions

In order to receive the top score, should the response be flawless without any errors or hesitations?

Band 5 describes a performance that requires almost no effort on the part of the listener. Natural features of speech such as slowing down or self-correction are not penalised if they are used to enhance the message and do not cause any effort for the listener.

What if there are pauses to look for words?

This may affect the **Delivery** score, depending on the frequency and effect on the listener. For example, a response that is mostly clear, relatively easy to follow and maintains overall fluency but with occasional pauses or hesitations requiring minor effort from the listener, would receive band 4. However, if the pauses are more frequent or longer and give a sense of disfluency to the response, requiring some effort or strain from the listener, the score would be band 3.

What if the delivery for Responding to questions is substantially different from Delivering a prepared talk?

The mark for **Delivery** reflects the balance between the two tasks, not one or the other. For example, if the delivery of the prepared talk is fully effective but in Responding to questions the listener struggles to understand due to issues with pronunciation, stress or intonation, the response is likely to get a mid-range score (eg band 3).

What about a candidate's accent?

It is natural that a candidate's pronunciation is affected by other languages they speak. Regardless of their accent, if the speech is clear, natural and fluent, a candidate can achieve the highest score for **Delivery**. However, if there are pronunciation or intonation errors which force the listener to make extra effort, the score for **Delivery** will be lower.

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1. Key concepts in the Speaking rating scale

Accuracy

What is it?

Accuracy refers to how free a speaker's language is from errors. Errors can be classified in different ways, such as by their linguistic category (eg pronunciation, grammar) or their cause (eg slips, false cognates). However, the ISE Digital rating scale does not focus on these classifications. Instead, raters assess accuracy solely based on:

- ▶ whether errors cause misunderstanding
- ▶ how frequently errors occur – too many errors can make listening difficult.

Appropriacy

What is it?

Appropriacy (or appropriateness) means using language that fits the context, the relationship with the listener and the purpose of communication. This involves not only grammar and vocabulary but also pragmatic and sociocultural awareness, such as choosing a suitable level of politeness and formality or recognising what is implied versus what is stated. Effective communication depends on choosing language suitable to the situation and ensuring the listener interprets the message as intended.

Appropriacy in spontaneous speech

In informal, everyday interaction, speakers often use contractions (eg I'm, don't), personal pronouns and colloquial expressions (eg gonna, wanna). These features help create a natural, conversational tone that suits the context. Appropriacy in this type of speech also means being able to adapt language in real time to match changes in the situation and respond to the listener's feedback. For example, if a conversation shifts from relaxed to more serious, the speaker may switch from casual phrases ('yeah, sure') to more formal responses ('yes, of course') or avoid slang or humour. This is particularly relevant to the Interacting task of the ISE Digital, where candidates are encouraged to pay particular attention to the situation and react appropriately.

Appropriacy in rehearsed speech

In prepared tasks, the level of formality usually depends on the audience and topic. A presentation for classmates might allow a friendly, relaxed style, while a talk at a conference would require more precise, formal language. This is particularly relevant to the Delivering a prepared talk task of the ISE Digital, where candidates are encouraged to match their style to the subject. For example, a talk on education policy should use more formal vocabulary and structure, whereas a talk about a special family tradition can be delivered in a more personal style, while still maintaining clarity and organisation.

Coherence

What is it?

Coherence is the ability to organise ideas in a way that is clear, logical and easy for the listener to follow.

Coherence in spontaneous speech

Unrehearsed spoken language is usually produced in shorter thought units, such as phrases and clauses, rather than in long, complex sentences. Even so, it follows a logical flow. Speakers often use everyday discourse markers (eg *so*, *anyway*, *but*) to connect ideas. They rely on intonation, stress and pauses to show structure and meaning and may repeat words for clarity instead of using words like *this*, *that* or *it* to refer back to what has already been mentioned (anaphoric references).

Coherence in rehearsed speech

Rehearsed speech is often more organised. It tends to include more formal discourse markers (eg *consequently*, *in addition*) and reference words (eg *this*, *it*, *they*). Because the ideas are planned in advance, rehearsed speech usually has a tighter logical flow and can convey complex ideas more efficiently.

Fluency

What is it?

Fluency is the ability to speak smoothly and at a natural pace, without long pauses that break the flow.

Fluency in spontaneous speech

Unplanned speech naturally includes repetition, self-corrections and rephrasing as speakers think on the spot and adapt to the immediate context, audience and feedback.

