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IELTS

SPEAKING

7+



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IELTS SPEAKING – MAT CLARK

Preface

During my 5 years as an IELTS examiner in China, I have seen thousands of Chinese IELTS candidates perform OK in the speaking interview.

Most people would agree that an OK score in speaking is 5 or 6.

Many students now realize that a score of 5 or 6 for speaking is not enough for their study requirements and this is why I wrote this book.

Many students spend months preparing for the IELTS speaking test and still find it difficult to score 7 or higher. In fact some candidates actually score lower than they potentially could have scored. There are a few reasons behind this poor performance and these will be discussed in detail throughout this book, but one major factor is the lack of quality material available for IELTS speaking preparation.

As an IELTS examiner, I am able to precisely separate the differences in spoken English ability resulting in different IELTS speaking scores – this knowledge provides the basis for this book.

There are a number of IELTS speaking books on the market but this book aims to break new ground by focusing on how to prepare for and achieve a speaking score of 7 (or maybe higher). All of the skills and strategies presented in this book are typical of a high scoring speaking candidate.

This book is intended for anyone who intends to take the IELTS test; it will also help learners of English improve their speaking skills. It is suitable for both classroom use and self-study.

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The Speaking Test in China

1. Chinese Performance and the Reason

1.1. Chinese Performance

As an IELTS examiner, I tested speaking candidates in most Chinese cities. I have often heard stories about candidates in certain cities getting higher scores than others, for example, “Candidates in Beijing get higher scores than candidates in Wuhan.” This is actually an “IELTS myth” and there is no truth in this theory. In reality, there is a nationwide trend of score averages and although some tests may contradict this trend on certain dates, the scoring average is quite consistent.

On average, 15~20% of candidates score below 5 (mostly 4); 60% of candidates score 5; 15~20% of candidates score 6; less than 5% score 7; a very small number of candidates score 8 or 9. (In my 5 year career of IELTS testing in China, which covered around 4,000 interviews I did not award a single speaking 9!)

From these numbers we can make the assumption that in general, Chinese candidates find it quite easy to score 5, but there are clearly some problems with scoring 6, 7 and 8.

I always begin a new IELTS speaking class by asking my students what score they need for speaking and the response is usually:

40% need a speaking score of 6;

60% need a speaking score of 7;

Clearly, most candidates are scoring below their required score in the speaking test. We can assume part of the problem rests in their preparation for the speaking test because most candidates achieve their desired score for listening, reading and writing (although the writing test has its own problems – these will be dealt with in another book).

We can now ask the question: Why do so many Chinese candidates have problems scoring 6 or higher for speaking?

Look at the following reasons and decide which you think are the most accurate in answer to the question above, put a cross (X) beside any reasons which you think are not true:

- a) The questions are too difficult.
- b) The candidates are nervous.
- c) The candidates haven't had enough practice.
- d) The candidates make lots of grammar mistakes.
- e) The examiners are too strict.

- f) The candidates give too many boring answers.
- g) The candidates didn't know enough about the topics.
- h) The candidates have poor pronunciation.
- i) The examiner didn't agree with the candidates' opinions.
- j) The candidates didn't communicate efficiently.
- k) The candidates have a Chinese accent.
- l) The candidates didn't answer the question directly.
- m) The candidates didn't understand the question fully.
- n) The candidates had no experience of talking with foreigners.
- o) The candidates think in a Chinese way (with Chinese logic).
- p) The candidates can't express their ideas clearly.
- q) The candidates were unfamiliar with the examiner's accent.
- r) The examiner talks too quickly.
- s) The candidates are not used to speaking in English.
- t) The candidates speak too slowly.

Which 3 reasons are the most accurate? If you are working in a class group, compare your reasons with your partner.

2. The Real Reason

Some of the reasons on the last page influence your speaking score but in fact the main reason why most Chinese candidates fail to score 6 or higher is because:

2.1. Do not Fully Understand How the Speaking Test Is Marked

When we take test of any kind, one of the most important things to know is how the test is actually marked.

As an example, let's forget about the IELTS for a while and consider a driving test. Anyone who is preparing for a driving test knows exactly what the driving test examiner is looking for, and they work on perfecting these particular aspects of their driving skills. They don't simply get in the car and “do some driving for an hour”.

Most people who take the IELTS speaking test don't know what the IELTS examiner is looking for, so most candidates just go into the interview room and “do some speaking English for 15 minutes”. As a result, many candidates miss the whole point of the speaking test and their score is usually below 6.

In the next section we will look in detail at the marking system of the IELTS speaking test, but first it is important to think about the basic elements of scoring.

The IELTS speaking test is a test for your spoken English language ability.

Most people either don't know this or they don't understand the importance of this fact. Many candidates seem to focus in the wrong way. Because the speaking test is based on a “question – answer” format, many people focus far too much on “answering” the questions.

Obviously, candidates are required to answer the question, but what they may not realize is that the examiner doesn't give marks for the actual answer. The marks are given for the “language content” of the answer – not the answer itself. It is possible to answer every question “correctly” and still get a low score (4 or 5).

The examiner is not asking questions because he/she needs answer. There are no correct or incorrect answers in the speaking test.

There are two basic types of answer:

[A] An answer to the question:

“How often do you go to the cinema?”

“One a month”

[B] A response focused on language:

“What's your favorite color?”

“Well, to be quite honest, I don't really have an actual favorite color but I guess that if I were buying clothes, then I'd usually go for something like blue or gray – you know, kind of dull colors, nothing too bright.”

The examiner gives marks for language ability not information, so answer A would actually get a very low mark. (There is some language ability here – 3 words, so answers like these might finally get a score of 4.)

Answer B does not focus on “answering” the question, instead it focuses on showing as much language ability as possible. This is the type of answer that a candidate needs to consistently produce to get a score in the region of 7.

2.2. First Language Interference

The speaking test is scored on a band system from 0~9. A score of 0 is someone who cannot speak any English at all. A score of 9 is someone who can speak English in the exactly the same way as an educated native speaker of English. So the higher scores 6, 7 and 8 are quite near to “native-speaker style English”. This is where our next problems occurs.

When we speak a second language most people are heavily influenced by their first

language. (Regardless of what these languages are.)

This causes problems because as we have just seen, to get a higher score for speaking it is essential to produce “native speaker style English”, but in fact most candidates produce Chinese style spoken English. In other words, they speak English in a similar way to how they speak Chinese.

It is not easy to instantly change your style of speaking, but one important step is to first consider the style of your first language and compare this with the style of the second language. Basically, to be able to speak English in the style of a native speaker, it is necessary to compare spoken Chinese with spoken English.

When you can recognize the differences between these two speaking systems, it will be much easier to work on removing elements of your first language influence from your second language speech.

Building a clear picture of how these two spoken languages differ makes it easier to produce a more “authentic style” of English.

Think about the way you speak your first language (most likely Chinese).

Try to list some points based on the style that native-speakers actually speak your language.

Remember, we are not thinking about the actual language system here; we are dealing with the way that language is commonly used its spoken form.

The next section deals with this important step.

Two Different Speaking Systems

1. The Economics of Language

This first point may sound strange but in fact it is easy to understand.

Different languages can be easily distinguished by the amount of words that native speakers produce in normal speech.

Ask the following question in your first language – Chinese (ask your partner if you are using this book in class); try to answer in a natural style: “What food do you like eating?”

Now think about your (or your partner's) answer. Try to repeat the answer exactly as it was given. How many actual words did the answer contain?

Now ask the same question in English to a native speaker of English (if you can find one). Ask your teacher if you are using this book in class. Again the answer should be as natural as possible. How many actual words did the answer contain?

Hopefully the result should be quite clear.

As a spoken language, Chinese operates quite “economically”. Native speakers of Chinese are able to hold conversations and communicate efficiently using small amounts of language. The way that Chinese has developed as language means that users of the language are able to exchange precise and exact ideas or concepts using a limited amount of words in their speech.

Spoken Chinese can therefore be described as an “economical” language. In simple terms, spoken Chinese doesn't waste words.

Spoken English on the other hand is quite “uneconomical” - it requires large amounts of words to communicate even basic ideas. In other words, spoken English wastes words.

This is our first major difference between spoken English and Chinese.

As a result of this, your IELTS responses should be longer than your natural spoken Chinese language response.

2. The Location of Key Information

Over the years I have often heard people describe English as a “direct language”.

In fact, this description is quite inaccurate. English is actually a very indirect language. Try listening to any British politician speaking in Parliament and you will certainly agree with me here.

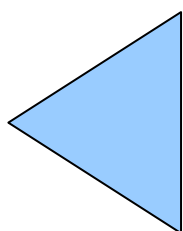
Chinese on the other hand is a direct language when it is spoken. Ask and answer the

following question in Chinese: “When do you usually listen to music?”

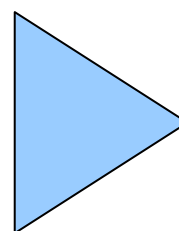
In Chinese, the answer would probably begin with a “time”, any details or explanations probably came after the key information or answer. For example, “At weekends or the evenings...(because + details)”

If the same question is asked in English, it is more likely that the details or explanations came first and the actual answer or key information came towards the end of the response.

It is a good idea to visualize the two answers as triangles:



Chinese answer
(begins with key information)



English answer
(begins with details)

Many language scientists (linguists) agree that spoken English contains approximately 50% redundant language. Redundant language can be described as words that don't contain meaning or words that do not alter the meaning of our message. These words and phrases are often described as “conversational filters”.

Anyone who want to speak English in a native-speaker style must use examples of these words and phrases. Conversational filters may appear at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of our spoken sentences.

Although spoken Chinese does contain some kind of redundant language, the actual amount is much lower than 50%. (Somewhere around 10%)

Look at the following example:

“Well you know my hometown London is kind of like huge you know. I mean it's actually enormous maybe even the biggest city in Europe. So really if you live there, it's sort of amazing really. You can do almost anything you want. Like you know there's so many things to do, and I guess that's why I love living there.” (about 60 words)

Now look at the same message without redundant language.

“My hometown London is huge, maybe the biggest city in Europe. If you live there, it's amazing. You can do anything you want. There are so many things to do. That's why I love living there.” (36 words)

With not exactly 50 redundant language but very close the message in the first answer is exactly the same as the message in the second answer.

If you are speaking English in the same way that you speak Chinese, you will not be producing this important “native-speaker feature” of spoken English. There are many examples of redundant language.

Another major difference between spoken Chinese and spoken English is that Chinese tends to recycle vocabulary.

Spoken Chinese conversations are often structured in a way that focuses on closed questions, in particular “yes/no” questions.

Look at the following example: “Is the food delicious?” The natural answer in Chinese would probably either: “Yes, it's delicious.” or “No, it's not delicious.” (followed by a reason). In spoken Chinese, it is perfectly normal to recycle vocabulary in this way.

On the other hand, spoken English doesn't normally do this. One of the reasons is because English conversations contain fewer closed questions and many more open questions. Example: “What's the food like?”

This difference is very important in the IELTS speaking test.

Look at the following question: “Do you like animals?”

If the candidate answers in a spoken Chinese style, the answer would probably begin with: “Yes I like animals...especially...”

In this answer the candidate is actually relying on the language in the question to form the answer. The candidate is not offering the examiner any original language.

We can see that vocabulary recycling has a negative effect on your score for two reasons. Firstly, native English speakers do not do it. Secondly, the examiner will penalize the candidate for copying the language in the question.

This point is discussed in more detail in the section on vocabulary.

Another key difference between spoken English and spoken Chinese is that spoken English is heavily graded. In other words, native speakers of English usually speak in degrees. English often uses “shades of different meanings”. In contrast, spoken Chinese is usually “black or white”.

Look at the following example question: “Do you like watching TV?”

Now look at the following answers:

Yes I really like watching TV...

I guess I'm quite fond of watching TV...

For the most part, I would probably say that I quite like watching TV...

To some extent I would say I like watching TV...

Well, I wouldn't say I actually like watching TV...

Well, I suppose you could probably say that I'm fond of watching TV...

Do I like watching TV...well it's hard to say...

The examples above display a common feature of spoken English – the use of “speaking in degrees”.

Chinese answers usually begin with a definite and clearly defined yes or no followed by supporting reasons.

There are more examples of this aspect of English later in this book.

3. Summary of the Differences between Spoken English and Spoken Chinese

In this section we have explored the differences between the way that native speakers produce Chinese and English. There are obviously exceptions to these differences on both sides, but our aim is not really to analyze language – our aim is to discover ways to produce native-speaker style English.

Hopefully we have highlighted some basic features of native-speaker style Chinese. It is likely that in the past many of these features were present in your spoken English.

As we have already stated, a high score in the IELTS speaking test is given when the candidate produces language which is similar to native-speaker style English.

The first step to achieving a higher score in the speaking test is to start speaking English in the following way:

- *Give longer responses*
- *Avoid being too direct*
- *Use filters and redundant language*
- *Don't recycle vocabulary*
- *Try to speak in degrees*

These basic points are the first step in producing a native-speaker style English.

The next section deals with the marking system in detail.

The Marking System

The IELTS speaking test is marked according to a carefully designed marking system. All speaking examiners use exactly the same marking system and use it in the same way.

The marking system is divided into four sections:

- Fluency and Coherence
- Lexical Resource (Vocabulary)
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy
- Pronunciation

This marking system is a printed document which the examiner refers to whilst listening to your spoken English. The sections are divided into scores in the following way:

<I skipped this part because the band score table of speaking test could be easily downloaded.>

Each box in the table contains a very detailed description of the features required for that score in that section. The box for “Fluency and Coherence 7” contains a 50-word detailed description of all of the things a candidate must do to get a score of seven in this section. Directly above and below the examiner can see the description for 8 and 6, in this way the examiner can listen to your language in the interview and decide carefully which description best fits your language.

