Ms. *Wright's Review of Mr. Knott's Test*

Strengths:

- It is an authentic guided listening task.
- It is academic in nature.
- The content is indicative of a geography lecture.
- Points are included in the rubric.
- Answer content is fairly spread out in the text.
- Questions are mostly in the order of how they are heard.
- The instructions for the task are fairly explicit.

Weaknesses:

(Tape Script)

- Authenticity is the biggest problem here. Obviously New Tuskland is an imaginary place. There are enough places in the world that students don't know about, so it is not necessary to make up places.
- It reads like a written text (only exception is "Today I am going to talk about. . . .").
- The number of points allocated to the task is not enough for the number of questions posed; the result will be in 104 points.

(Questions)

- Extraneous clue on the first item; New Tuskland is located on the test paper not once but twice.
- The location question does not specify how much information should be written down; both of the following propositions are keyable: —"located in the northern part of the Gumayan continent". —"it shares borders with Inlanda, Gammaland, and the Azure Ocean."
- Because no specific info is given on how much information is required, some students will write only one of the above-mentioned keys; others will write both. When it comes time to score, teachers will feel inclined to give those students who wrote more higher marks, thereby disadvantaging students who in fact adequately answered the question.
- For the Geographical Features question, no indication is made as to how many are wanted. The only indication that more than one answer is wanted is the plural "s" on Features.
- For the Weather question, the term climate is used in the text.
- The Wild Animals question implies that two responses are wanted but only one (whale) is in the text.
- The key to the Most Valuable Resource is polystyrene, a low-frequency word that is difficult even for the native speaker to spell. Unless this word is part of the unit vocabulary list, the teacher will have to accept virtually any answer that begins with poly-.

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6 Assessing Speaking

How important is speaking in your school's assessment of your learners?

(A) Intensive English Program, Community College, University (-Bound) Program:	(B) Conversation Classes, Non-academic Programs, Survival Classes:	(C) K–12:
Prior to the new TOEFL®, speaking was not accorded much importance in these programs because the TOEFL® did not assess speaking. However, the new iBT® TOEFL® assesses several speaking samples from ESL learners. Programs are now implementing speaking assessments of various types, often to mimic the TOEFL®. This shift means short tests of impromptu speaking (normally 60–90 seconds), speaking in reaction to a listening passage, and speaking in reaction to a reading passage.	Because these programs focus on conversation, the curricula will emphasize speaking and listening, which means that any kind of assessment will also emphasize these two areas. In general, however, more overt emphasis is given to speaking than to listening. Some programs have an exit interview that requires the student to speak in response to several questions or prompts.	Speaking is not "taught" and is therefore not assessed in any formal way in K–12. However, K–12 teachers are at the forefront for providing English language input for their ELLs. K–12 teachers are constantly monitoring their ELLs' speaking ability in English by engaging in informal assessment.

As in daily life, speaking is an important channel of communication in a general English program. When testing this skill, we want to simulate real-life situations in which students engage in conversation, ask and answer questions, and give information. In an academic English program, the emphasis may shift to participating in class discussions and debates or giving academic presentations. In a business English course, students might develop telephone skills, make reports, and interact in common situations involving meetings, travel, and sales. Whatever the teaching focus, valid assessment should reflect the course objectives.

Ms. Wright knows the importance most students place on being able to speak proficiently, so she assesses her students' speaking abilities both in class and in a formal speaking exam. Some of the things she does in order to ensure valid and reliable speaking assessment are:

- She starts any speaking assessment with an unassessed warm-up to reduce nervousness.
- She conducts her speaking exams with another teacher so that each has a specific role.
- She uses a range of assessment tasks.
- She focuses on both fluency and accuracy when marking students' speech.
- She records exams so that she has a record of them for later reference.
- She limits the number of speaking exams per day to ensure intra-rater reliability.
- She conducts regular calibration sessions with other teachers to ensure inter-rater reliability.

Heaton (1995, p. 88) points out that speaking is "an extremely difficult skill to test, as it is far too complex a skill to permit any reliable analysis to be made for the purpose of objective testing." The greatest challenges are resource requirements and reliability, including the perceived subjectivity in grading. Lack of time, number of students, lack of available tests, and administrative difficulties are other pressing concerns. In addition, practicality issues for reliability of the marking often arise as raters must be trained, and this training can be very time consuming. For all these reasons, many teachers do not even attempt to assess speaking. However, the assessment of spoken language has evolved dramatically over the last several decades from tests of oral grammar and pronunciation to tests of genuine communication, and now to integrative speaking tasks on high-stakes tests like the TOEFL® and TOEIC®.