Fluency in rehearsed speech

Intonation and pauses play a key role in rehearsed speech, but they serve to enhance clarity and emphasis rather than signal real-time processing. A polished delivery with controlled pacing, strategic pauses and varied intonation helps maintain audience engagement and highlight key points, making the speech both coherent and compelling.

Intonation

What is it?

Intonation is the rise and fall of pitch in speech.

Intonation in spontaneous speech

In spontaneous speech, intonation is often varied and natural, reflecting the speaker's thoughts and reactions in real time. It helps signal turns, indicate questions, agreement or disagreement and express emotions.

Intonation in rehearsed speech

In rehearsed speech, intonation is more controlled and purposeful. Speakers use it to emphasise key ideas, create a polished delivery and help the listener follow the structure of the message. Thoughtful intonation makes the speech sound natural and engaging, even when carefully planned. For example, in the Delivering a prepared talk task of the ISE Digital, candidates are encouraged to vary their intonation to avoid a flat or robotic tone; to use rising intonation to signal new and important ideas and falling intonation at the end of main points to show closure.

Linguistic range and complexity

What is it?

Linguistic range and complexity refer to the variety and sophistication of grammar and vocabulary a speaker uses.

Linguistic range and complexity in spontaneous speech

Spontaneous speech typically uses shorter thought units, such as phrases and clauses, rather than long, structured sentences. Speakers may use simpler grammatical forms and more repetitive structures when thinking on the spot. However, complexity can still be demonstrated through varied vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and the ability to adapt language to the context in real time.

Linguistic range and complexity in rehearsed speech

This often includes longer sentences, more varied grammatical forms and carefully chosen vocabulary. Speakers can incorporate complex clauses, subordinate ideas and nuanced phrasing because they have time to prepare and refine their message.

Examples of complex structures

In the following excerpts of candidate language, there are instances of complex structures (despite some errors). Some examples have been highlighted.

- ▶ She **has always had** a difficult life and **despite** that uh she looked after me and my brothers...
(complex verb phrase, anaphoric reference)
- ▶ ...they have **so many things to do for school like homework**... and they also **have a lot of extra-curricular activities** and they no longer get a **chance to just be kids**... they have to be **mature** from a very young age... **there is a lot of responsibility they hold**... **what's more**...
(noun phrases, adjective clause, range of lexis, good coherence)
- ▶ I do believe **that uh we will see** more electric cars in future because um **people are becoming more and more aware** of the uh the **impact uh fuel has on uh and pollution has on the world and global warming**... and I think um people will tend to uh go towards electric cars more...
(in spite of hesitations – noun, adjective, adverb clauses, conjunction, self-correction)
- ▶ I think that um **people around me are really important**... and I think that uh **with their help I can uh I get to do almost everything**...
(noun clause, self-correction, mature idea)
- ▶ Uh **see the thing is** I was uh... there was uh a little boy on a tricycle and he just got in front of me... and **in order for me not to hit him** I had to move my bike... and I accidentally bumped into your car...
(colloquial language, use of fillers to buy time to develop the story, complex prepositional phrase)
- ▶ Clearly I um will **pay if it is necessary** to you **to fix the scratch I caused**...
(in spite of disjointed word order – adverb clause, adjective clause, colloquial language)

As we see in these examples, grammatical complexity can come in a variety of forms. ISE Digital raters do not use fixed lists of grammar, lexis or linguistic functions. They are trained to use their knowledge and expertise to determine if a response shows evidence of grammatical complexity.

Examples of less common lexis and idiomatic expressions

In these excerpts of candidate language, there are instances of less frequent vocabulary words and idiomatic expressions being used effectively despite some errors. Some examples have been highlighted.

- ...she always helps me and she loves me **unconditionally** and I know I can **count on her** no matter what I need...
- She sent me a picture of them and they are almost dead. Uh, she **appreciated the gesture** but I was really **embarrassed to see that**...
- ...it means loving each one **equally with their differences**...
- ... but they were dead so my gift was ruined...so uh can you please send send him uh a fresh bunch of flowers so I can **make it up uh to him**...

Assessors don't use any predetermined word, topic or frequency list when assessing lexical range. They are trained to use their professional expertise to determine if a response contains evidence of idiomatic expressions and less common vocabulary.

Stress

What is it?

Stress is the way certain syllables or words are emphasised more than others when speaking.

Stress in spontaneous speech

In unrehearsed speech, stress often shifts as the speaker thinks aloud. It helps highlight new information and keep the listener oriented.