It is important to understand this because many people do not realize that, for example, a score of 7 for “Lexical Resource” can only be awarded if your vocabulary exactly fits the description in that box.

The descriptions are written in professional linguistic terms so it would not be very useful to reproduce them here. Instead, the following section will translate into simple terms the language features a candidate must produce to achieve scores of 6, 7 and 8.

1. Fluency and Coherence (Scored 1~9)

In general terms, the score for “Fluency and Coherence” refers to the ways that the candidate speaks.

The features described in the marking system for this section include:

- Ability to produce long responses
- How easily the candidate can produce the long responses
- The amount of hesitation

- The speed of speech
- Use of discourse markers/ linking phrases/ connectives
- The amount of self-correction

Fluency and Coherence 6

According to the marking system, the examiner will award a 6 in this section if the candidate produces the following features:

- Be able and willing to produce long responses to most questions.
- Produce a range of different linking words/ phrases.
- Linking phrases are sometimes used incorrectly.
- Use some “marker” language (eg, redundant language).
- There is some hesitation/ repetition/ self-correction.

So from the above, it is clear that a Fluency 6 is the score where candidates begin to produce native-speaker style language features in longer answers.

A Fluency 5 lacks most of these features.

Fluency and Coherence 7

The examiner will award 7 in this section if the candidate can produce the following:

- Can produce long responses easily.
- Produces a wide range of linking words, phrases and connectives.
- Uses different linkers in a flexible ways.
- Responses are relevant to the topic.
- There is some hesitation/ repetition/ self-correction (but these do not affect understanding and meaning).

From the above it can be concluded that a Fluency 7 is awarded when the responses are usually long and they contain a larger quantity of linking devices (redundant language etc.)

Fluency and Coherence 8

The examiner will give 8 in this section if the candidate can produce the following features of language:

- Fluent use of a wide range of linking language features.
- Occasional hesitation/ repetition.

- Long responses are easily delivered and are directly relevant to the topic.
- Use cohesive features (linking phrases) accurately.

A Fluency and Coherence 8 score is very close to native speaker level.

Summary of Fluency and Coherence

Many people believe that the “Fluency” score is based on the speed and flow of speech. From the marking system descriptions it can be seen that these aspects are only a small part of the actual score.

The most important aspect of your “Fluency and Coherence” score is the length of your response and your use of cohesive features such as linking words, discourse markers, connectives and redundant phrases.

Problems with Fluency and Coherence

The most common problem that Chinese candidates face in this section of the marking system is that they focus too heavily on answering the question. In other words, their answers contain “information content” but lack the language to link these ideas together.

Look at the following example:

“What do you like about your hometown?”

“My hometown is Wuhan. Wuhan is very modern so I like the buildings. All over the city there are lots of new interesting buildings being built. When I was younger most of the buildings looked the same so it wasn't as attractive as it is nowadays.”

The answer above is not a bad answer. In fact the grammar is fairly complex and accurate; it is not too short. The problem with this answer is that it lacks cohesive features.

Now compare the following answer:

“Well you know, my hometown is Wuhan and you might not know this but Wuhan is a very modern, so I suppose I would have to say I like the buildings. Actually, all over the city there are lots of new interesting buildings being built. In fact, it's quite interesting to consider that when I was younger most of the building looked the same, so you know it wasn't as attractive as it is nowadays.”

The content in the answer above is exactly the same as the first answer. The difference in this second answer is that the information is linked using native-speaker style cohesive features. The answer above would most likely be typical of a Fluency and Coherence 7 or 8. (There is a section later which deals with cohesive language in detail.)

A second problem with coherence is when candidates avoid the question by talking

about something else.

Look at the following example:

“What sports do you like?”

“I don't like sports. I like computer games. My favorite computer game is Counter Strike and this game is very popular in China now. I like Counter Strike because...”

This situation happens quite often in the speaking test. If it happens once or twice, the examiner probably won't change your score. If it happens frequently then your “Fluency and Coherence” will be reduced.

2. Lexical Resource (Scored 1~9)

Many people (even examiners) call this section as the “vocabulary” score.

There are some common misunderstandings about how this score is awarded.

I have often been asked the following question: “How many words do I need to know to get a vocabulary score of 7?”

This question is almost impossible to answer because the marking system does not base the “Vocabulary” score on how many words you know.

The “Vocabulary” section of the marking system is based on the type of words you use and how you use them.

The language points featured in this section of the marking system include:

- Ability to use least common words
- Use of idiomatic language
- Paraphrasing (explaining words that you don't know)
- Ability to talk about unfamiliar topics
- Ability to convey precise meaning

A candidate will score 6 in this section if he/ she can produce the following features:

- Can produce vocabulary for most topics in some detail.
- Can explain “vocabulary gaps” by using other words.
- Does not confuse meaning by using vocabulary incorrectly.

A Lexical Resource 6 is not difficult to score. In general, Chinese candidates can score 6 in this section quite easily because they usually know quite a lot of English words and have prepared vocabulary for most topics. If a candidate fails to paraphrase or explain

“vocabulary gaps” this may reduce the score to 5 in some cases.

Lexical Resource 7

A score of 7 in this section requires examples of the following items:

- A range of vocabulary to talk about a wide variety of topics in detail.
- Examples of uncommon words.
- Some use of idiomatic language.
- Some examples of collocation.
- Ability to successfully explain “vocabulary gaps”
- Some vocabulary may still be used incorrectly.

The Lexical Resource 7 score is quite different to the 6 score because it needs some examples of complex vocabulary skills (a 6 doesn't require this). One of the most common reasons why candidates fail to score 7 is because they don't include idiomatic vocabulary. Idiomatic vocabulary can cover many aspects including slang, idiomatic sayings and phrasal verbs. (There is a section on vocabulary later in the book which offers examples of idioms for many topics). Another reason why candidates fail to score 7 in this section is because there are no examples of uncommon vocabulary or collocations.

Lexical Resource 8

A score of 8 will awarded if the candidate shows:

- A wide vocabulary range – enough for all topics.
- Vocabulary is used to give precise and exact meanings.
- Use a range of uncommon words and idioms correctly.
- Explain ideas using uncommon vocabulary.

In many ways the score of 8 is similar to 7. The main difference is the amount of uncommon vocabulary and idiomatic language.

Problems with Lexical Resource

Generally speaking, the most common problem in this section is the overuse of common words: “Beijing is a big city.” In this example, the word “big” is an example of very basic vocabulary.

The candidate could have chosen any word to describe Beijing but chose to produce an example of a very basic adjective.

In contrast, “*sprawling, cosmopolitan, politically-important, fast-developing,*

colossal” are examples of uncommon vocabulary and would have a positive effect on the candidate's “Vocabulary” score.

Candidates often neglect this area because they focus too much on the answer to the question.

There is a section later in this book on vocabulary building.

3. Grammatical Range and Accuracy (1~9)

There are two aspects of this score - “range” and “accuracy”. This score is often misunderstood because many people believe that a high score is awarded if the candidate doesn't make any grammar mistakes. The score in this section is based on a number of different factors including:

- Sentence formation
- Use of clauses (subordinate etc.)
- Use of complex structures
- Range of tense use
- Error density (the amount of errors in each sentence)
- The level of errors (whether the errors occur in basic or complex structures)

Grammatical Range and Accuracy 6

The candidate will be awarded a 6 in this section if the following is produced:

- A mixture of both basic and complex structures.
- Basic structures are produced accurately.
- Complex structures may contain errors.
- The grammar errors do not seriously influence meaning of the sentence.
- Tenses are usually formed correctly but not always used correctly.

A score of 6 in this section is not difficult to achieve. The candidate's language may contain quite a lot of grammar errors but these errors must occur in the examples of complex grammar. There should be examples of different tense formation, in particular, perfect and continuous tenses.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy 7

A score of 7 is awarded when the candidate's language contains the following aspects:

- A wide range of sentence structures and tenses.
- Many examples of sentences without grammar errors.
- Some small grammar errors.

The description of a Grammar score 7 is quite simple. The main point here is that the candidate must produce many examples of sentences which do not contain errors. Most basic sentence structures must be correct. There must be examples of complex sentence structures and many examples of subordinate clause structures. Modals (would, could, should, may) should also be used correctly. There must be a range of different tenses (usually used correctly).

Grammatical Range and Accuracy 8

The 8 score in this section is quite simple to describe:

- Wide range of grammar structures and features.
- Wide range of complex sentence structures used correctly.
- Most sentences contain no grammar errors.
- There may be occasional grammar errors but these are probably careless mistakes and do not affect meaning.

An 8 score is awarded when the candidate can produce examples of most complex sentence structures and can produce most tenses correctly and use them in the right way. There are a few mistakes.

Problems with Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Grammar is a very important part of the English language. In spoken English, basic meaning can be communicated using basic grammar. Many IELTS candidates focus on “communicating” the answer to the question and as a result they produce basic grammar.

Another problem is the lack of perfect and continuous tenses. Native speakers of English produce quite a lot of these tenses when they speak. In general, Chinese speakers of English neglect these important tenses.

The next problem is the actual sentence type. Many candidates produce too many basic sentences, eg:

“I come from Chongqing. Chongqing is a mountain city. It is located in on the Chang Jiang River.” (three basic sentences)

“I come from Chongqing which is a mountain city located on the Chang Jiang River.” (one complex sentence)

To score 7 in this section the majority of sentences should be complex sentences.

There is a section later in this book which gives advice and activities on tenses and sentence structures.

4. Pronunciation (1~9)

With effect from August 1st 2008, the marking scale of pronunciation will change in all IELTS speaking tests worldwide. Examiners will now be able to award band score 1~9 instead of the older system 2-4-6-8.

Candidates' pronunciation will be marked in the same way, but for the higher scores (7-8-9) there are one or two areas that have become more emphasized in the marking criteria; these are discussed below.

The most common myth about the “Pronunciation” section is that many people place too much importance on accent. The pronunciation score is influenced by accent but there are other important factors which influence the score.

“Pronunciation” covers the following language aspects:

- How easily the examiner understands what is being said
- Word stress
- Sentence stress
- Intonation
- Evidence of first language accent

Pronunciation 6

To score 6 for pronunciation, a candidate must display the following:

- Examiner can understand most of the candidate's language quite easily.
- There are some examples of correct word stress and sentence stress.
- Some evidence of intonation.
- Some use of stress of intonation to emphasize important meaning.
- There may be some mispronounced words.
- A first language accent may still be present.

The key to scoring 6 in this section is to speak clearly enough to be understood throughout. There is no need to try to reproduce a native-speaker accent (British, American, and Australian) in this band score.

Pronunciation 7

To score 7 for pronunciation, a candidate must display the following:

- Examiner can fully understand candidate's language (may have occasional problems).
- Examples of correct word and sentence stress used to emphasize or focus meaning.
- Use of intonation to emphasize important meaning.
- Able to vary speed of delivery to affect meaning.
- Able to divide utterances in “chunks” (see below)/
- There maybe some mispronounced words.
- A first language accent may still be present.

Pronunciation 8

The candidate will be awarded 8 in this section if the following requirements can be met:

- The examiner understands everything clearly and easily.
- The candidate uses pronunciation features to emphasize and alter meaning efficiently throughout the interview.
- Intonation, word stress and sentence stress are used efficiently throughout the interview.
- Fully able to use variation of speed, volume and pitch to efficiently emphasize meaning.
- There may be evidence of a first language accent but this does not affect meaning or understanding.
- May have occasional minor problems with sentence intonation.

Pronunciation 9

The candidate will be awarded 9 in this section if the following requirements can be met:

- Fully demonstrates native-speaker style pronunciation and skillfully uses pronunciation devices to control meaning.
- Some minor evidence of first language accent may still be present but this have no effect on intelligibility.

Aiming for Pronunciation 7

The introduction of the band score 7 in pronunciation will benefit many candidates.

In the past, because pronunciation scores were awarded 2-4-6-8, the absence of the score 7 meant that many candidates narrowly missed their target score of 6.5 or 7.0 simply because their pronunciation score was 6.

Now it should be easier to score 6.5 or 7.0 if the candidate can score 7 for pronunciation. Also, because there is a pronunciation score of 9, the requirements for a pronunciation 8 have been lowered slightly; this means more candidates will be awarded a score of 8 for pronunciation. It should also be remembered that some candidates will be worse off under this new system of marking. There will be situations where examiners will award a 5 for pronunciation when in the older system (2-4-6-8) the score would have been 6.

The Skills Required for a Pronunciation 7

If candidates can focus on the following skills and techniques, it will be easier to achieve a 7 in pronunciation.

1) Using variations in volume and pitch to highlight important meaning

E.g: I suppose that I occasionally read magazines but I rarely pick a newspaper.

In this sentence we can increase the volume or pitch of the adverbs.

2) Using variation in speed to emphasize meaning

E.g: I used to be quite into Yoga but more recently I've been getting into ballet dancing.

In this sentence we can slow down or stretch the phrases “used to” and “more recently” to emphasize the time comparison.

3) Dividing utterances into “chunks”

E.g: (I recently went on holiday to Sanya) (which is a small resort on Hainan Island.) (I guess it's one of the most popular tourist destinations in South China because of its beaches.) (Of course you can find a wide variety of seafood there, things like crab, shellfish and lobster.)

Each “chunk” of speech can be delivered as on “flowing segment” where sounds at the start of end of words can flow into each other. This is also called “elision”.