Why Test Speaking?

Despite the difficulties associated with assessing the speaking skill, there are important reasons that speaking should receive as much attention in assessment as the other language skills. In communicative language teaching, speaking is a prominent component of the language curriculum (Folse, 2006; Jones, 2005). If we value communication skills, we must assess them or we send a double message to our students about what we consider to be important. Furthermore, with English now a global language, a large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. In the interests of promoting clear international communications, we need to recognize the importance of spoken English by testing students' progress.

Theory of Speaking Assessment

Harris (1977, p. 81) notes that speaking is a complex skill requiring the simultaneous use of different abilities that often develop at different rates—namely pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. These abilities still underlie the assessment of speaking, but now more attention is paid to contextual and interactional factors.

Canale and Swain (1980) argue that there are four competencies underlying speaking ability:

- *Grammatical competence*: includes knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (basic sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonation and stress) (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, p. 141)
- *Discourse competence*: concerned with relationships beyond the sentence level, rules of cohesion and coherence, holding communication together in a meaningful way
- *Sociolinguistic competence*: applying knowledge of what is expected socially and culturally by users of the target language
- *Strategic competence*: "the way learners manipulate language in order to meet communicative goals" (Brown, H.D., 1994, p. 228); the ability to know when to take the floor, how to keep a conversation going or end it, and how to resolve communication breakdowns

Categories of Oral Skills

Weir (1993) categorizes oral skills as speaking skills that are part of a repertoire of routines for exchanging information or interacting, and improvisational skills such as negotiating meaning and managing the interaction. The routine skills are largely associated with language functions and the spoken language required in certain situations like ordering food in a restaurant or asking for directions to a museum. By contrast, the improvisational skills are more general and may be brought into play at any time for clarification, to keep a conversation flowing, to change topics, or to take turns. It is the teacher's task to decide which speaking skills are most germane to a particular program and then create a variety of assessment tasks. It is also common to weight some skills more heavily than others.

Differences between Writing and Speaking

Before we focus specifically on assessing speaking, it is necessary to understand some of the differences between the two productive language skills—writing and speaking. We have already seen that subjectivity is a major issue in grading writing and that is also the case for assessing speaking. As with writing, there is the issue of whether to grade speaking holistically or analytically. However, as

Writing	Speaking
Full, complex, and well-organized sentences	Incomplete, simply and loosely organized sentences
Information densely packed	Simpler discourse with less information
Use of specific vocabulary	Use of more general vocabulary
Use of discourse markers to help the reader	Frequent use of fillers to facilitate speech
Text written for an unseen audience	Face-to-face communication
A relatively solitary process	Negotiation of meaning between two or more people
Alterations and crossings out kept to a minimum	Alterations, corrections, and miscues are very common
Reference can easily be made to what has been written previously	Memory limitations are important as speech is transitory

Source: Jones, W. (2005). Assessing students' oral proficiency. In D. Lloyd, P. Davidson, & C. Coombe (Eds.), *The fundamentals of language assessment: A practical guide for teachers in the Gulf* (pp. 75–86). Dubai: TESOL Arabia Publications, p. 77.

you can see in the chart on page 114, writing and speaking differ significantly. According to Jones (2005, p. 77), these differences "are fundamental to our understanding of the construct of speaking and any assessment of this skill must take these features into consideration."

In contrast to writing, speaking is more ephemeral unless measures are taken to record student performance. Yet the presence of recording equipment can negatively influence students' performance and often recording is not practical or feasible.

Special Issues in Speaking Assessment

Logistically, the administration of speaking exams to large numbers of students can be overwhelming in terms of time and resources. With large classes, it is unrealistic to test speaking individually. For example, to test a class of 30 students individually, it would take more than four class periods to administer a 10- to 15-minute speaking exam. One solution is to develop assessments that test more than one student at a time, yet allow each student some opportunities to speak individually. Another solution is to test, formally only a few times during a course but to use continuous assessment of students during normal classroom activities.

Another phenomenon in speaking assessment is that sometimes a student can score higher on exams because of having an outgoing personality. Take care to evaluate a student on what was said in the exam, not on personality.