Stress in rehearsed speech

In prepared speech, stress is usually more deliberate. It is used to emphasise key ideas, mark relationships between ideas and create impact for the audience. For example, in the Delivering a prepared talk task of the ISE Digital, candidates are encouraged to practise stressing the most important content words in each sentence (eg The **main** challenge is), avoid placing equal stress on every word and use stress to highlight contrasting or opposing ideas (eg 'This solution is **cheap** but **not** effective.').

2. Sample tasks and scored responses

Responding to questions and Delivering a prepared talk

Sample response 1

Responding to questions – Question 1: What is your favourite colour?

C: [silence] My... my favourite colour is blue and [another language].

Responding to questions – Question 2: I want to get a pet, but I have a small house. What kind of pet would be best for me?

C: Eh cat cat... eh... your best eh... pet for your house is cat... because eh you have small... house... and eh another another pet is no is is difficult... big pet.

Responding to questions – Question 3: What can young people learn by having a pet?

C: Eh young people learn eh... what... eh what eh... go to eh... in the park... and what uh... uh spring and this [another language].

Delivering a prepared talk: Please tell me about your prepared topic now. You have two minutes to talk.

C: [long silence] eh my... eh my name is [unclear] and I am... 14 years old... uh and I go to home... nine o'clock... because I bored and I sleep... eh the school is bit difficult... em I learn all learn all... but I'm good in biology... I'm very good student... eh and I and... I I learned... I have found a dog... eh she very handsome and I love it... bye, bye.

Delivering a prepared talk – Follow-up question: Have you talked to other people about this topic?

C: [silence] Um... eh no... yes... eh... eh the people is very smart in very company... I have friend, eh.

Task fulfilment	2	Language	1	Delivery	2
<p>All parts of the task are attempted, but responses are mostly short and lacking in development. The topic and questions 2 and 3 have limited coherence. Occasional use of the mother tongue causes additional confusion for the listener.</p> <p>Simple structures are not always used effectively. There is a lack of use of the indefinite article, and errors are evident even in the use of the present simple (eg <i>I bored, she very handsome</i>). Lexis is limited and repetitive. There is no evidence of ability to use more complex structures, other than '<i>I have found</i>'. The response to question 3 is incoherent due to the candidate constantly searching for words.</p> <p>Pronunciation is mostly clear, but pauses and hesitation to formulate answers are common throughout and severely impede the fluency of the responses.</p>					

Sample response 2

Responding to questions – Question 1: What is your favourite colour?

C: Uh my favourite colour is dark blue because is... very happy and expressive colour... and... I think it really expresses my personality.

Responding to questions – Question 2: I want to get a pet, but I have a small house. What kind of pet would be best for me?

C: I believe the best pet for you would be a cat because cats are very quiet and... they're very suitable for a small house... they... usually don't make a mess and they're very friendly.

Responding to questions – Question 3: What can young people learn by having a pet?

C: Uh they can learn to take care of them and be more responsible... uh they can also have something to... uh [unclear]... uh.

Delivering a prepared talk: Please tell me about your prepared topic now. You have two minutes to talk.

C: [silence] uh many young people have uh social media and it's something that they spend their time on however it can have a lot of negative impacts on their mental health... um constant comparison with others can lead to self-hatred and... self and depression because people usually post the best versions of themselves on social media... uh also... many people use uh social media to harass and...make other people feel bad which can also cause uh low self-esteem and uh... uh... but I think you can still use social media without having to worry about these things if you just be careful and... use it wisely.

Delivering a prepared talk – Follow-up question: Have you talked to other people about this topic?

C: Uh yes because I think it's a topic that we should all be aware about.

Task fulfilment	4	Language	4	Delivery	4
The responses effectively address all tasks, although the reply in question 3 ends rather unclearly and abruptly. The ideas are relevant, and all other responses are well organised and easy to follow.					
Simple and complex structures are mostly used with accuracy, although there are occasional lapses. The topic uses a relevant and broad range of vocabulary to express the feelings of some social media users (eg <i>self-hatred</i> , <i>low self-esteem</i>), and idiomatic expressions such as ' <i>make a mess</i> ' are used accurately.					
Minimal effort is required from the listener. The stress, intonation and halting in the topic sound more like recitation than natural speech. Elsewhere, responses are natural and mostly fluent with occasional pauses to search for words or ideas.					

Sample response 3

Responding to questions – Question 1: What is your favourite place in your country?

C: Um... my favourite place in the country is the city where I live... because eh you can do anything you want you can go to different places to eat to try different stuff and eh if you want to... escape from the everyday life you can also go to some more eh vacant places for you to relax.