The Marking System – The Overall Score

The candidate is awarded four different scores and the overall score is an average of these scores. For example:

Fluency and Coherence	5
Lexical Resource	5
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	6

Pronunciation	6
The average of these four scores	5.5

In the IELTS speaking test, scores are rounded up or down to the nearest half-band (5.0 5.5 6.0 etc.), so in this example the candidate would score an overall 5.5 for speaking.

5.25 = 5 5.5 = 5.5 5.75 = 6 etc

5. A Summary of the Marking System

In this section we have looked in detail at the way that the speaking test is marked. It should now be quite clear that in order to achieve a higher score, the candidate must produce the features specially described in the marking system under that score.

One very important point to emphasize here is that the marking system does not include references to the following points:

- Interesting or original content
- Amusing or funny answers
- Polite or well-mannered attitudes
- Body language
- Eye contact
- Intelligent answers
- The truth
- Correct answers
- Opinions or ideas
- Appearance or dress code

So in fact it can be concluded that your speaking score is awarded purely on the basis of your spoken language. In theory it could be possible for a candidate to arrive at the interview in dirty old clothes, be impolite, invent answers, tell lies and hold unreasonable or controversial opinions and still achieve a high score if he or she demonstrated the features described in the marking system – i.e. native-speaker style spoken English. I can add an example from my own experience here. Many years ago in an IELTS speaking test, I interviewed a young lady who was arrogant, impolite, impatient and quite rude – I awarded this candidate a score of 8 because her spoken English matched the descriptions in the marking system for band score 8.

The Speaking Test Format

At the time of writing, the speaking test follows the format introduced in the year 2000. There are often “rumors” about changes to the format of the test. To date there have been no changes to the test format since it was first introduced in the year 2000. There are regular changes to the speaking test content, but the format remains the same.

All IELTS speaking tests follow a rigid structure. Wherever in the world you take your speaking test, you can expect your interview to follow the same pattern. Examiners are regularly monitored to ensure that they deliver the speaking interviews in the correct way as set by UCLES (the test designers).

Overall, speaking interviews are between 11 and 14 minutes in length. (Occasionally this may differ, for example if a candidate fails to respond to any questions, the interview will probably be shorter in length.)

The interview is divided into three clearly defined sections and each section focuses on different speaking skills and linguistic abilities. The criteria described in the marking system is the same for all 3 parts of the test and the score is awarded according to the candidates average performance across all three parts. This means that all three sections are generally “equal” in value. In theory, it is possible for a candidate to achieve a reasonably acceptable score (5~6) even if he or she underperforms in one particular section as long as the other two sections produced a decent performance.

To achieve a higher score (7+) a candidate must demonstrate the features as described in the marking system in all three parts.

The Start of the Speaking Test

There is confusion surrounding the start of the test. Usually candidates will be shown to their interview rooms and they wait outside until the examiner invites them inside. The candidate is asked to sit down and the examiner will say the following:

“Good Afternoon, My name is..., can you tell me your full name please?”

Many candidates misinterpret this as the start of the actual speaking test and proceed to deliver a long answer describing their name and tell a story about how their name was given to them.

This is totally unnecessary because the examiner needs to know your name so that he is certain that he is interviewing the right person. The suitable response is:

“My name is...(Mo Wenwei).”

Many candidates try to establish a conversation with the examiner at this stage; again this is totally unnecessary because this part of the interview is not being tested. So something like:

“Oh, you must be very tired today...”

is unnecessary because the test has not really started. Save your energy until the actual test has begun. The best way to deal with the start of the interview is to follow the examiner.

The actual speaking test will begin when you hear the words:

“In this first part I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself.”

In other words, everything you say after this point is being tested, anything you say before this point is not being tested.

The start of the speaking test (asking for candidate name and checking ID card) usually takes about 30 seconds to 1 minute. This time is not included in the interview time. The examiner starts timing the interview when the test questions begin.

1. Part One of the Speaking Test

Part One of the speaking test lasts for 4~5 minutes.

Many people wrongfully call Part One the “self-introduction” part of the test. This is an inaccurate description because although this section does ask some questions about your personal background, it also covers many other questions and topics. A more accurate description of Part One would be:

“Basic questions on familiar topics including your background, hobbies, interests, routines, lifestyle and habits.”

The examiner will select three topics in Part One. The range of Part One topics is quite extensive. (See the section on Part One skills.)

In general the first topic in Part One deals with your background and there are two possible paths.

[A] Where you live (you city, area where you live, street, house)

[B] Your studies, work, job

As a rule, the examiner will select either path A or B but NOT both. All candidates can expect to be asked questions on one of these topics areas.

After this first “personal” topic, the examiner will select two more topics based on hobbies, interests, routines, lifestyle and habits.

The number of questions asked in Part One varies for each candidate. The maximum number of questions for each topic is usually four or five and the minimum is two. This means that the maximum number of questions in Part One is between twelve and fifteen and the minimum is around six.

The number of questions asked in Part One depends on the length of time the candidate spends speaking. A candidate who produces long responses will be asked fewer questions because Part One is limited to four or five minutes. A candidate who gives short answers will be asked more questions.

Candidates often ask the question: “Is it better to give long or short answers in Part One?”

The answer to this question is quite simple. If you have read the earlier chapter on the marking system you should know that longer responses result in a higher score, so obviously in all parts of the speaking test longer answers are preferable to short answers.

1.1. Possible Topics for Part One

Where you live	Collecting things	Cooking
Your studies	Dancing	Weddings
Your job	Learning languages	Public transportation
Hobbies	Rain	Travelling
Sports	Hotels	Names
Television	Relaxation	Restaurants
Music	Outdoor activities	Food
Reading	Memories	Birthdays
Email	Childhood	Seasons
Learning English	Weather	Flowers
Writing	Happiness	Birds
Clothes	Shopping	Photography
School(Primary school)	Films	Buildings
Friends	Weekends	Museums
Festivals	Going out in the evening	Cycling
Meeting new people	Animals	Healthy eating
The sea	Routines	Colours
Computers	Family	

This list of topics is not complete and every year more topics are introduced into Part One.

The important fact is that all of these topics should be quite familiar to you. Even if you don't like sport, you should be able to answer basic questions related to the topic of sport.

Another important fact is that the topics are “general”. They are not specific to any particular country or region. This means that the questions on food for example are about food in general or food in your country, not specifically about “food in China”.

One useful tip to remember about the Part One topics and questions is that they are designed so that every candidate in any country has an equal opportunity to fully answer ALL questions.

For example, you might be asked: “What food is popular in your country?” or “What food do you like eating?” You will NOT be asked: “How do you make Chinese dumplings?” or “Do you prefer noodles or rice?”

From the list of topics we can see that there are approximately 50 Part One topics (and this list is increasing every year). If there are five possible questions for each Part One topic then we can conclude that there are potentially 250+ questions in Part One.

This presents a problem. Most candidates prepare for their speaking test by preparing “specific answers” for “specific questions”. It seems an almost impossible task to prepare 250+ answers. Even if this was possible, it would take an enormous effort and use up most of a student's preparation time and energy.

Most people who prepare in this way focus on the “content” of each answer and as we have already seen, content does not increase your score. Within the content they may be learning vocabulary for each question, but vocabulary only influences part of your score. Also it would be very difficult to learn 250+ sets of vocabulary.

Obviously, this is not a realistic preparation method for Part One of the test. We need to find an alternative way to effectively prepare for these topics and questions.

Most people are unaware that this huge list of topics and questions can actually be broken down into sub-groups. By this, I mean the questions themselves not the topics.

Look at the following Part One topic/question frame.

Hometown

Tell me about your hometown.

What do you like about your hometown?

Is there anything you don't like about your hometown?

Would you like to move to another city in other future?

Studies

Tell me about your studies.

What do you like about you studies?

Is there anything you don't like about your studies?

What would you like to do after your studies?

The two topics are completely different and the questions are completely different in

the “content”. There is however one very clear similarity.

The actual “question types” are the same. The answer to the second question in both questions would obviously be different in content but the structure and style of the answer should really be very similar.

Although the number of different topics and questions in Part One is enormous, the number of actual question types is quite limited.

For this reason, one very effective method for dealing with Part One is to focus on the question types. In the following pages, we will explore the different question types in Part One and develop structures suitable for each type.

1.2. Question Type 1: “Basic Description” Questions

Look at the example question: “Tell me about your hometown.”

This seems like a simple question. Candidates must remember that the examiner is NOT asking this question because he or she wants to know something about your hometown.

Remember: The examiner is not interested in you, your life or anything you say. The examiner is doing a job. The job is to award a score for your spoken English in relation to the marking system.

So again we can see that content becomes irrelevant. The examiner is actually asking the following question: “Show me your ability to describe something (a place) and give me some town or city vocabulary.”

Look at the example answer:

“I come from Beijing. I am native of this city. Beijing is the capital of China. In Beijing there are many historical buildings. Beijing Duck is very famous – I always eat it with my friends.”

The problem with this response is that it “answers” the question but it doesn't offer the examiner any evidence of your ability to describe something. A description needs to offer detailed and precise information and the points need to be developed in some way.

If we consider the marking system we can also add that the answer does not contain any features of native-speaker style spoken English.

- The answer is short/direct.
- It does not contain any linking words or phrases.
- It does not contain any redundant language.
- There are no examples of uncommon vocabulary.

- There is no idiomatic language.
- The grammar is correct but it is very basic grammar.
- There are no complex sentence structures.
- The tense use is limited.

This answer is therefore typical of a lower score (4~5).

Now consider the following answer:

“Well as you can probably guess I come from Beijing and I have lived here all my life, although at the moment I'm studying in another city – Tianjin. I suppose if I had to describe Beijing, the first thing I would say is that it's absolutely enormous, maybe even one of the biggest city in Asia I guess. It's so big in fact that even the locals have problems finding their way around. Another significant characteristic is that it offers examples of both classical and contemporary architecture. Actually some of the China's most renowned landmarks are “slap-bang” in the middle of Beijing.”

This response is much better in quality than the first answer for the following reasons:

- It is long but doesn't move away from the topic/ questions.
- It contains redundant language.
- It contains linking phrases.
- It contains one idiom.
- It contains some uncommon vocabulary.
- The vocabulary is topic-specific.
- It contains examples of complex sentence structures.
- It contains a mix of tenses.
- The grammar is correct (even in the longer structures).

Because this answer meets many of the marking system descriptions required to achieve a higher score it would be typical of a score of 7+.

➤ **Activity**

In the answer above find examples of the following:

- Redundant language
- Linking words

- Linking phrases
- Uncommon vocabulary
- Idiomatic vocabulary
- Different tenses (how many are used?)

Description Structures

When responding to description questions, you need to begin with a lead-in phrase. (This is an example of a linking device/ redundant language). Possible lead-in phrases include the following:

OK then...	Right, OK...
Alright...	Well...
Well, you know...	Well first of all...
Actually...	

We can add a “pointing phrase” next, to signal to the listener that the first point is coming. (This is another example of a linking device/ redundant language).

- ...the first thing I should mention is that...
- ...the point I'd like to begin with is that...
- ...I could start off by saying that...
- ...my initial point would be that...
- ...I need to start off by pointing out that...
- ...the main thing you need to know is that...
- ...I suppose I should begin by highlighting the fact that...
- ...you may (or may not) be aware that in fact...
- ...I really need to kick off with the point that...

Most of the above contain interchangeable words. Now you are ready to describe your first point.

➤ Activity

Example question: “Tell me about the street that you live in.”

Think about one important point you can describe about your street (it could be location, size, appearance, the buildings, etc). Do not give the name as this is not really describing (and the name would probably be in Chinese so you would not be using examples of

topic-related vocabulary). Select a lead-in phrase and a pointing phrase.

- Now describe your first point.
- Choose different lead-in and pointing phrases and practice describing the first point about your street.

The first point needs to be developed with a complex sentence. Notice in the example how the candidate uses a structure with “that”.

“...the first thing I would say is *that* it's absolutely enormous, maybe even one of the biggest city in Asia I guess.”

This is a simple but effective way to join your linking phrase with the detail sentence. The result is a complex structure. Notice how the candidate then uses another linking word “maybe even” to add more details.

➤ **Activity**

Example questions: “Tell me about your studies or job.”

Choose a lead-in and pointing phrase. Introduce your first point and use a structure with “that”. Add a linking word to introduce a detail about your first point. Now we can look at the full structure.

- (1) Lead-in phrase
- (2) 1st pointing phrase
- (3) Point 1
- (4) Linking word/ phrase + detail about point 1
- (5) 2nd pointing phrase
- (6) Point 2
- (7) Linking word/ phrase + detail about point 2
- (8) 3rd pointing phrase
- (9) Point 3
- (10) Linking word/ phrase + detail about point 3

Examples of 2nd pointing phrases:

Another point which I could add is that...

A second feature which I should mention is that...

As well as that, I could say that...

On top of that I can also add that...

Also, I suppose I should say that...

Examples of 3rd pointing phrases:

And I shouldn't forget to mention that...

In addition to what I've just said, I can add that...

Something else that I need to comment on is that...

I guess I could also remark on the fact that...

So a complete response might look something like this:

“Well first of all, the main thing you need to know is that...(point 1)...In fact...(detail 1)...On top of that I can also add that...(point 2)...which means...(detail 2)...Something else that I need to comment on is that...(point 3)...So actually (detail 3)...”

➤ **Activity**

Practice saying the full example structure with your own points and details for the following questions:

Tell me about the house/ flat you live in.

Describe your hometown.

Tell me about your job.

Tell me about your family.

Tell me about your city.

What is your main ambition?

What makes you happy?

Now write out your full describing structure using the example phrases. Now practice using your structure for the questions above.