Designing Speaking Assessments

Prior Considerations

A number of factors need to be considered before designing speaking assessments. One is whether to focus more on fluency or accuracy. On the one hand, fluency is important for students, but if there are many errors, that might impede comprehension. We recommend that you focus equally on fluency and accuracy. Ask yourself whether the mistakes students make impede comprehension or cause a breakdown in communication. If they do not, ignore or play down the problems. One way to ensure that you place an equal focus on both fluency and accuracy is to build this into your assessment criteria. In other words, 50 percent of a student's grade would come from aspects of fluency

such as initiating and maintaining communication and 50 percent would be based on how accurately the student spoke.

Teachers also have to decide on which criteria to evaluate. If you espouse an equal emphasis on fluency and accuracy, we recommend the following marking categories: *accuracy* (grammar), *vocabulary, linguistic ability* (pronunciation, intonation, and stress), *fluency* (ability to express ideas), and *content* or ideas. Work with your colleagues to determine the relative weighting of each category to ensure inter-rater reliability. We've all experienced instances where one rater emphasized accuracy in grammar and pronunciation only to be at odds with a colleague who focused on the ability of the speaker to fluently express meaning.

Another factor to consider before you design your assessment is the procedure for grading. Since subjectivity is a major problem in marking speaking exams, a common solution is to use multiple raters. The more teachers you use, the more reliable a test score will be. It is common practice to use two raters with different roles for speaking exams. One teacher, the *interlocutor*, interacts with the student or students being tested. The other teacher, the *assessor*, focuses on writing scores and making notes. At the end of the test after the candidates leave, the two raters either discuss their suggested marks and negotiate an agreed-upon score or take an average of the two marks. For reliability, interlocutors should work from a script so that all students get similar questions framed in the same way. In general, the teacher or assessor should keep in the background and only intercede if truly necessary.

The grading process is greatly simplified if the assessor uses a scoring sheet with the criteria for assessment and their relative weights. A clear, easy-to-use grading sheet reduces note-taking and keeps the grading criteria ever present. If the speaking assessment is a formative exam, have a section on the sheet with comments that can be used later for feedback to the student. Here is a checklist for two teachers assessing two students at one time. Note grading criteria and section for feedback.

Upper Intermediate English
Speaking Assessment Checklist
Date: _____ Time: _____
Interlocutor: _____
Assessor: _____

S's Name: _____ ID #: _____
Pass? ☐ yes ☐ no

below	average	above	
☐	☐	☐	grammar generally accurate, adequate (basic sentences, tenses, vocabulary OK)
☐	☐	☐	pronunciation, intonation OK (mainly intelligible, appropriate)
☐	☐	☐	discourse management (maintains flow of conversation)
☐	☐	☐	S can initiate, respond; can maintain, repair

Problems for remediation:
☐ response inappropriate
☐ S can't initiate, sustain at normal speed
☐ S needs excessive prompting
☐ other: _____

S's Name: _____ ID #: _____
Pass? ☐ yes ☐ no

below	average	above	
☐	☐	☐	grammar generally accurate, adequate (basic sentences, tenses, vocabulary OK)
☐	☐	☐	pronunciation, intonation OK (mainly intelligible, appropriate)
☐	☐	☐	discourse management (maintains flow of conversation)
☐	☐	☐	interactive communication (S can initiate, respond; can maintain, repair)

Problems for remediation:
☐ response inappropriate
☐ S can't initiate, sustain at normal speed
☐ S needs excessive prompting
☐ other: _____

A final concern before designing the assessment is deciding what type of speaking samples to collect from students. Brown and Yule (1983) recommend collecting speaking data with the following characteristics:

- speech that has a purpose
- extended chunks of speech
- speech that is structured or organized
- tasks where the amount of speech is controlled
- tasks where there is a specific number of points of required information

Designing Speaking Assessments

As noted, we recommend that teachers assess speaking in class as well as through individual speaking tests. To get a valid picture of speaking proficiency, use a variety of methods and techniques. We will explore techniques ranging from a traditional formal test to informal techniques you can integrate with other classroom activities. Whatever technique you use, start the speaking assessment with a simple task that puts students at ease so they perform better.

Formal Speaking Assessment Techniques

The speaking test or oral interview is perhaps the most common format for assessing speaking on well-known language examinations. Many institutions schedule formal speaking exams at least once during a course to ensure that all students are tested under reliable and standard conditions. Oral exams/interviews need not be overly long. According to Hughes (2003), each student needs 15 minutes to ensure that the information a rater receives is reliable. For placement purposes, an interview of between five to ten minutes should suffice.