Responding to questions – Question 2: I like having a job that is interesting. When you think about a job, what is most important for you?

C: Well when I think about the job eh...I want to feel free doing it... and uh... the most important stuff is to be happy when you go to work and not to feel em the pressure from not liking your job... and... and to have people around you that are not toxic and you can communicate well, uh through everyday tasks.

Responding to questions – Question 3: Should work be the most important thing in your life? Why or why not?

C: Well of course work is a very main eh... thing to have in your life because it provides you your salary in which you can do everything you want with it... eh but it... should not be the most important thing in your life and affect your personal life... because uh in the time you have off work you have to feel free and relaxed do whatever other hobbies you want... and not feel the pressure from eh... your job.

Delivering a prepared talk: Please tell me about your prepared topic now. You have two minutes to talk.

C: Well, it's funny enough because the... questions before me were about my job, and I also wanted to talk about the job that I have... and since I have to work, I have to go to work after this... um I work in the group of indie techs and it's a very nice place to be part of because it gives you... many assets and has many... profits such as eh discounts and paid stuff... and the actual work part itself... it's very nice because you have to communicate with people every day... you work in fashion so you see the latest trends em... everything you need to know about fashion itself and you also... em... you also... uh have many skills to um... accomplish and because eh... you have to learn stuff every day either it's in the cashier part or in the sales part itself um... and I find it very interesting em... because you never get bored of it...you may get a little bit upset which is also a nice thing... a nice skill to learn from it because you learn how to be patient with people and the...situations you have before you...and uh...overall, I think it's a nice experience because the whole group of indie takes... it's very friendly and has um... the person as a person eh... on top of eh... the success part and uh yeah... that's it.

Delivering a prepared talk – Follow-up question: Will you still find this interesting in 10 years?

C: Well based of uh... this job I don't think I I will be capable eh for my body to stay do it because a very tiring job and you have to be stand...eh like eight hours straight so...it will be interesting as a project but I don't think I can follow it up uh...with uh...my durability as a person.

Task fulfilment	5	Language	4	Delivery	4
<p>All responses fully address the tasks that are set. They are relevant, clearly appropriate and give sufficient detail. The talk, although not delivered within a formal structure, flows naturally. Simple and complex structures are used mostly correctly, although there are a couple of errors in the prepared talk. A reasonably broad range of lexis is used, including less common vocabulary, such as <i>toxic</i>, <i>indie-tech</i> and <i>durability</i>. Minimal effort is required from the listener. Although there are one or two mispronunciations, such as 'vacant' in question 1 and 'cashier' in the talk, stress and intonation are consistent, making the responses easy to understand. The occasional hesitations for word searching sound natural and are not over prolonged. The majority of the responses are fluent.</p>					

Sample response 4

Responding to questions – Question 1: What is your favourite place in your country?

C: I think my favourite place in my country is my... my home city, Athens... uh, I believe... well, not I believe uh my favourite place I am not a fan of urban areas... I'm more of a... uh I like cities more and where everything is close to me even malls shopping... even shopping malls or shops cinemas and uh... yeah.

Responding to questions – Question 2: I like having a job that is interesting. When you think about a job, what is most important for you?

C: For me the most important thing about a job is not uh... a salary for me the most important for a job is for you to love your job... because if you don't love your job... um... cause if you don't love your job you want to be motivated every morning to wake up and to... to by loving your job you will perform better and you will also be happier in your life... well.

Responding to questions – Question 3: Should work be the most important thing in your life? Why or why not?

C: In in my opinion work should not be the most important thing in your life... work uh at the end of the day is not the most important thing sure... the salary is important it determines your life and your work also determines your life because you spend most of it... uh because you spend most of your life working... but for me the most important thing is your social life and... above all having fun because at the end of the day is just a job... and the most important thing is to have fun because you only get one life.

Delivering a prepared talk: Please tell me about your prepared topic now. You have two minutes to talk.