Summary of “Description” Questions

Most candidates will probably be asked at least one description question. This question is often one of the first questions in Part One. By producing style of answer we have just seen, the candidate is focusing on the marking system criteria and not “answering” the question. We have not looked at any vocabulary for any of the individual topics or questions – this can be found in the section on topic-specific vocabulary later in this book.

1.3. Question Type 2: “Liking”

A very common type of question in Part One is the “liking” questions. For example: “Do you like animals?”

As an examiner I have asked this style question hundreds of times. A common response might be something like:

“Yes, I like animals. I like cats and dogs because they are very lovely.”

If you have read and understood what has been written so far in this book, you should be starting to see the problems with this answer. This answer lacks all the features common in native-speaker style English. The answer focuses 100% on content.

Expressing likes and dislikes is actually quite a large area of the English language and as a result there is a wide range of language available to express these functions. When the examiner asks, “Do you like animals?”, your answer should display some ability to express these functions using a range of appropriate language.

“I like” and “I don't like” do not display any ability to skillfully or flexibly express these functions. In most cases, the examiner probably used “like” or “don't like” in the question, so candidates who use these words are simply recycling the question words in the form of a statement.

For these questions, the first step is to find some alternative language for “liking”. The following expressions can be used for all general topics:

I'm fairly/ pretty keen on...

I'm really into...

I'm quite a big fan of...

I simply adore...

I'm quite enthusiastic about...

I generally prefer...(use only when comparing)

Most of the adverbs are interchangeable in this list.

One advantage of the IELTS vocabulary marking system is that if you use an uncommon word incorrectly or in the wrong context, you will still get some credit for trying to use the word.

For example, if a candidate said:

“I’m quite enthusiastic about Korean food.”

Compare it with:

“I like Korean food.”

Native-speaker wouldn't normally use the word “enthusiastic” to describe food, but the first sentence is better than the second because it attempts to use an uncommon vocabulary item (quite enthusiastic).

So don't be afraid to use any of the words from the list – they are all worth more to your score than “I like” or “I enjoy”.

We return to the question: “Do you like animals?” The aim of our answer is to use about 3 or 4 “liking” expressions.

Look at the following answer:

“Well to be quite honest, in general I would say that I'm actually quite keen on animals, but in particular I would probably have to say that I'm really into domestic pets like dogs. I guess the reason why I'm a fan of dogs is because I adore their loyalty and companionship. In addition to dogs I suppose I'm also pretty passionate about endangered species, especially dolphins and things like that and this is due to the fact I feel some degree of responsibility towards wildlife protection.”

➤ **Activity**

How many “liking” expressions can you find in the answer? How many liking phrases can you find? How much redundant language is there? Find examples of uncommon or topic-specific vocabulary. (Note “things like that” - the meaning of “like” is not the same as the meaning in the question.)

Possible starting phrases for “liking” include:

Well in general I would say that...

Actually, I suppose that for the most part I'd probably say that...

Well, to be honest I should really say that...

Of course I think I'd have to say that...

Certainly I would definitely say that...

Well, I guess that generally speaking I would certainly say that...

Then select the first “liking” expressions and add the topic word or a general category of the topic.

Example: “Well in general I would say that I'm quite passionate about Italian food;...”

Now you need to add a linking word or phrase to introduce a specific type of the topic of category (eg, pizza).

...but in particular...

...particularly...

...especially...

...specifically...

...to be more precise...

...to be more specific...

...to be more exact...

...to be more accurate...

Now add your second “liking” expression with the specific type.

Example: “Well in general I would say that I'm quite passionate about Italian food, to be more specific, I would probably say that I'm really into pizza and pasta.”

Now add a linking phrase to introduce the first reason:

And I guess this is probably because...

This could be because...

This might be because...

This is due to the fact that...

I suppose the reason has something to do with the fact that...

“Well in general I would say that I'm quite passionate about Italian food, to be more specific, I would probably say that I'm really into pizza and pasta. This is mainly because my girlfriend is Italian so she always cooks Italian cuisine at home.”

Now use a linking phrase to introduce your second point.

As well as this...

In addition to this...

To add to this...

Use another “liking” expression: “As well as this, I’m quite partial to vegetarian food.”

Now be more specific:

“As well as this, I’m quite partial to vegetarian food especially things like bean curd. This could be because...I’m quite conscious of healthy eating and bean curd is a fat-free food and it’s high in nutritional value.”

So the complete structure looks like this:

“Well to be quite honest, in general I would say that I’m actually quite keen on..., but in particular I would probably have to say that I’m really into...you know, things like ...I guess the reason why I’m a fan of ...is because I adore...In addition to this I suppose I’m so pretty passionate about..., especially...and things like that, and this is due to the fact that...”

Use the structure above to answer the following questions:

What food do you like?

Do you like reading?

What do you like about your hometown?

Do you like listening to music?

Do you like shopping?

What do you like about your studies/ job?

Now answer the question using your own structure.

1.4. Question Type 3: “Disliking” Questions

“Disliking” questions are quite common in Part One of the speaking test. The answer can be very similar to the “liking” questions but with “disliking” vocabulary.

The following language can be used to express “dislikes”.

I’m not so keen on...

I’m not much of a fan of...

I’m not really that fond of...

And for very strong “dislikes” use the following:

I totally detest...

I absolutely loathe...

I really can't stand...

In your answer, try to use a “dislike” and a “strong dislike” phrase. Use the same style of structure as the “liking” answer but change the linking phrases.

Example:

“Is there anything you don't like about your hometown?”

“Of course I think I'd have to say that I'm not so keen on the weather. To be more precise, I really can't stand the summer months. This is due to the fact that the temperatures can get as high as 40 degrees so it can be quite uncomfortable if you don't have air conditioning in your house. In addition to this, I'm not really that fond of the public transport system. And I guess this is probably because the buses are too old and the seats are really hard, so long journeys are usually pretty bumpy.”

Now answer the following “disliking” questions using a similar structure:

Is there anything you don't like about your school/ studies?

Is there any food you don't like?

What's the worst thing about shopping?

Are there any clothes that you don't like?

What type of weather do you dislike?

Summary of “Liking/ Disliking” Questions

The most important thing is to avoid the simple vocabulary (like, dislike, enjoy, love, hate) and replace these with the expressions given in this chapter.

Many candidates put “likes” and “dislike” in the same answer (usually the “liking” question). This is not wrong, but as we have seen, the answers to these questions can be quite long, so it is better to split them into two separate answers.

Remember: Give a developed answer to every question. In the past I have heard answers like these:

Do you like animals? - No, I don't like animals

Do you like reading? - No, I like watching TV instead.

Is there anything you don't like about your hometown? - No, I like my city.

As a rule, if the examiner asks you if you like something, give a positive answer (yes) even if that answer is not true. In the same way, If the question is “ Is there anything you don’t like about...?”, you should also give a positive answer(yes).

Speaking positively is much easier than speaking negatively and it is easier to give reasons and examples to say “why” rather than “why not”

Remember: Base your answer on language not on fact or truth. You do not get any marks for telling the truth!

1.5. Question Type 4: “ Types of” Question

Another common type of questions in Part One is “ types of” questions.

For example:

“ Tell me about the different types of public transport in your country”.

The most common problem with these questions is shown in the following answer:

“ In my city there are many types of public transport, for example, buses, taxis motorcycle taxis, trains, planes, ferries and mini-buses.”

In this answer, the candidate lists seven types of public transport. However, the answer is 100% content and there is no evidence of native-speaker style language. Some candidates may believe that get one mark for every type of transport that they list but this is not true.

One reason for this answer is that in spoken Chinese it is quite common to give these “ list” style answers.

A good answer to these questions should be structured and developed in the following way.

Begin with an opening phrase:

Well actually...

Of course, you know...

Sure, obviously...

Of course, it goes without saying...

Ok, certainly...

Then use one of the following:

... there’s quite a mixed variety of...

... there's quite a wide range of...

... there's quite an extensive diversity of...

... there's quite a diverse mixture of...

... there's a fairly broad range of...

So the opening line might be:

“ Of course, it goes without saying that there's quite a mixed variety of public transport in my city.”

Now use the following structure to introduce the first type:

But I guess the most + *adj* ... would probably be...

However, I suppose the most+ *adj* ... could possibly be...

Though I think the most + *adj* ... would potentially be...

Yet I imagine the most + *adj* ... may well be...

Still, I suspect that the most+ *adj* ... could perhaps be...

In these structures you will need to select an adjective which fits the question. Here are some possible adjective suggestions:

common	commonplace	influential
popular	frequent	prevalent
fashionable	trendy	notorious
famous	well-known	crucial
widely-used	widely-known	prominent
important	significant	widespread
standard	conventional	celebrated
hip	with-it	commonly-used
usual	customary	common-known
current	fashionable	notably
best-selling	up-to-date	renowned

So the first sentence could be:

“ Of course, it goes without saying that there’s quite a mixed variety of public transport in my city. Though I think the most commonly- used would potentially be buses.”

Now use a phrase to add a detail:

The thing with buses is that...

I assume buses are so +*adj* because...

The point I want to add about buses is that...

And what you have to realise with buses is that

And the explanation for this could be that...

And the basis of this is that...

So the first part of the answer could be:

“ Of course, it goes without saying that there’s quite a mixed variety of public transport in my city. Though I think the most common-used would potentially be buses. And the explanation for this could be that they are so cheap and reliable. In fact the average bus fare in my city is about one yuan for a single journey.

Notice that the detail sentence doesn’t repeat word “buses”, instead it uses the pronoun “they” (some answers will need it).

Also notice that the detail sentence uses a linking word “in fact” to make a complex structure.

Now use a linking phrase to introduce a second type:

Besides (buses), ...

As well as (buses), ...

In addition to (buses), ...

Another kind of (public transport) would be...

Another form of (public transport) worth mentioning could be...

A second variety of (public transport) would be something like...

A subsequent category would be something like...

So the next part of the answer might be:

“As well as buses, a second variety of public transport would be something like taxis”

Add a linking phrase to develop the second type:

And the main characteristic of (taxis) is that ...

And the unique aspect of (taxis) is that ...

And the exceptional aspect with (taxis) is that ...

Add the detail with a linking word to form a complex sentence:

“ As well as buses, a second variety of public transport would be something like taxis. And one exceptional aspect of (taxis) is that ... they are certainly quickest way to get around town. So if you're in hurry then taxis are the best bet (= the best choice).

Now you need to add a vague end line:

And of course there's the usual things like...

And obviously you can also find things like...

Likewise, as might be expected, there are things like...

And naturally, there are things like...

So the final sentence might be:

“Likewise, as might be expected, there's things like ferries, motorcycle taxis and trains although these are not as widely-used as the first two that I mentioned.”

So the finished structure might look something like:

“Of course, It goes without saying there's quite an extensive diversity of...(topic) Still, I suspect that the most + *adj* could perhaps be ... (type 1) And what you have to realise with...(type1) is that... In fact/ so/ but/ because ...(detail)

Another form of ...(topic) worth mentioning could be... (type 2) And the main characteristic of ...(type 2) is that ...(detail) (+ linking word/ complex structure)

And naturally, there's things like (type2 or 3 other types)”

Use the complete model structure to answer the following question:

Tell me about the type of sports that are popular in your country?

What kinds of restaurants are popular in your country?

What types of shop can be found in your local area?

What types of things do people collect in your country?

What hobbies are common in your country?

What types of TV programmes are popular in your country?

Now design your own structure using the language option provided in this section.

Summary of “Types of” Questions

Don't repeat the adjective used in the question. Example:

“What kinds of restaurants are popular in your country?”

In your answer, do not use “popular”. Example:

“Yet I imagine the most widespread may well be...”

Sometimes candidates struggle to find content for these questions because they generalize their answer too much. Example:

“What kinds of restaurants are popular in your country?”

If you say “Chinese restaurants”, this is far too general and difficult to introduce other types of restaurants.

See the individual topic sections later in the book for vocabulary ideas on types and kinds of particular topics.

1.6. Question Types 5: “Wh-/How Often” Questions

This question type is very common in Part One.

Look at the following examples:

How often do you go to the cinema?

Where do you usually buy your clothes?

When do you listen to music?

At what time of day do you usually read?

Do you spend your weekends with?

The problem with these questions is that many candidates give very direct “information-focused” responses. It is quite common for candidates to respond to these questions in the following way:

Maybe once a week
In New World Department store,
At weekends and in the evenings.
In the evening before I sleep.
My parent or my friends.

As we have discovered, It is almost impossible to achieve a high score with this type of answer. The key to these questions is to answer the question with two or three different responses. Example:

“how often do you go to the cinema?”

“Well to be honest, I think I would have to say that it really depends. Like for instance, if I have the money, then it’s quite possible that I will watch a movie in the cinema, two or three times a month. You know cinema tickets are pretty pricey in China. Whereas in contrast, if I’m broke, it’s more likely that I’ll watch movies at home on DVD; you probably know that DVDs are quite cheap here, especially compared to the price of a cinema ticket.”

The key to the answer is the structure “it depends”. If you use this, you can produce a “situational contrast” which allows you to use contrast language (linking words).

The first step is too select an opening phrase:

Well to be honest ...

Actually to be fair ...

In actual fact ...

Well in truth ...

Well in all fairness ...

In fact, in all honesty ...

Now select a “depends” phrase:

... I think I would have to say that it is really depends.

... I suppose I would have to maintain that it kind of depends really.

... I imagine that it would depend on the situation.

... I guess my answer would be determined by different conditions.

Now select a linking phrase:

Like for instance ...

Like more specifically ...

You know like, to be exact ...

More precisely like ...

Like, to be more direct ...

Notice that all of these linking phrases include the word “like”. In these structures “like” is a conjunction used as a meaningless filler word. This is very typical of informal native-native speaker English.