In 1984, Canale proposed a framework for speaking tests that is still in use today. He believed that students perform best when they are led through the following stages:

• **Warm up:** The purpose of this phase is to relax students and lower their anxiety. Students are asked for personal details such as general information about themselves, their likes and dislikes, etc. Assessors can even ask students to spell out something or give numerical sequences (e.g., zip code, telephone number, etc.). The warm-up phase has a dual purpose of putting the students at ease and getting basic information about them. It usually takes a minute or two and is not assessed.

• **Level check:** At this stage, the assessor tries to determine the student's level of speaking proficiency through a series of questions or situational activities. This part of the exam is assessed.

• **Probe:** In this part of the speaking test, the examiner attempts to push the student to the height of his or her speaking ability. Another function can be as a confirmation of the level check. This part of the exam is assessed if the

student can go beyond his or her abilities, but it is unscored if a communication breakdown occurs.

• **Wind down:** At this stage of the exam, the examiner once again attempts to relax the student with some easy questions, perhaps about future plans. Typical content during this stage is information about when and where to obtain exam results. This part of the oral exam/interview is not scored.

Variations on the Framework

Students can be tested individually, in pairs, or in groups of three. If more than one student is assessed, it is important to provide time for each individual to speak as well as opportunities for interaction. This set-up makes it possible to test common routine functions as well as a range of improvisational skills. In paired-student oral exams, the examiner has the advantage of hearing students interacting with their peers. However, examiners should take care not to let one student monopolize the conversation.

Regardless of the particular tasks employed, the general flow of the exam will follow the four steps identified by Canale. Here are some common tasks that can be used for the level-check stage.

• **Picture Cue:** Visuals can be very useful in assessing speaking skills. They are especially good for descriptions. In this technique, students are given a picture or photo and must describe what they see. Pictures can be as simple or as elaborate as you want or can illustrate a story. Make sure you give students enough time to look at the picture before you require them to start speaking. Good sources for visuals are newspaper and magazine photographs or advertisements, printed digital photographs, or pictures downloaded from the Internet. The National Geographic website (*http://llava.nationalgeographic.com/cgi-bin/pod/archive.cgi*) is a particularly good source for high-quality photographs for teaching and testing.

Alternatively, students may have to answer questions about the picture or photograph. This variation is a useful way of focusing on certain structures, functions, or vocabulary. Consider the following example.

Sample Activity

Look at the picture and answer the questions.

Mario's Italian
Restaurant

1 spaghetti	9.50
steak dinner	14.80
2 salads	6.60
1 soft drink	1.50
1 tomato juice	2.20
	34.00
8% tax	5.44
Thanks! total	39.44

Source: Folse, K. S. (1996). *Discussion starters: Speaking fluency activities for advanced ESL/EFL students.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 100.
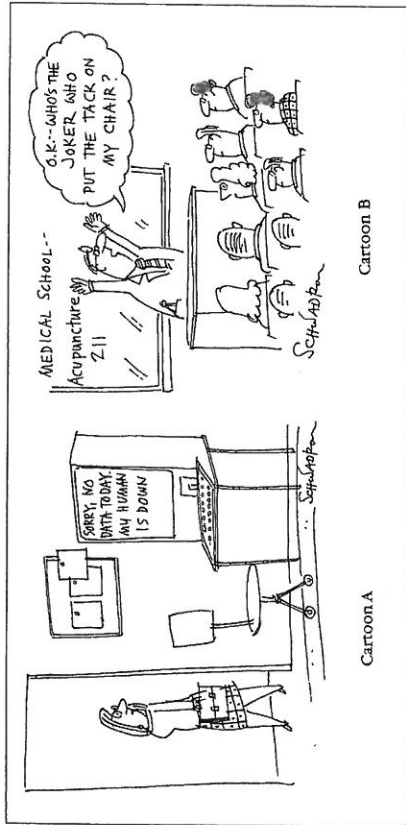
Questions:

- What kind of food does the restaurant serve?
- Which dish is the most expensive?
- Did the customer leave a tip? If so, how much?
- In your opinion, was the meal expensive? Why? Why not?

An elaboration of the visual technique is to give the student a series of pictures or a cartoon strip and ask her/him to narrate the major events in a story. This approach can be used to elicit sequence markers and a variety of verb tenses.

Sample Activity

Look at the two illustrations and explain what is happening in each.

MEDICAL SCHOOL--
Acupuncture
211

O.K.-WHO'S THE JOKER WHO PUT THE TACK ON MY CHAIR?