C: Well the topic that I would like to discuss uh is uh climate change... obviously climate change uh refers to... the long term change of temperature and weather patterns in our world... uh these uh long term uh...changes of temperatures are mainly caused by human uh... activities such as burning fossil fuels... deforestation... and also industrial processes uh... obviously these activities release uh gasses such as carb carbon oxide which are very harmful for the planet and trap heat in the earth's uh ecosystem... um the main um... consequences of climate change is rising sea levels due to... um high temperatures and melting ice caps... uh there are more frequent uh and severe weather effects such as like hurricane storms maybe even floods and droughts... and these all... all these things prevent threats to biodiversity um... I think it's very important for humans to address climate change as it requires as it requires um... in my personal opinion...immediate uh...as it requires to be immediately handled... uh the way we can handle climate change is by reducing our carbon emissions the way we can do that obviously is by... by using renewable energy... trying to protect our natural ecosystems as much as we can and generally adapt to... to a more healthy lifestyle change our ways because climate change uh... it's not often taken seriously by a lot of people but it is something um... that's very dangerous to our planet and that it's inevitable... it's inevitable... uh for it uh to become much worse than it is now... uh yeah... and it may harm our earth as we know it.

Delivering a prepared talk – Follow-up question: Will you still find this interesting in 10 years?

C: I mean this is a topic that it's still I think gonna be relevant in 10 years because with the way the planet is going uh our... our society is working right now... climate change will still be a thing in 10 years maybe worse I hope it gonna to be better than it is right now... but yes I will always find this topic interesting... because uh it's important for us to... to combat it and I think um... it's very important for us to combat it obviously and we should combat it to help our planet survive for the next time.

Task fulfilment	5	Language	5	Delivery	5
Tasks are comprehensively fulfilled in a thorough and detailed way. Responses are well organised and coherent, with the possible exception of question 1 which is a bit disjointed. The listener is fully informed and clear about the viewpoints and opinions of the speaker.					
Grammatical structures are used flexibly and appropriately and, where necessary, are repeated and reformulated to improve clarity. A broad lexical range is evident in the topic. There is some repetition of key words, such as ' <i>important</i> ,' in the responses to jobs, but there are also many good examples of idiomatic usage (eg <i>at the end of the day, you only get one life</i>) that show an ease of expression.					
The listener requires no effort. Speech is fluent and natural, with hesitations generally used to enhance the response and very few instances of needing to search for words. Pronunciation is clear, and intonation and stress are used effectively.					

3. Sample tasks and scored responses

Interacting

Sample response 1

Question 1: Here is your situation. Your neighbours have a dog that is always barking in their garden. This is causing problems for you and your family.

Talk to your neighbour and

- complain about their dog's barking
- ask them to help resolve the situation.

You have 15 seconds to think, then you will have up to one minute to talk.

C: Yea hi... em your dog is always on my... ground and... sometimes it very difficult for me to... cope with it because he eh... he destroys my... eh yard and uh... it is very unfair because... I spent uh plenty of time to... plant them so I would like to... tell you if it could be possible to take your dog out of my house eh... for a better living.

Question 2: Oh I see, I'm very sorry. I had no idea. I'll try to keep him quiet, but we can't bring him in the house because we have small children.

C: Oh... understand...em... I think it will be helpful for yours for all your children sometimes to keep in contact with their bed em... they will uh... eh have the opportunity to... have company... but okay you could go uh you could keep it outside from home.

Task fulfilment	2	Language	3	Delivery	3
The response addresses only some parts of the task as the response to part 1 is off topic, though part 2 includes some relevant ideas that partially fulfil the task.					
A mix of simple and complex structures is used, and lexical and grammatical errors, though noticeable, do not impede understanding. There is some self-correction (eg <i>for yours, for all your children</i>), and the lexis is generally appropriate for the topic.					
Pronunciation is mostly clear, although there is at least one significant mispronunciation of a key word (eg <i>bed/pet</i>). The speech shows reasonable fluency, although the pace is generally slow, and there are occasional hesitations and false starts when searching for words.					

Sample response 2

Question 1: Here is your situation. Your neighbours have a dog that is always barking in their garden. This is causing problems for you and your family.

Talk to your neighbour and

- Complain about their dog's barking
- Ask them to help resolve the situation.

You have 15 seconds to think, then you will have up to one minute to talk.

C: Uh... well um... your dog is very loud and barking a lot um... so I would like to... to tell you that it's very difficult for me to um... study and uh... relax at my house and other neighbours too complain about that so can we please like find a solution about this problem... um... maybe to um... keep your dog a little bit away from where all the houses are or to be with you in the house so to um... try to increase uh the barking... um can we please do something about it.

Question 2: Oh I see, I'm very sorry. I had no idea. I'll try to keep him quiet, but we can't bring him in the house because we have small children.

C: Well, uh... can you please like... uh move uh the dog in like uh... other part of the house maybe um... you can build like a small area in the... um yard for... for him to... uh have like um space to move to run to play or...