It is important to get the next step exactly right. The success of this structure relies on the following conditional grammar structure:

Select one of the following:

If (situation A) ... then I will most likely ...

If (situation A) ... then it’s quite possible that I will ...

If (situation A) ... then as a consequence I will probably ...

If (situation A) ... then I guess it’s quite likely that I will ...

Your answer is going to compare two different situations or conditions. These can be quite flexible. Here are some possible ideas to use:

Situation A	Situation B
Weekdays	Weekends
Summer	Winter
Good weather	Bad weather
Term time	School holidays
If I’m alone ...	If I’m with friends ...
If I’ve got a lot of time ...	If I’m fairly busy

So the opening sentence might be:

“Well in all fairness, I imagine that it would depend on the situation. Like for instance, if (situation A) ... then I will most likely ... so/because/in fact ...”

Answer the following question, introducing one situation. (Develop the situation using a complex structure).

“How much time do you spend listening to music?”

(If possible try to avoid repeating the question vocabulary “listening to music”).

Now you can compare situation A with situation B. Add a compare linking phrase:

Whereas in contrast ...

Whereas on the other hand ...

Though, at the same time ...

While, oppositely ...

Select one of the following:

If (situation B) ... then it's more likely that I'll ...

If (situation B) ... then it's almost certain that I will ...

If (situation B) ... then I will almost always

If (situation B) ... then I will most certainly ...

Remember to develop situation B with a complex structure.

Now answer the following questions using the fully developed structure for two situations. (If you want to give a longer response you could even introduce a third situation.)

How often do you go to the cinema?

Where do you usually go shopping?

When do you usually read?

At what time of day do you usually listen to music?

Who do you spend your evenings with?

When do you go out in the evenings, what do you usually do?

How often do you play sports?

How often do you eat in restaurants?

Summary of “Wh-/How often” Questions

If you follow the example structure, make sure that you choose two situations that are very different. It is easier to contrast two clearly different situations.

Make sure that you use “if” and “will” for both situations. This is a fairly complex grammar structure but it is easy to construct accurately. This type of answer directly influences the “Grammar” score and the “Fluency” score in your speaking test.

1.7. Question Type 6: “Yes/No” Questions

In Part One, the examiner might ask you questions which appear to be direct “Yes/No” questions.

Look at the following examples:

Do people wear special clothes at weddings in your country?

Is watching TV a popular activity in your country?

Do you think it is important to play sports/do physical exercise?

Is fast food popular in your country?

Is healthy eating important?

Can you play a musical instrument?

Do you think it's important for children to learn to play a musical instrument?

Is food expensive in your country?

Is education free in your country?

Do you think you are an ambitious person?

A common problem with these questions is that many candidates begin their answer a direct “Yes” or “No” and then give one or more details to explain their answer.

This is not wrong, but these answers are often too simple in grammar structure and lack the essential linking phrases.

A better answer is to answer BOTH “Yes” and “No”. By doing this you will produce a response with better quality language structures.

Look at the following example:

“Is healthy eating important?”

“Yes, healthy eating is important, because ...”

If you answer in this way, you are limiting your answer to a fairly basic structure.

Now look at the next example:

“Well in actual fact, If I think about it, I guess that in many ways it’s fairly important, especially when you consider that a healthy diet can help to prevent a variety of diseases and health problems such as diabetes and obesity. But you also have to understand that eating unhealthy food in moderation is not overly harmful. In fact unhealthy food is often tastier than healthy food so I guess it’s fine to eat a little junk food now and then. So all in all I guess my answer would have to be yes and no.”

It is possible to use this type of structure for many, but not all, “Yes/No” questions.

Look at the list of questions at the beginning of this section and decide which ones you would be able to answer with this structure.

The structure can be built in this way. First, use an opening phrase:

Well in actual fact, if I think about it, I guess that in many ways ...

OK, well in reality, I suppose that to some extent ...

Alright, I guess that on the one hand ...

Well certainly in some ways ...

Now make your first statement (eg, It’s fairly important ...). Develop the first statement using a linking structure:

... especially when you consider that ...

... particularly if you think about the point that ...

...especially with regard to the point that...

...and this is definitely the case with...

Try using this structure to give a “Yes” answer for the following questions:

Is crime a problem in your country?

Do people in your country often keep pets?

Is it always good to be ambitious?

Now you need to introduce your “No” answer. First use a linking phrase:

But you also have to understand that ...

Even so, you could also say that ...

At the same time you could say that ...

After describing your “No” answer, you can “round-off” the answer with one of the following phrases:

So all in all I guess my answer would have to be yes and no.

So on the whole I suppose the answer has to be yes and no.

So all things considered I guess the answer is both yes and no.

So in the main, I suppose the answer is probably yes and no.

Use the full structure to answer the following questions:

Do many people work on farms in your country?

Is food expensive in your country?

Is public transport expensive in your country?

Do you think that it is important to spend time alone?

Some "Yes / No" questions in Part One cannot use this "Yes and No" style of response. Look at the following questions:

Is watching TV a popular activity in your country?

Can you play a musical instrument?

Are friends important to you?

With questions like this it may be difficult to answer both yes and no. It is probably much easier to give a "Yes" answer. Use the structures given to introduce your "Yes" idea and then develop this single idea with one or two reasons or details.

Summary of "Yes / No" Questions

The most important thing is to avoid repeating the question structure with a "Yes"

or "No". Example:

"Is fast food popular in your country?"

"Yes, fast food is very popular in my country, especially ..."

As we have seen before, repeating the question structure does not have any significant influence on your score, so if you want a high score - DON'T DO IT!

With these questions you need to think quite quickly, especially if you want to give a "Yes and No" style answer. You don't need to have wonderful ideas for your "Yes and No" answer, just something that gives you the chance to use the structure. Remember-the examiner is not marking your ideas.

1.8. Question Type 7: "Would" Questions:

Look at the following questions:

Would you like to move to another city, in the future?

Would you like to change your job?

Would you like to live near the sea?

Would you like to learn another foreign language?

Would you like to be in a film?

What would you like to change about your city?

What would you like to change about your school (school in the past)?

Would you like to change your name?

When the examiner asks these questions, he or she is listening carefully to one aspect of your answer. What do you think is the most important aspect of your answer for these questions?

Look at the following example:

"Would you like to change your name?"

"No, I don't want to change my name. In fact I think I'm really fond of my name because it has quite a deep and significant meaning, and as well as this, my mother chose it for me so she doesn't want me to change it. Actually I am sure I will never change my name!"

Is this a good answer?

What is good about this answer?

What is missing from this answer?

The grammar aspect of these questions is very important. As a basic rule, if the question uses "would", then you need to include at least one example of "would" (or might/could) in your answer.

For most of these questions, you should use the second conditional tense in your answer. In fact the examiner is expecting you to produce an example of this verb tense.

The form of the second conditional is quite simple:

If + past simple, would / could / might + infinitive verb.

eg: If I lived near the sea, I would be able to eat fresh seafood.

If I had the time, I would go for travelling.

The second conditional is used to talk about a present or future time, to describe an event that is unlikely (hypothetical).

eg: If I worked in a factory, I would be tired every day! (But I don't work in a factory and it's unlikely that I will work in a factory in the future.)

➤ **Activity 1**

Think of one basic second conditional structure for each question: use positive sentences. Try to use different words for each example.

eg: "Would you like to move to another city in the future?"

"I would like to change cities if I had the chance." Or "If I had the chance I would like to move to another city."

Would you like to change your job?

Would you like to live near the sea?

Would you like to learn another foreign language?

Would you like to be in a film?

What would you like to change about your city?

What would you like to change about your school?

Would you like to change your name?

What job would you like to do in the future?

Would you like to live in a foreign country?

Would you like to be a professional photographer?

When you add a reason or detail, you need to use more second conditional structures:

eg: "Would you like to move to another city in the future?"

"I would like to change cities if I had the chance, because if I lived in a different city I would make lots of new friends and I could try lots of new kinds of food. Also I might be able to find a well-paid job."

➤ **Activity 2**

Go back to the previous activity questions and develop your answer with details or reasons, using more examples of the second conditional. (Try to use some examples with "might" and "could".) For some of these questions it is possible to use a negative form.

eg: "Would you like to move to another city?"

"No I wouldn't like to move to another city, because if I lived in another city I wouldn't have any friends.

Try to make some negative sentences for the questions (remember your details and reasons can be either positive or negative structures, but they should be second conditional).

Sometimes candidates begin these questions with: "I never thought about it." This is not a good example of native-speaker language. The following structures can be used to begin your answer.

Well, quite honestly I don't think I've ever thought about that, but I guess...

Actually, this isn't something that I've ever considered, but in short...

I'm not really sure how to put this, but I suppose generally speaking...

Look at the following complete structure:

"Would you like to move to another city?"

"Actually, this isn't something that I've ever considered, but in short I suppose I would possibly consider moving cities, especially if I had the chance to move to a coastal city like Xiamen or Sanya. If I lived in a seaside city I would be able to hang out on the beach every day and I would also have the opportunity to get into water sports like scuba-diving and possibly surfing."

Notice how the first structure used "verb+ing": "I suppose I would possibly consider moving cities ..."

This structure is much more complex than the basic: "I suppose I would like to move to another city..."

Try to use one of the following structures for your first structure.

I imagine I would possibly think about (verb + ing)...

I guess I would maybe contemplate (verb + ing)...

I would perhaps reflect on (verb + ing)...

Look at the activity questions again and try to use one "verb + ing" structure for each. Try to use a different verb from the question verb.

Eg: "Would you like to learn another foreign language?"

"Well, quite honestly I don't think I've ever thought about that. But I guess I would maybe contemplate taking up a new language."

Now practice developing all of the "Would" questions in this section.

Summary of Part One Question Types

In Part One of the speaking test, most of the questions asked will be one of the seven types described in this section. There may be one or two questions that are not covered, but most candidates will find that all of their part one questions are covered by these seven types.

If the examiner asks a question that is not covered by these seven types, just remember the following rule:

Long response – Linking phrases – Complex sentence – Redundant language

One obvious question that has not been described in this section is the "Why" question. These questions are more common in Part Three but they occasionally appear in Part One. See the Part Three question types later in this book for ideas on how to answer these questions.

In this section each Part One topic is presented with possible questions and example uncommon vocabulary and idiomatic language relevant to that topic. (Remember

– one of the most important aspects of the marking system is uncommon and idiomatic vocabulary.)

Most of the idioms have been explained in simple English, but the vocabulary has not been translated into Chinese.

You should use these topic pages as a learning tool. Select one or two topics per day and use a good dictionary to translate the words yourself; in this way you will be actively learning the new vocabulary. You will find it easier to remember the words if you have translated them yourself.

1.9. Part one topic list

Topic 1: Where you live

Tell me about your hometown/street/apartment.

What do you like about your hometown/street/house/apartment?

Tell me the good things about your house.

Is there anything you don't like about it?

Would you like to move to another city/street/house/apartment?

What would you change about your city?

Would you recommend your area/street as a good place to live?

➤ Nouns

Winding street

suburb

architecture

The locals (= people)

local cuisine

shopping

Residential area

estate

neighbourhood

Apartment complex

capital

➤ Adjectives

Sprawling

regionally important

commercial

Unique

distinctive

built-up

Industrial

provincial

➤ Idioms

run down (= in bad condition)

some areas are *run-down*

up-market/ chic (= fashionable)

some neighbourhoods are very up-market/ chic

Topic 2a: What you do—your job

Tell me about your job./ What job do you do?
Why did you choose this job?
What do you like about your job?
How long have you been doing this job?
Is there anything you don't like?

➤ Nouns

profession line of business occupation line of work

➤ Verbs

be involved in share responsibility for work within a team

➤ Adjectives

hectic exhausting taxing intricate
undemanding

➤ Idioms

work flat out (= work very hard)	Sometimes I have to <i>work flat out</i> .
on the go (= very busy)	I'm always <i>on the go</i> .
get to the bottom of(= solve)	I have to <i>get to the bottom</i> of problems related to...
pull out all the stops(=make a special effort)	When it's busy I have to <i>pull out all the stops</i> .
take charge of(= manage)	I often have to <i>take charge of</i> the whole department.
pick up the pieces(= take responsibility)	When there's a problem I have to <i>pick up the pieces</i> .

Topic 2b: What you do- your studies

What are you studying?
Where are you studying?
Why did you choose this college I university?
What's good about where you're studying?
What would you like to do after your studies?

➤ Nouns

schoolwork branch of learning field of study discipline
lecturer theory

➤ Verbs

revise comprehend succeed in
become skilled in

➤ Adjectives

hands-on (=practical) job-related theoretical reputable
highly regarded compulsory optional

➤ Idioms

Pass with flying colours (= pass with a high score)

I *pass* my entrance exam *with flying colours*.

Sail through (= finish sth. Easily and quickly)

I can usually *sail through* all my assessments.

To flunk (= to fail/ perform badly)

I always seem *to flunk* my compulsory maths tests.

Cross that bridge when sb. come to it (= deal with a problem when it arrives)

I'm not worried about that now—I'll *cross that bridge when I come to it*.

Topic 3: Hobbies/ Free-time activities

Do you have any hobbies?
 What do you do in your free time?
 What hobbies/ free-time activities are popular in your country?
 Is it important to have a hobby?
 Why is it important for people to have free-time activities?
 Is it harmful to spend too much time on a hobby?
 What free-time activities would you like to try in the future?