SORRY, NO
DATA TODAY.
MY HUMAN
IS DOWN

Cartoon A   Cartoon B

Source: Folse, 1996, p. 78.

- **Prepared Monologue:** The teacher provides students with a written topic card. Students have one minute to make notes and then present their remarks on the topic. Possible topics include agreement or disagreement with a controversial statement, extemporaneous topics, or explaining proverbs or idioms.

- **Role play:** Students are given cue cards with information about their "character" and the setting. If there is only one student, the interlocutor role-plays with him or her. If there are two or more students, be certain that the roles they are asked to play are familiar to all and would elicit comparable amounts of speech.

  Some students find it difficult to project themselves into an imaginary situation, and this lack of acting ability may affect reliability. Role plays should not be used on a test unless they have been a normal part of class activities; a good test always reflects actual class content and teaching.

Sample Activity

You buy something from the store and when you get home, you discover it is broken. You take it back to the store and talk with the manager.

• **Information Gap Activity:** One student has information the other lacks and vice versa. Students have to exchange information to see how it fits together. Students work together on a task on which they may have different opinions. They have to reach a conclusion in a limited period of time.

Sample Activity

Students must select a graduation gift for a mutual friend. They are given five pictures of possible gifts to buy. They must discuss which gift to buy and come to an agreement.

Classroom Speaking Assessment Techniques

Oral Presentations

The Icebreaker speech is an ideal first start to the art of oral presentations. It is designed to get students talking about a familiar topic: themselves. It is a 4 to 6 minute speech where the student introduces himself or herself to the rest of the class. The advantage of this speech as a first effort is that it serves as a warm-up and gets the student in front of an audience.

Giving oral presentations is a real-life skill for students in academic and business programs, so presentations are often used for classroom speaking assessment. Oral presentations are not just concerned with language accuracy and fluency. They also include aspects of delivery such as body language, facial expression, eye contact, and gestures. The visual aids and handouts that the student creates and uses are integral parts of the presentation. PowerPoint or other presentation software is often used to highlight the spoken delivery. Here is an example of an analytical grading sheet based on ten components that are considered important in one English program. For each component, a score of ten would be the highest grade and zero the lowest.

Grading Chart for Individual Class Presentation

Student's name: _____   Date: _____

Topic: _____

	Well done								Done poorly		
1. Content (Relevant, Shows Research)	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Task Fulfilment	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Delivery	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Pronunciation	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Communicative Performance	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Use of Visual Aids	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Organization	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Fielding Questions	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Language (Grammar and Vocabulary)	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. Time Management	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Total score = _____ /100											

Comments for feedback:

Teacher's Signature:

Debate on a Controversial Topic

A debate is a formal public speaking activity where two students or groups of students argue for or against a topic. The topic they debate is called the motion. The student(s) who argues for the motion usually starts the debate with a three-minute speech. The student(s) on the opposing team then has a chance to argue against or rebut the arguments made by the first student(s). Group or team debates in which two teams of four students argue for and against a certain motion are preferred. Three students on each team deliver oral arguments. The remaining student serves as a silent observer who helps formulate the arguments or rebuttal statements.

Sample Debate Topics:

- Cigarette smoking should be banned in all public places.
- The legal driving age should be raised to 21.
- Men and women can never be just friends.

Here is a sample grading form for three students, each of whom is graded individually before a group grade is given.

Grading Chart for Three-Student Debate

The motion: _____

Content	Mark	Speaker 1 Names: ___	Speaker 2 Names: ___	Speaker 3 Names: ___
The speaker developed strong, well-supported arguments and successfully rebutted opponent's argument(s), if applicable.	10/9			
The speaker developed well-supported arguments and quite successfully rebutted opponent's argument(s), if applicable.	8/7			
The speaker developed satisfactory arguments, competently supported, and rebutted a number of the opponent's argument(s), if applicable.	6/5			
The speaker developed weak, poorly supported arguments and tried generally unsuccessfully to rebut opponent's argument(s), if applicable.	4/3			
The speaker developed largely irrelevant arguments and rebutted none of the opponent's argument(s), if applicable.	2/1			

Organization	Mark	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3
The speech was very well organized, clearly signposted, and a pleasure to listen to.	5			
The speech was well organized, well signposted, and easy to listen to.	4			
The speech was organized, signposted, and rather easy to listen to.	3			
The speech was poorly organized, signposted in parts, and slightly difficult to listen to.	2			
The speech was very poorly organized, not signposted, and difficult to listen to.	1			