Task fulfilment	4	Language	4	Delivery	4
The two responses effectively address the key tasks of complaining and asking for help to resolve the problem. Detail is provided to show the impact of the dog barking. The responses are organised, although the end of part 2 is cut off.					
Simple and complex structures are mostly used effectively. There is a broad range of lexis, and the expressions to suit the situations of complaint resolution are appropriate (eg <i>I would like to tell you, can we please find a solution</i>). One lexical error is particularly noticeable, 'increase' instead of decrease, but generally, other than overuse of the word 'like' as a filler, the message is clearly communicated.					
Minimal effort is required from the listener, but there are occasional hesitations and pauses while finding words. Consistently accurate stress, intonation and clear pronunciation, however, make the response easy to understand.					

Sample response 3

Question 1: Here is your situation. You booked a day off work to attend a family event in a weeks' time, but your manager has scheduled you to give a presentation on that day.

Talk to your manager and

- explain that there has been a misunderstanding about your requested day off
- negotiate a solution to the problem.

You have 15 seconds to think, then you will have up to one minute to talk.

C: Yes hello good morning... uh I'd like to talk to you about a misunderstanding that um... um has been about a requested day that I asked... to take the day off... um so um... you see um I'd like to have um a day off and um... go out with my family and uh spend time with them as I live far away and uh in the past two months I haven't take any day off... and uh I think it would be pleasure um if you give me this opportunity um so... what do you think?

Question 2: I'm so sorry about that. I forgot about your day off. You see the problem is that there is an important customer coming to see that presentation.

C: Oh, I understand but um... could you... um could you tell me that tell him that it is very important for me um or... cancel this and... I don't know... maybe put this for another day.

Task fulfilment	3	Language	3	Delivery	3
<p>Part 1 of the response consists mostly of a lengthy, irrelevant explanation with no suggestions as to a solution to the problem. There is a brief mention of possibly rescheduling the presentation in part 2, which suggests the listener has most of the information but is not fully informed. Although the listener can follow the message, the initial explanation is disjointed. There is also a lack of detail about when the day off is and no mention of the scheduled presentation.</p> <p>Simple and complex structures are used, but with some errors. Common lexis is used accurately, though there is some repetition, such as with the word 'day'. Some collocations and idiomatic phrases are evident (eg <i>spend time</i>, <i>have a day off</i>), but phrases like '<i>maybe put this for another day</i>' and the direct use of sections of the prompt suggest a lack of business orientated lexis.</p> <p>Pronunciation is clear, but speech is slightly slower than normal, and there are occasional hesitations and pauses which affect the continuity of the message.</p>					

Sample response 4

Question 1: Here is your situation. You booked a day off work to attend a family event in a weeks' time, but your manager has scheduled you to give a presentation on that day.

Talk to your manager and

- explain that there has been a misunderstanding about your requested day off
- negotiate a solution to the problem.

You have 15 seconds to think, then you will have up to one minute to talk.

C: Yes I think there has been a misunderstanding... uh you particularly told me that uh... I was going to get the day off so... I'm going to attend a family dinner so um... I think you yeah... my core my co-worker... Stephanie... uh she would love to... present... represent the representation and take my place in it... I hope I didn't cause enough I didn't cause... any trouble at all but... I'm pretty sure there have been a misunderstanding... thanks for your time.

Question 2: I'm so sorry about that. I forgot about your day off. You see the problem is that there is an important customer coming to see that presentation.

C: But... I'm I'm really sorry I'm sincerely apologising... but I really have to attend the family dinner so I won't be able to make it to the presentation today... is it possible that a co-worker can do it for me... since I already got the day off.

Task fulfilment	4	Language	4	Delivery	4
<p>The listener is well informed as to the misunderstanding, its consequences and the suggestions for a solution in part 1, so the task is effectively fulfilled. Part 2 reiterates the same suggestion but misses the opportunity to give any additional detail. The response can be followed with relative ease and progresses logically.</p> <p>Simple and complex structures are used appropriately, with a few minor errors (eg <i>there have been an understanding</i>). There is a good range of common and less common lexis appropriate to a business setting (eg <i>co-worker, sincerely</i>). There is some confusion with the use of the words '<i>present</i>' and '<i>represent</i>', but occasional errors have only a minor impact and do not compromise the message. Idioms are used accurately throughout (eg <i>take my place, cause any trouble</i>).</p> <p>Pronunciation is clear. Fluency is evident, though there are occasional hesitations and backtracking to rephrase more accurately. Stress, intonation and pace are consistent, and it is easy to understand the response.</p>					