➤ **Nouns**

leisure pursuit spare time pastime

➤ **Verbs**

amuse oneself by unwind by kill time by

➤ **Adjectives**

fascinating cativating time-consuming appealing

➤ **Idioms**

take up (= start)	I've recently <i>taken up</i> swimming.
take part in	I frequently <i>take part in</i> group activities like..
get into (= enjoy)	Recently I've been <i>getting into</i> fishing.
have a go at (= try)	I'd really like to <i>have a go at</i> scuba diving.
idle away the hours (= spend time)	In my time off I often <i>idle away the hours</i> by playing guitar.

Topic 4: Sports

Do you like playing sports?
 How often do you play sports?
 What sports are the most popular in your country?
 Do you think it is important to play a sport?
 What sports would you like to try in the future?
 Do you prefer watching or playing sports?

➤ **Nouns**

team game spectator sport physical activity squad
 solo sport

➤ **Verbs**

compete challenge get fit lose weight
 stay healthy

➤ **Adjectives**

strenuous physical energizing revitalizing

➤ **Idioms**

have a crack at (= had a try at)	I <i>had a crack at</i> baseball but it was too strenuous for me.
get into shape	I've been trying to <i>get into shape</i> by going to the gym.

Topic 5: Television

Do you like watching TV?
 How much time do you spend watching TV?
 When do you usually watching TV?
 What types of TV programme do you like watching?
 What types of TV programme are popular in your country?
 Why do children like watching TV?

➤ **Nouns**

telly (= TV)	episode	series	soap opera
documentary	mainstream	sitcom	audience
viewer			

➤ **Verbs**

turn on/ off/ over	tune in	sit in front of the telly
repeat	produce	telesise broadcast

➤ **Adjectives**

witty	enlightening	mind-numbing (= boring)
televised	live-broadcast	attention-grabbing (= interesting)
pre-recorded		

➤ **Idioms**

watch the box (= watch TV)	I often <i>watch the box</i> at weekends
channel surf(=change TV channels frequently)	I usually sit in front of the telly and <i>channel surf</i>

Topic 6: Music

Do you like listening to music?
 What types of music do you like listening to?
 Where do you usually listen to music?
 Can you play any musical instruments?
 Do you think it's important for children to learn to play a musical instrument?
 Do you prefer listening to live performances or recorded music?

➤ **Nouns**

harmony	melody	lyric	synthesizer
concert	gig (= concert)	album	tune
portable	CD player	MP3 player	a hit record

➤ **Verbs**

download(MP3's)	burn CD's	put on CD/ piece of music
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➤ **Adjectives**

funky	catchy	soothing	atmospheric
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➤ **Idioms**

blow one's mind	The music was so amazing it <i>blew my mind</i>
set sth. to music	The composer managed to <i>set</i> the lyrics <i>to music</i>
chill out to (= relax)	I often <i>chill out to</i> atmospheric ambient music

Topic 7: Reading

Do you like reading?
How often do you read?
What do you like to read?
Where do you usually read?
Do you read for pleasure or to get information?

➤ **Nouns**

a work of fiction	biography	novel	novelist
poetry	author	literature	best-seller

➤ **Verbs**

scan	skim	browse	flick through
flip through			

➤ **Adjectives**

fictional	gripping	contemporary	classical
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➤ **Idioms**

read up on (=read about)	I often <i>read up on</i> modern literature.
have one's nose in a book (= read a book)	I always <i>have my nose in a book</i> .
a coffee-table book (= a large book that one leaves on the table, often with photos etc.)	I sometimes flick through <i>a coffee-table book</i> .

Topic 8: Email

How often do you use email?
 What do most people in your country use email for?
 What are the advantages of email?
 Are there any disadvantages?
 Do you think that email will replace letter-writing?

➤ **Nouns**

email account electronic message attachment spam (= junk mail)
 commercial correspondence (= business communication) cyberspace

➤ **Verbs**

send out deliver delete

➤ **Adjectives**

web-based prompt speedy virtual
 time-consuming

➤ **Idioms**

snail mail (= sending letters through the post)	<i>Snail mail</i> is extremely time-consuming
lost in cyberspace (= lost somewhere on the internet)	Sometimes emails get <i>lost in cyberspace</i>
At the push of a button	With email you can send a message <i>at the push of a button</i>

Topic 9: Learning English

How long have you been learning English?
 What do you find difficult about learning English?
 What advice would you give to someone starting to learn English?
 Would you like to learn another language in the future?

➤ **Nouns**

expression irregularity syntax learning
 strategy

➤ **Verbs**

become skilled at sth. make progress recall

➤ **Adjectives**

tough (=difficult) effortless (= easy) intricate

➤ **Idioms**

learn by heart (= remember)	It's quite tough to <i>learn</i> expressions <i>by heart</i>
swot up on (=learn)	I find it effortless to <i>swot up</i> on the irregular verbs.
block out (= ignore)	It's a good idea to <i>block out</i> your first language

Topic 10: Writing

How often do you write something by hand?
 What types of things do you usually write by hand?
 Do you think it is important to have good handwriting?
 What are the advantages of writing something by hand?

➤ **Nouns**

handwriting calligraphy correspondence script
 diary journal

➤ **Verbs**

scrawl scribble sth. down (= write sth. quickly) keep a diary

➤ **Adjectives**

hand-written illegible sloppy (=untidy) clear (= tidy)
 personal

➤ **Idioms**

put pen to paper (= write by hand)	I don't <i>put pen to paper</i> very often.
put...in writing	A diary is a cool way to <i>put</i> your thoughts <i>in writing</i> .
jot down (= write quickly)	I might <i>jot down</i> a new idea in my notebook.

Topic 11: Clothes

What types of clothes do you like wearing?
 Where do you usually buy your clothes?
 Did you wear a school uniform when you were younger?
 What can we learn about a person from the clothes that they wear?

➤ **Nouns**

clothing garment trend Clothes
 boutique

➤ **Verbs**

flaunt show off dress up

➤ **Adjectives**

stylish chic well-made hard-wearing

Topic 13: Restaurants

How often do you eat out in restaurants?
What types of restaurants do you like best?
What types of restaurant are common in your city?
What are the advantages of eating out in restaurants?

(See Topic 31: Cooking and Topic 36: Food)

➤ **Nouns**

eatery cuisine meal speciality dish
delicacy service décor setting

➤ **Verbs**

eat out dine out feast on sample

➤ **Adjectives**

regional swanky posh low-cost
unsophisticated

➤ **Idioms**

Not as good as it's/they're cracked up to be (=not as good as people say)
Lots of the posh restaurants are *not as good as they're cracked up to be*.
Run of the mill (=average, typical)
In my neighbourhood there are quite a few *run of the mill* eateries.
Set sb, back (=cost sb, an amount of money)
The swanky restaurants will *set you back* quite a lot of money.

Topic 14: Friends

How much time do you spend with your friends?
What do you usually do with your friends?
Do you prefer spending time with your family or friends?
Is friendship important to you?

➤ **Nouns**

companion acquaintance best-buddy (US) best-mate
company sibling shared interests (=similar hobbies)

➤ **Verbs**

get together hang out with socialize

➤ **Adjectives**

sociable gregarious out-going chummy
extrovert introvert

➤ **Idioms**

own flesh and blood (=family, relative)

Obviously my siblings are my *own flesh and blood* so I love them very much.

soul mate (=best friend)

I usually hang out with my *soul mate*.

a sounding board (=a good person to talk to)

I can use my best mate as *a sounding board* when I have problems.

Topic 15: Festivals

Do you often celebrate festivals in your culture?
What do people usually do during festivals?
Which is your favourite festival?
Do you think festivals are important?

➤ **Nouns**

celebrate festivity reunion family get-together
ceremony ritual legend folklore

➤ **Verbs**

celebrate reunite revisit pay one's respects to

➤ **Adjectives**

cheerful customary long-established time-honoured

➤ **Idioms**

Push the boat out (= have a party)

We really *push the boat out* during spring festival celebrations.

Make merry (= drink and eat)

People always *make merry* on New Year's Eve.

Slap-up meal (= big meal)

There is usually a customary *slap-up meal*.
In high spirits (= happy)
Everyone *is in high spirits* just before midnight.

Topic 16: Meeting new people

Do you often meet new people?
In your country where can you meet new people?
How easy is it to meet new people in your city?
Is it possible to meet people from other countries where you lives?

(See vocabulary for Topic 14: Friends)

➤ **Nouns**

individual meeting point gathering place nightclub

➤ **Verbs**

congregate flock meet for the first time
crowd together
get acquainted befriend

➤ **Adjectives**

approachable antisocial

➤ **Idioms**

Bump into (= meet)
It's quite easy to *bump into* someone from another country.
Make somebody's acquaintance (= get to know somebody)
It's possible to *make somebody's acquaintance* online.

Topic 17: The sea

Have you spent much time near the sea?
What do people usually do when they visit the sea?
Why do people like spending time near the sea?
Would you like to live near the sea?

➤ **Nouns**

coast shoreline seashore water's edge

wave
beach resort

scuba diving

marine wildlife

sea breeze

➤ **Verbs**

sunbathe get a suntan paddle go for a swim

➤ **Adjectives**

marine rocky sandy pebbly
tropical exotic coastal (water)
crystal-clear

➤ **Idioms**

Go for a dip (= go swimming)

You can *go for a dip* in the crystal-clear water.

Get one's sea legs (= get used to being on a ship/boat)

I went sailing but it took me a while to *get my sea legs*.

Topic 18: Computers

How often do you use computers?
In what ways do people use computers in your country?
How did you learn to use a computer?
How much have computers changed your life?

(See vocabulary for Topic 8: Email)

➤ **Nouns**

laptop worldwide web online shopping chat room
forum online gaming

➤ **Verbs**

surf (the net) browse (website) sit in front of (the computer)

➤ **Adjectives**

digital electronic virtual computer-literate

➤ **Idioms**

Technophobe (=someone who can't use a computer)

I used to be a *technophobe* but now I am computer-literate.

Call up (= find and read) I can use the Internet to *call up* current news items.

Conk out on (= break) My old computer *conked out on* me.

Do ... by hand Some tasks I prefer to *do by hand*, like writing letters.

Topic 19: Collecting things

Have you ever collected anything?
What things do people collect in your country?
Why do people like collecting things?
Would you like to start collecting something new in the future?

➤ **Nouns**

collection postage stamp autograph album
person value

➤ **Verbs**

hoard accumulate classify collecting
have an obsession for collecting have a fixation with

➤ **Adjectives**

antique vintage rare valuable high sought-after
worthless

➤ **Idioms**

A one-off (= only one of its kind) a one-off.	I have a very rare stamp, in fact it's
Here and there (= in different places) here and there.	I sometimes find valuable stamps
Once in a blue moon (= not very often) really rare example.	Once in a blue moon you can find a

Topic 20: Dancing

Do you like dancing?
What kinds of dancing are popular in your country?
Is traditional dancing popular among young people in your country?
What kind of dancing do people like watching?

➤ **Nouns**

ballet ballroom dancing salsa break-dancing
ethnic minority

➤ **Verbs**

boogie twist twirl

➤ **Adjectives**

rhythmic ritual ceremonial

➤ **Idioms**

Two left feet (describing someone who cannot dance) I can't dance at all, in face I've got *two left feet*.

All the rage (= fashionable) Nowadays break-dancing is *all the rage*.

Topic 21: Learning languages

What languages do you speak?
Do you think it's important to learn a foreign language?
What languages are spoken in your country?
Would you like to learn another language in the future?
(see vocabulary for Topic 9: learning English)

➤ **Nouns**

Native tongue Dialect Verbal communication

➤ **Verbs**

Be fluent in Converse Chat

➤ **Adjectives**

Understandable Unintelligible Meaningless

➤ **Idioms**

Have a chinwag (= have a conversation)

When I travelled to France, I tried to have a chinwag with the locals.

All Greek (= a language that one doesn't understand)

When I went to Korea, I tried to converse with some people but the native tongue was all Greek to me.

Topic 22: Weather

What's the weather like where you live?
What do you do when the weather is bad?
What type of weather do you like best?
Would you like to have that type of weather all year round?

➤ Nouns

Climate Blizzard Average temperature Shower Spell

➤ Verbs

Drizzle Shift Vary

➤ Adjectives

(rain) torrential Balmy (=warm) Sunny Sun-drenched

Sweltering (=hot) Muggy (=humid) Chilly (=cold)

Clammy (=humid) Nippy (=cold)

➤ Idioms

Chuck it down (=rain heavily): In spring it usually chuck it down for days
on end

Rain or sunshine (=in all weather): Rain or sunshine – I love to be outdoors

Like a sauna (= a hot and humid place): My city is like a sauna in summer

Topic 23: Happiness

What kinds of things make you happy?
What do you do if you feel unhappy?
Is unhappiness always a bad thing?

➤ Nouns

Pleasure Satisfaction Depression Frame of mind

➤ Verbs

Cheer up Brighten up Go through (a bad time)

➤ Adjectives

Contented Gloomy Overjoyed Dejected

➤ **Idioms**

In high spirits (=happy): I am always in high spirits when I go out with my friends.

On cloud nine (=happy): After I win at basketball I feel like I'm on cloud nine.

Down in the dumps (=sad): I usually feel down in the dumps if my football team loses.

Topic 24: Shopping

Do you like shopping?
How often do you go shopping?
What kind of shops are there in the area you live?
What's the worst thing about shopping?

➤ **Nouns**

Essential Store Luxury Market stall Independent retailer
Chain

➤ **Verbs**

Purchase Flog (slang for "sell") Haggle Pick out

➤ **Adjectives**

Inexpensive Low-priced Pricey Over-priced Fake Genuine Posh
Classy

➤ **Idioms**

The real McCoy (=genuine, not fake)

Most chain stores only stock the Reak McCoy goods.

Going for a song (=offered at a low price)

If I see some classy products going for a song – I might be tempted.