Presentation and Language Skills	Mark	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3
Information was confidently presented using correct grammar and a wide range of appropriate vocabulary in a way that clearly resonated with the audience.	5			
Information was well presented, using almost error-free grammar and a very good range of appropriate vocabulary in a way that resonated with the audience.	4			
Information was satisfactorily presented using mainly correct grammar and an adequate range of appropriate vocabulary in a way that mainly resonated with the audience.	3			
Information was fairly satisfactorily presented using correct grammar and a narrow range of appropriate vocabulary in a way that did not resonate much with the audience.	2			
Information was presented using somewhat correct grammar and a less-than-adequate range of appropriate vocabulary in a way that clearly did not resonate with the audience.	1			

Speaker 1 ___/20 × 5 = ___% 　 Speaker 2 ___/20 × 5 = ___% 　 Speaker 3 ___/20 × 5 = ___%

GROUP RESULT = Percentages for Speakers 1 + 2 + 3 divided by 3 = _____%

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is good for pronunciation practice and assessment, and it can be done with unrelated sentences or connected prose. Give students a chance to look at the passage first. A useful tool for assessing pronunciation is the Accent Inventory, developed by Prator and Robinett (1972). This 155-word paragraph is the diagnostic tool that students can record pre- and post- course. It comes with a checklist of problems on stress and rhythm, intonation, vowel and consonant sounds.

Retelling Stories

Students are asked to report on the contents of a graded reader or a magazine/newspaper article they have read.

Verbal Essays

Verbal essays require the students to speak for approximately three to five minutes on a specified prepared topic.

Extemporaneous Speaking

Students are given a topic and are asked to speak on it extemporaneously for one to two minutes. Students have no time in which to prepare.

Sample Topics:

- A person you really admire
- A world problem you'd like to solve
- A place you'd really like to visit

Now more than ever, speaking plays an important role on the TOEFL® iBT. The test takes an integrated skills approach that requires students to employ more than one skill at a time. For speaking, the student listens to six questions on audio. Two of the questions are on familiar topics, and the remaining four require the student to listen to or read something and then respond orally. According to the producers of the test, the integrated approach is a more authentic form of speaking assessment.

General Rubric for Assessing Speaking

Thus far, we have presented rubrics for oral presentations (page 123) and debates (pages 124–125). Many teachers, however, prefer to use a more general rubric for these and other speaking tasks, such as role plays, retelling stories, and extemporaneous speaking. For these tasks, we recommend the speaking assessment rubric on page 127.

Speaking Assessment

Name: _____
Date: _____

Category	Your Score	Guide
Grammar 25 points		24–25 *Excellent.* Few errors; communication of ideas is clear.
		22–23 *Very good.* One or two errors, but communication is mostly clear.
		20–21 *Good.* Several errors in syntax, but main ideas are mostly clear.
		18–19 *Fair.* Noticeable errors that occasionally confuse meaning.
		12–17 *Weak.* Language is marked by errors. Listeners' attention is diverted to the errors rather than the message. Meaning is often unclear or broken.
		0–11 *Unacceptable.* Communication is impeded. Too many errors in this task for a student at this level.
Vocabulary 20 points		20 *Excellent.* Correct selection of words and idioms. Variety of vocabulary.
		18–19 *Very good.* Correct selection of words and idioms. Some variety of vocabulary.
		16–17 *Good.* Mostly correct choice of vocabulary. Meaning is clear.
		14–15 *Fair.* Noticeable vocabulary errors that occasionally confuse meaning; Reliance on simple vocabulary to communicate.
		12–13 *Weak.* Many vocabulary errors. Listeners' attention is diverted to the errors rather than the message. Meaning is often unclear or broken.
		0–11 *Unacceptable.* Too many errors in this task for a student at this level. Communication is impeded.
Fluency 30 points		29–30 *Excellent.* No hesitations at all.
		27–28 *Very good.* Hesitations in one or two places but immediately continued.
		24–26 *Good.* Occasional hesitations but recovered well.
		21–23 *Fair.* Noticeable gaps that catch listeners' attention usually followed by recovery.
		12–20 *Weak.* Several short periods of silence. Several gaps that disrupt the flow of information. Listeners' attention is diverted to the gaps rather than the message.
		0–11 *Unacceptable.* Periods of silence. Gaps without good recovery.
Pronunciation 25 points		24–25 *Excellent.* Few errors; native-like pronunciation.
		22–23 *Very good.* One or two errors, but communication is mostly clear.
		20–21 *Good.* Several pronunciation errors, but main ideas are understood without problem.
		18–19 *Fair.* Noticeable pronunciation errors that occasionally confuse meaning.
		12–17 *Weak.* Language is marked by pronunciation errors. Listeners' attention is diverted to the errors rather than the message. Meaning is often unclear.
		0–11 *Unacceptable.* Too many errors in this task for a student at this level. Communication is impeded.