Rip sb. Off (=cheat sb.)

Some market stalls rip you off – they always flog fake stuff.

Topic 25: Films

Do you like watching films?
What types of film do you like watching?
How often do you watch films?
Do you prefer watching films at home or at the cinema?
Would you like to be in a movie

➤ **Nouns**

Big name Star Director Current release DVD release
Oldie (=old movie) Soundtrack Blockbuster Flick (slang for movie)
The pictures (= the cinema)

➤ **Verbs**

Produce Direct Star in Act in Play the lead role

➤ **Adjectives**

Unforgettable Avant- garde Tear-jerking Spellbinding
Thrilling Samey Action-packed Big-budget

➤ **Idioms**

Film buff (=someone who loves films): I wouldn't describe myself as a film buff.

Box-office smash (=a very successful film): I find most box-office smashes to be a bit samey.

Topic 26: Weekends

What do you usually do at the weekend?
What do people usually do at weekends in your country?
Do you think your weekends are long enough?
How important do you think it is to have free time?
(Use the same vocabulary for Topic 3 Hobbies/Free-time activities)

➤ **Nouns**

Leisure pursuit Spare time Pastime Time off

➤ **Verbs**

Amuse by Unwind by Kill time by

➤ **Adjectives**

Soothing Pleasing Engaging

➤ **Idioms**

Let one's hair down (=relax): At weekends I usually let my hair down.

Take it easy (=relax): On Saturdays I take it easy.

Slip by (= (time) passes quickly): I feel like the weekend slips too quickly.

Topic 27: Going out in the evening

How often do you go out in the evening?
 Who do you usually spend for evening with?
 When you go out in the evening what do you usually do?
 Do you think there is enough to do in the evening in your city?

- **Nouns**
 dusk nightlife nightspot discotheque
 café
- **Verbs**
 go for a stroll wander around pay a visit
- **Adjectives**
 invigorating happening(=fashionable) late-night
- **Idioms**

Regular haunt (=a place one regularly goes to)	My regular late-night haunt is a trendy little café.
Drop in on (=visit)	I sometimes drop in on my neighbors.
The wee hours (= very early in the morning – after midnight)	I usually have to get home before the wee hours.
In the dead of night (=very late at night)	Occasionally, I go for a stroll in the dead of night.

Topic 28: Animals

Do you like animals?
 What types of animals do people keep as pets in your country?
 How do most people feel about animals in your country?

 What are animals used for in your country?

- **Nouns**
 wildlife species domestic animal mammal
 reptile dairy farming
- **Verbs**
 protect conserve raise (farm animals)

➤ **Adjectives**

endangered

extinct

domesticated

Idioms

Flora and fauna (=all animals and plants)	People in cities don't really care about flora and fauna.
Like one of the family	People treat their dogs like one the family.
Make a fuss over(= care very much for)	People often make a fuss over their pets.

Topic 29: Routines

What time do you usually get up in the morning?
 Are your weekday and weekend routines different?
 What's your favorite time of day?
 What's the favorite part of the day for you?

➤ **Nouns**

habit

fixed schedule

agenda

routine

➤ **Verbs**

wake up

get out of bed

retire (=go to bed)

➤ **Adjectives/adverbs**

later than usual

earlier than normal

flexible

inflexible

rigid

habitual

➤ **Idioms**

The daily grind (=everyday work routine)	At the weekend I can forget about the daily grind.
Get away from it all (= get away from the daily work routine)	It's a good idea to get away from it all at least once a month.
Get into the swing of (=get used to)	I find it quite easy to get into the swing of my study routine.
Early bird (= someone who gets up early)	I'm not much of an early bird.

Topic 30: Family

Tell me about your family.
What kind of things do you and your family do together?
Who does the housework in your family?
Would you prefer to have a larger or smaller family?

➤ **Nouns**

family unit relative household chore
family circle family connection

➤ **Adjectives**

affectionate intimate distant

➤ **Idioms**

It's in the blood (= it's a natural part of one's character).
All my family are really fond of reading – I guess it's in the blood.
Run in the family (= be shared family characteristic).
My brothers and I have big ears – it runs in the family.
Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth (= born into a rich family).
I wasn't exactly born with a silver spoon in my mouth – my family is quite normal.

Topic 31: Cooking

Can you cook?
Who usually does the cooking in your home?
How do people usually learn to cook in your country?
What are the advantages of being able to cook?

➤ **Nouns**

cookery cuisine ingredient recipe
home economics bite to eat (=snack) oven

➤ **Verbs**

become skilled at prepare entertain (= have guests)

➤ **Adjectives**

yummy full of flavor nourishing hot from
home-cooked famished

➤ **Idioms**

Lip-smacking (=delicious)

When I entertain guests I try to some lip-smacking recipes.

Burn to a crisp (= burn food)

Once I tried to prepare steak for my friends but it came out burn to a crisp.

Rustle up (= cook sth, quickly without a recipe)

It's good to be able to rustle up a quick bite to eat when you're famished.

Topic 32: Weddings

Have you ever been to a wedding?

What do people usually do at weddings in your country?

What clothes do people usually wear at weddings in your country?

Which people are usually invited to weddings?

➤ **Nouns**

marriage ceremony

bride

groom

honeymoon

bridal gown

banquet

best man

bride's maid

➤ **Verbs**

get married

give presents

drink a toast

➤ **Adjectives**

conventional

customary

ceremonial

➤ **Idioms**

Tie the knot (= get married)

When people decided to tie the knot, they usually want to lead a steady life.

Get hitched (=get married)

My cousin got hitched when she was 21 years old.

Raise a glass (= drink a toast)

The bride and groom have to raise a glass with all the guests.

Give (the bride) away (part of a traditional wedding ceremony)

The bride is given away by her father or mother.

Topic 33: Public transport

What types of public transport can be found in your city?

What types of public transport do you use most?

Are there any public transport problems in your city?

How would you improve the public transport system in your country?

➤ **Nouns**

transport network	bus system	minicab	traffic
congestion	delay	fare	commuter
journey	Rush hour		

➤ **Verbs**

commuter	catch (a bus/ train)
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➤ **Adjectives**

old-fashioned	inefficient	well-organized	government subsidized
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➤ **Idioms**

Packed like sardines/ jam – packed (=very crowded)
 During rush hour the buses are always jam-packed- actually the passengers are packed like sardines.
 Pile-up (=traffic accident)
 Sometimes there are serious pile ups on the main roads.
 Get stuck in traffic (= get stuck in a traffic jam)
 Buses always get stuck in traffic during rush hour.

Topic 34: Travelling

How much travelling have you done?
 Do you prefer travelling alone or in a group?
 When you visit new places, what do you like to do?
 What places would you like to visit in the future?

➤ **Nouns**

package tour	independent travel	tourism	tourist
tourist trap	sightseeing	holiday-maker	travel agent

➤ **Verbs**

go backpacking	go sightseeing
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➤ **Adjectives**

touristy	tacky	overdeveloped	exclusive
luxurious			

➤ **Idioms**

Off the beaten track (= to a place not usually visited by tourists)
 When I go backpacking I prefer to go off the beaten track.

Rough it (= live in uncomfortable conditions, eg, camping)
When we went camping we had to rough it two days on the mountain.
See the sights (= visit the famous places)
I always try to see the sights.

Topic 35: Names

Do you like your name?
Does your name have any special meaning?
Who usually chooses babies' names in your country?
Would you ever change your name?

➤ **Nouns**

Surname	Last name	Middle name	Nickname
Meaning			

➤ **Verbs**

Christen	Settle on	Signify	Pick out
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➤ **Adjectives**

Conventional	Insignificant	Auspicious
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➤ **Idioms**

Be named after (= have the same name as someone else)

My father named me after my great-grandfather.

Nothing out of ordinary (= common, ordinary)

My name is nothing out of ordinary – it's quite common.

Run of the mill (=typical, ordinary)

My name is actually very run of the mill.

Topic 36: Food

What food do you like eating?
Is there any food that you don't like?
What food is popular in your country?
(See Topic 13: Restaurants and Topic 31: Cooking)

➤ **Nouns**

Cuisine	Regional dish	Calory	Flavour
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➤ **Verbs**

Eat out Dine out Eat at home

➤ **Adjectives**

Scrumptious Appetizing Revolting Fattening
Wholesome Peppery Sugary Vinegary

➤ **Idioms**

Wolf down (= eat very quickly)

When I'm in a hurry I wolf down some fat food

Sink one's teeth into (= eat (some special food))

I love to sink my teeth into a juicy steak.

Something about it (=something strange or special)

I can't stand seafood. There's just something about it I'm not sure about.

Topic 37: Birthdays

How are birthdays usually celebrated in your country?
What gifts do people receive on their birthdays in your country?
Do people eat special food on their birthdays in your country?
Which birthday is most important in your culture?

➤ **Nouns**

Get-together Shindig Greeting card Surprise

➤ **Verbs**

Get older Grow older Crack open a bottle of wine

➤ **Adjectives**

Unexpected Customary

➤ **Idioms**

- Throw a party (= have a party)

Most people throw a party on their 21st birthday

- Let one's hair down (=enjoy oneself)

People can really let their hair down on their birthday

- Push the boat out/paint the town red (= have a big celebration)

On their 21st birthday most people really push the boat out/paint the town red.

Topic 38: Seasons

Tell me about the seasons in your country?
 What is your favourite season?
 Do the seasons affect people's behavior?
 Do you wear different clothes in different seasons?

➤ **Nouns**

Time of year	Climate	Average temperature	Variability
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➤ **Verbs**

Vary	Fluctuate	Differ
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➤ **Adjectives**

Seasonal	Erratic	Unpredictable	Constant
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➤ **Idioms**

In blossom (= many flowers opening)

When you see the cherry trees in blossom you know spring is on its way.

Down south (= in the southern part of a country)

Down south the winters are much milder

Up north (=in the northern part of a country)

Up north the winters can be quite harsh

Topic 39: Birds

Are there many birds where you live?
 How do people in China feel about birds?
 Do birds have any special meaning in your culture?
 Should we protect birds?

➤ **Nouns**

Poultry	Domestic fowl (=farm birds)	Species
Habitat	Migratory bird	Resident bird
		Pest

➤ **Verbs**

Symbolise	Offer protection	Provide food for
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➤ **Adjectives**

Rare	Endangered	Widespread	Commonplace
Mythical	Fairy - tale	Symbolic	

➤ **Idioms**

On the wing (=flying)

In my city you can often see pigeons on the wing.

Dart in and out (= move quickly between two things, eg, trees)

Almost every day I catch a glimpse of a woodpecker darting in and out of the pine trees near my house

In one's own backyard (=near where one lives)

You never really see rare birds like owls in your own backyard.

Ten a penny/ dime a dozen (=very common)

Sparrows are ten a penny in my city – you can see them everywhere

Topic 40: Photography

Do you like taking photographs of new places?
Is photograph popular in your country?
What kinds of photographs do you like looking at?
Would you prefer to buy a postcard or take a photograph of a new places?

➤ **Nouns**

Snapshot	Likeness	Landscape shot	Studio print
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➤ **Verbs**

Get (photos)	Develop	Pose for the camera
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➤ **Adjectives**

Photogenic	Camera – friendly	Picturesque	Photographable
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➤ **Idioms**

Do justice to... (= represent or illustrate... accurately)

Photographs don't do justice to the beauty of natural places

Touch...up (= repair... on the surface)

The good thing about digital photos is that you can touch them up afterwards

Strike a pose (= position oneself in a certain way)

I never strike a pose in front of camera – I'm not really photogenic

Zoom in on (=use a zoom lens to get a closer view on a camera)

My camera has a zoom lens so I can really zoom in on things and get fine detail in my shots.

I never *strike a pose* in front of the camera—I'm not really photogenic.

zoom in on (= use a zoom lens to get a closer view on a camera)
My camera has a zoom lens so I can really *zoom in on* things and get fine detail in my shots.

Topic 41: Flowers

Do you like flowers?
On what occasions do people give flowers in your culture?
Do any flowers have a special meaning in your culture?

➤ Nouns

flora petal lotus flower a bunch of (roses etc.)
florist hay fever a bouquet of flowers
artificial flower (= silk flower)

➤ Verbs

cultivate sneeze

➤ Adjectives

fragrant sweet-scented

➤ Idioms

in bloom (= when flowers are opening)

give off (= smell)

Roses *give off* a sweet fragrance when they are *in bloom*.

reminiscent of (= reminding sb. of)

The fragrance of flowers in blossom is *reminiscent of* spring.

Topic 42: Buildings

What types of buildings are there in your city?
Do you prefer old or new buildings?
Are historical buildings important?
Would you like to live in an old building?

➤ Nouns

architecture
block

structural design
residence

skyscraper

office

➤ **Verbs**

construct

erect

renovate

demolish

➤ **Adjectives**

elegant
contemporary

well-designed

unsightly

➤ **Idioms**

put up (= build)

They are *putting up* loads of unsightly office blocks.

do up (= repair)

They should *do up* some of the old-fashioned residences.

pull down (= demolish)

They are *pulling down* older neighbourhoods to make way for the new skyscrapers.

Topic 43: Rains

Do you like rains?

What do you usually do when it rains?

How do people feel about rain where you live?

What do you think is worse, too much rain or not enough rain?

➤ **Nouns**

drizzle
downpour

shower

torrential rain

➤ **Verbs**

pour down

spit (= rain lightly)

➤ **Adjectives**

showery
waterproof
soaked

damp

waterlogged

(clothing)

➤ **Idioms**

chuck it down (=rain heavily)
In spring it often *chucks it down*.

get well
I really hate *getting wet*.

put off (= cancel a planned activity)
If it's pouring down with rain I will usually *put off* any

clear up (= stop raining)
outdoor activities until it *clears up*.