Your score: _____

Comments:

Administrative Issues for Assessing Speaking

Oral exams have to be scheduled, rooms booked, and teachers ready to examine. Speaking tests can be conducted live or they can be recorded. Alternatively, students can be tested over the phone.

When students are tested individually or in small groups, teachers are concerned about what to do with the students in the classroom who are not being tested. In colleges and universities, they can be assigned work to do in the independent learning center or in the library. In public schools, teachers often resort to conducting speaking exams at the front of the class while other students work silently. This arrangement is not ideal as the student being tested becomes self conscious and nervous, and the teacher cannot concentrate fully on the speaking exam. Security is also a concern as students overhear exam content and thus have extra preparation time.

To assess students' speaking skills in the regular classroom, select two or three students each class period and focus on their speaking during class participation. If you do this regularly, you will be able to track students' progress throughout the course in a fairly stress-free environment.

Ten Things to Remember about Speaking Assessment

1. **Choose tasks that generate positive washback for teaching and learning.**
Select speaking assessment tasks that have a positive effect on the teaching and learning process. These tasks should be as authentic as possible.

2. **Allow time for a warm-up.**
A warm-up will probably improve results. Speaking tests can be traumatic for second language learners. Use a warm-up activity to put students at ease.

3. **Keep skill contamination in mind.**
Don't give students lengthy written instructions that must be read and understood before speaking.

4. **Remember that larger samples of language are more reliable.**
Make sure that students speak long enough on a variety of tasks. You must have enough material for an accurate assessment.

5. **Choose a range of appropriate techniques.**
Use more than one activity during an oral exam, as this is more authentic. Multiple measures within an exam give more reliable results than a single activity.

6. **Ensure valid and reliable scoring by choosing an appropriate scale.**
Decide with your colleagues which speaking skills are most important and adopt a grading scale that fits your program. Whether you adopt a holistic or analytical approach to grading, create a recording form that enables you to track students' production and later give feedback for improvement. Remember, you can use different forms of grading for different tasks.

7. **Train teachers in scoring.**
Let's face it: some teachers are better than others in using a rating scale. Train teachers in scoring, and practice together using the scale until there is a high rate of inter-rater reliability. Conduct moderation or calibration sessions with high-stakes speaking exams.

8. **Try to personalize the test by using the students' names.**
Address students by their name to personalize the test. If you make personal comments, do not monopolize the exam by talking too much.

9. **Carry out speaking assessments and oral exams in a suitable venue.**
Whichever type of assessment you're doing, you will need a relatively quiet room with good acoustics. This is especially important if you want to record the assessment.

10. **Never mark the test in front of the students.**
It is distracting for students to see teachers marking in front of them. The best solution is to have two teachers administer the oral assessment, one functioning as interlocutor and the other as assessor in the background. If you administer a speaking test alone, wait until students have left the room before you record their marks. If you must take notes during the exam, make sure you tell students beforehand that you'll be doing this.

Extension Activity

Mr. Knott just gave his speaking tests. Here is a transcript of his speaking test with David, a student in his third period class. Try to identify the four stages of a speaking test: warm up, level check, probe, and wind down.

Transcript of Mr. Knott Administering Speaking Test

Mr. Knott: Hello, David. Can you tell me your name, please?

David: My name is David Jones.

Mr. Knott: Do you live in Chicago?

David: Yes.

Mr. Knott: Do you have any pets?

David: No.

Mr. Knott: Okay, David, remember this is a speaking test. You've got to say more so I can give you a grade. Tell me about your family, your classes, and your hobbies. Which one would you like me to start with?

David: Any one you like.

Mr. Knott: What were my options again?

David: Please talk about your hobbies.

Mr. Knott: One of the things I really like to do is travel during the summer vacation with my family. Last summer we went to Hawaii. . . .

Mr. Knott: Hawaii. . . . fabulous. I've been there three times, and each visit was better than the rest. My favorite place was Maui. The beaches were fantastic, and I even learned to scuba dive when I was there. Probably the greatest thing about Hawaii was the shopping, lovely weather, and great variety of things to do. You can visit Pearl Harbor and see the USS Arizona. What a sad sight that was. It's a great place even if you don't like the beach. We spent one day hiking up to the top of Diamond Head. Oh . . . enough of that. Let's move on to the next part of your speaking test. Here is a picture of a classroom scene. Could you please describe it for me?

David: Ah . . . well. . . . The picture is really not very clear. I know it is a picture of a classroom, but that's all I can tell you about it.

Mr. Knott: Excellent, David. Now let's move on to the role play. I forgot to bring the cards, so I'm just going to explain the situation to you. I'm a patient who has just

suffered a heart attack. You are my surgeon. Our conversation will take place just after my triple bypass. We are going to discuss my post-operative treatment and rehabilitation. Are you ready???

David: Ah . . . I guess. . . .

How would you rate Mr. Knott's first speaking exam? What feedback would you give him? Mr. Knott let Ms. Wright listen to his taped speaking test with David. Here is the feedback Ms. Wright gave him.

Transcript of Ms. Wright's Feedback to Mr. Knott

Ms. Wright: First of all, Mr. Knott, congratulations for surviving your first batch of speaking tests. How did you find the experience?

Mr. Knott: Thanks. To tell you the truth, I found it just as stressful as the students.

Ms. Wright: Well, that's only natural. Let me tell you the things I liked about this particular speaking test. The first thing was that you taped it. Recorded speaking tests are always useful because we can engage in activities like this one. Another thing I liked is that you started with a warm-up to try to relax David. The highlight of the interview was that you used a range of speaking tasks starting with a Q & A warm-up, moving on to a description of a picture, and then on to a role play.

Mr. Knott: Why thanks. . . . But if I did all the right things, why did David not respond well? He's one of my best students.

Ms. Wright: Well, Mr. Knott . . . to be honest, David did not really get a chance to speak, as you did most of the talking. If we listen to the part where you asked him about his hobbies, the minute he mentioned Hawaii, you went off on a two- to three-minute description of your trips there. Then when you saw that time was slipping away, you went immediately on to the picture description.

Mr. Knott: Oh, haha! I guess you're right.

Ms. Wright: In the warm-up, it was a good thing that you personalized the exam by calling your student by his first name, David, but then you followed up by asking him his name. Probably a different question like "How are you doing today?" would have been more effective. Then the rest of your questions were of the yes/no variety. These types of questions don't generate much

discussion, as you found out. Your next question was a three-parter. It would have been better to ask these question one at a time.

Mr. Knott: I guess my warm-up was a bit of a disaster! What about part two, the picture description?

Ms. Wright: I really liked the task you chose, but as you yourself noted, the picture you used for the description was not clear. It's important that any time we use visuals that they be clear and reproduce well.

Mr. Knott: Ok. Good point. How about the role play? I think that went well.

Ms. Wright: Role plays are great for speaking tests, but next time remember to bring your cards. I also think it would have been better to choose a more authentic task. To have a student pretend to be a heart surgeon is already too difficult. It is far-fetched and I believe too advanced for this level. In keeping with your health theme, having David play a student and you play a counselor would have been more purposeful. All in all, Mr. Knott, you did a fine job for your first speaking exam. I think given the discussion we've just had that perhaps you should allow David to take the exam again.

7 Student Test-Taking Strategies

Although teaching and assessment differ, the cornerstone of validity ties them closely together: *Test what you teach and how you teach it.* In your instruction, strive to emphasize important objectives and demonstrate ways in which they could be assessed. Make sure students are familiar with all formats and rubrics that they will encounter in assessment situations, and encourage students to use them to develop review tests for each other. For writing assignments, make your scoring system clear and familiarize students with it through self- and peer assessment.

In today's universities, grades are substantially determined by test results. So much importance is placed on students' test results that often just the word *test* frightens students. The best way for students to overcome this fear or nervousness is to prepare themselves with test-taking strategies. This process should begin during the first week of each semester and continue throughout the school year. The key to successful test-taking lies in a student's ability to use time wisely and to develop practical study habits.

Effective Test-Taking Strategies

Effective test-taking strategies are synonymous with effective learning strategies. This section provides suggestions for long-term successful learning techniques and test-taking strategies, not quick tricks. There is nothing that can replace the development of good study skills.