Topic 44: Museums

Do you like museums?
How often do you visit museums?
What types of museum can be found in your country?
Why are museums important?

➤ Nouns

Natural History Museum	antique	artifact
fossil		

➤ Verbs

put on display	put on show	exhibit
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➤ Adjectives

rare	antique	prehistoric
primitive		

➤ Idioms

take sth. in (= look at sth.)
It takes about a full day to *take* in all the museums.

make a day of sth. (= spend a whole day doing sth.)
I'm quite into *making a day of* walking around the science museum.

on view / on display
There are loads of prehistoric fossils *on view*.

Topic 45: Relaxation

What do you usually do to relax?
How much time do you usually have to relax?
What do people usually do to relax in your company?
Do you think it's important for people to relax?
(Note: Most sporting activities are not “relaxing”, so do not talk about sport for this topic.)

➤ **Nouns**

break rest

➤ **Verbs**

unwind recuperate

➤ **Adjectives**

soothing comforting calming

➤ **Idioms**

take a breather (= relax)

I've mowed the front lawn, and I'm just *taking a breather* before taking the back lawn.

chill out (= relax)

Stop working; let's *chill out*.

take it easy (= relax)

Don't worry; *take it easy*.

put one's feet up (= relax)

On weekends, we always *put our feet up*.

Topic 46: Cycling

Do you like cycling?
Is cycling popular in your country?
What are the advantages of cycling?
How often do you walk to places

➤ **Nouns**

pushbike mountain bike biking bike-riding

➤ **Verbs**

peddle slow down speed up

➤ **Adjectives**

invigorating energetic environmentally-friendly

➤ **Idioms**

had it (= broken)

My old pushbike has *had it* so I'm saving up to buy a new mountain bike.

run the risk of

If you leave your bike in public place, you *run the risk of* having it stolen.

Topic 47: Healthy eating

Do you like eating healthy food?

Do you think it is important to eat healthy food?

Is fast food popular in your country?

Do you think people eat healthier food nowadays compared with people in the past?

➤ **Nouns**

calory cholesterol vitamin mineral

➤ **Verbs**

munch (= eat) lose weight put weight on

➤ **Adjectives**

nutritious nourishing wholesome
harmful (to one's health)

➤ **Idioms**

in good shape/ in good condition (= having a healthy body)

She's *in good shape* after months of training.

pig out (= eat a large amount of food, usually unhealthy food)

We *pigged out* on pizza last night.

a Big Mac Attack (modern slang for eating Macdonald's fast food)

The Child is having *a Big Mac Attack*.

junk food (= un healthy fast food)

Junk food has little or no nutrition.

a fast-food joint (= a restaurant which serves fast food)

There's *a fast-food joint* in the street corner.

Topic 48: Hotels

Do you like staying in hotels?
How often do you stay in hotels?
What types of hotels can be found in your city/ country?
What are the advantages of staying in a hotel?

➤ **Nouns**

Hostel hotel-chain (= holiday inn) room service

➤ **Verbs**

In English we do not usually “live in a hotel”. The common verbs are:

Reside in a hotel stay in a hotel be a good guest or resident

➤ **Adjectives**

Spartan (= basic and simple) luxurious exclusive

➤ **Idioms**

Get the royal treatment (= be treated as if one is a king or queen)

 If you stay in an exclusive hotel, you usually *get the royal treatment*

At one’s beck and call (= ready serve sb.)

 In most luxury hotels there are loads of staff *at your beck and call*

Creature comforts (= things that make people comfortable)

 In 5-star hotels there are usually loads of *creature comforts*

Topic 49: Outdoor activities

Do you like doing outdoor activities?
How often do you do outdoor activities?
What outdoor activities are popular in you country?
Do you think it’s important for people to spend time outdoors?
(Use the same vocabulary as Topic 3: Hobbies/ Free-time activities and Topic 4: Sports.)

➤ **Nouns**

Outdoor interest leisure
pursuit

➤ **Verbs**

Breath fresh air feel the wind in other’s face

➤ **Adjectives**

Bracing refreshing revitalising

➤ **Idioms**

Out in the open air *We always have a picnic out in the open air.*

Topic 50: Memories of the past

Do you like to think about the past?
How do you feel when other people talk about their memories?
Do you keep photographs to remind you of past events?
What can people learn from the past?

➤ **Nouns**

Recollection childhood early years

➤ **Verbs**

Reminisce muse over recall

➤ **Adjectives**

Reminiscent (memories) amusing

➤ **Idioms**

Hang on to old memories (= remember sth. for a long time)

I'm not really the sort of person who likes to *hang on to old memories* – I prefer to look to the future.

Hark back to (= remember sth. in the past)

Some of my friends often *hark back to* out childhood memories.

The here and now (= the present day)

I think that the past is history; I prefer to live for *the here and now*.

Rake up old memories (= remember past events. Usually bad memories)

Some people often *rake up old memories*.

Topic 51: Childhood

Did you have a happy childhood?
What party of your childhood do you remember most?
What makes a happy childhood?
What would you like to change about your childhood?
(Use the same vocabulary as Topic 50: Memories of the past.)

➤ **Nouns**

Early years infancy formative years

Summary of Part One Topics

All of these Part One topics are the authentic topics that have been used in the speaking test for the last 5 years.

The speaking test recycles these topics but generally speaking, there will be 10 topics in use for around 3 months. After 3 months these topics will be changed to a different set of 10.

The speaking test does not introduce new Part One topics very often. On average 8 totally new topics are introduced in a year. These new topics are introduced gradually; so you will not suddenly encounter new topics in Part One. It is more likely that you will see one or two new topics introduced in each set of 10 topics.

2. Part Two of the Speaking Test

After completing Part One (usually after 4 - 5 minutes) the examiner will move onto Part Two of the speaking test.

In Part Two the examiner gives the candidate a topic card and the candidate has one minute to prepare and make notes. After the one minute preparation time the candidate is required to talk about the topic for between one and two minutes (as a rule you are expected to speak for at least 1 minute 30 seconds-anything less than this and your "Fluency" score may be reduced).

Candidates do not need to worry about "timing" in Part Two because the examiner will stop the candidate when the clock hits two minutes.

The best strategy in Part Two is to keep talking until the examiner says stop. Candidates are naturally nervous in this part of the test so it is not good to try to guess the time.

IELTS Myth: Most people believe that in the speaking test, Part One is the easiest, Part Two is more difficult and Part Three is the most difficult section. With regard to performance, this is not usually the case. Most candidates perform quite well in Parts One and Three but the Part Two performance is usually the worst part of the interview (i.e. the language quality is lower than other parts).

2.1. Part Two Problems

The biggest problem with Part Two is that candidates focus on content. Most people are so busy trying to think about "what to say" and as a result they forget about "language content" of their speech.

As we have already concluded, there are no marks for content, so a Part Two that focuses on content will score quite low on the marking system.

I think it is good time to repeat myself here: The examiner is NOT listening to what you say-he I she is only listening to how you say it!

In the past, many of my students have approached me with questions like:

"In Part Two is it OK for me to describe a Chinese book?"

"In Part Two should I describe A or B?"

"In Part Two, what if the examiner isn't familiar with the thing that I describe?"

All of the above questions are totally irrelevant. The examiner is not concerned with your choice of content (however it must be related to the topic.)

During Part Two, the examiner is focused on the marking system. Any features of the marking system that you produce in Part Two will influence your score; content will not affect your score.

So again we can see that content or ideas are irrelevant. It really does not matter what you choose to talk about as long as you are talking on the topic.

2.2. Part Two and the Marking System

A good Part Two is NOT focused on "telling the examiner something".

In the same way as Part One, during Part Two you should be focused on the following features of language.

➤ **Fluency**

During a 2-minute talk it is essential to use linking words, linking phrases and fillers (redundant language).

➤ **Vocabulary**

Uncommon words and idioms will significantly increase your "Vocabulary" score. In Part Two try to find words that are directly related to your topic area (most of the Part One vocabulary from the previous chapter can be used in Part Two). Don't forget to paraphrase.

➤ **Grammar**

Whatever you are saying in Part Two, say it with complex sentences and if necessary use a variety of tenses (see the detailed section on tenses in Part Two).

Part Two does NOT need to be:

➤ **Interesting**

Some of the best Part Two performances are actually quite boring! Here you must remember that the examiner has probably heard 1000's of Part Two responses. Even if your content is genuinely interesting (e.g., you played football with the Chinese National Team), it will not influence your score in any way.

➤ **Original**

It does not matter if you describe the same movie that everyone else has described- the examiner is only listening to how you describe it. In some ways describing the same thing as other candidates can be work to your advantage-if you are focused on language, your 2-minute talk will be noticeably better than other candidates.

➤ **Familiar**

It does not matter if the examiner is not familiar with the thing that you are describing. In fact, if you describe something unusual or unfamiliar, then you will probably need to explain or paraphrase. Paraphrasing directly increases your score!

➤ **True**

Some of the best Part Two performances are lies! Even if the examiner knows you are lying, this cannot affect your score. Obviously you should avoid outrageous lies, such as, "Last year I went to the moon with my classmates."

The Topic Card

The topic cards are printed in the same way. The basic topic is presented and there are some guidelines or prompts on the card.

Describe an interesting trip you have been on.

You should say:

Where / When you went

What you did there

Why it was interesting

Whether you would like to go on a similar trip again.

One of the most important things to remember is that the card is slightly misleading!

On the topic card, it says "You should say This is not actually true; the guidelines on the card are simply there to help you! If you want to talk about those aspects, then that is OK; however if you don't want to follow the guidelines, that is also OK.

The prompts on the card are not compulsory questions - you are not required to provide answers.

As long as you are describing some aspects of the main topic "an interesting trip you have been on", there is no problem.

For most of the topic cards it is a good idea to use the guidelines because it means you have to think less about content and can therefore concentrate more on language, but if there is a guideline prompt that you don't like or you think is a little difficult, e.g., "Whether you would like to go on a similar trip again", feel free to ignore it and just talk about some other aspect of your trip.

Irrelevant Content

Although we have said that content is irrelevant to your score-you cannot produce two-minute content that is not related to the topic.

A fairly common problem in Part Two is that candidates talk about a topic different to the one on their card. Example:

Describe a sport that you like playing or watching.

Sometimes a candidate will say:

"I don't like sport so I will describe my favourite hobby which is playing computer games."

Clearly this is off-topic and Part Two speeches which are off-topic are marked down-basically you lose marks.

If you are given the topic "sports", the examiner is expecting to hear language (especially vocabulary) related to that topic. If you avoid the topic, you will not produce language related to your topic and your score will be seriously affected.

Later in this section we will look at how to select your content in Part Two.

2.3. Part Two Topics

One of the challenging aspects of Part Two is the huge number of potential topics. Naturally with such a wide range of topics every candidate has certain topic areas that he or she is comfortable with and others that they find more difficult.

In the strategy section of this chapter hopefully this problem will be addressed, but first it is probably a good idea to look at the Part Two topics.

One important aspect to recognise is that many of the Part One topics are recycled as Part Two topics. Examples:

Part One Topic	Part Two Topic
Restaurants	A restaurant
Reading	A book
Public transport	Form of public transport
TV	TV program
The sea	A river, lake or sea
Seasons	A season
Clothes	An item of clothing
Photography	A photograph
Hobbies	A hobby
Sports	A sport
Animals	An animal
Buildings	A building

This list could go on, but the main thing to realise is that most of the topic areas for Part Two are very similar to Part One. This is to your advantage because it means you can use Part One language in your Part Two.

There is no danger of repetition here because if you are given a certain topic in Part One you will NOT get the same topic in Part Two. So if the examiner asks you about "animals" in Part One, you will not get the Part Two topic "Describe an animal... "

Instead of making a huge list of Part Two topics it is easier to put all of the topics into groups or categories.

The most obvious categories are as follows:

- (1) Experiences / Past events
- (2) Objects/ Material possessions
- (3) People
- (4) Places
- (5) Media related
- (6) Others (anything that doesn't fit into the 5 categories above)

One of the advantages of grouping topics together is that when you look at the relationships between some of the topics you will see that it is in fact possible to use the same content for more than one topic card.

In this way you don't need to prepare a separate response for every topic card, you can reuse the same language for many different topics. The individual topic cards are given later in this section.

2.4. Strategies for Part Two

There are a number of different ways to deal with Part Two and some are more effective than others.

From our earlier observations we can conclude that the best strategy is one which focuses directly on the features detailed in the marking system and produces as many of these features as possible in the 2-minute time frame.

One important area that is often neglected is the one minute preparation time. In my experience many candidates actually cause problems for themselves in the one-minute preparation time.

➤ **Activity**

Look at the following topic card and make notes for one minute.

Describe an interesting building in your city.

You should say:

What the building looks like

What it is used for

Why it is interesting

How often you visit this building.

Most people write notes in the following way:

- (1) a Chinese building/old
- (2) a library/books
- (3) its very old
- (4) once a month

What often happens is that most people write “answers” to the guidelines and prompts and usually those “answers” are in very simple language.

When Part Two begins, people are focused on their notes-their notes contain basic answers to the prompts so the focus of their Part Two is basic answers in response to the prompts. Obviously, this is not an effective strategy.

At this early stage one effective strategy is to ignore the prompts altogether and use a. simple

Three-step Preparation Method

Step 1 : Selection

Selecting the “right thing” to talk about is quite important if you want to produce a good quality Part Two.

As we have already discussed, the examiner doesn't care what you talk about but here we are not talking about the examiner-we are talking about you.

If you choose the wrong thing to talk about you might have problems talking for two minutes on that topic. If you have problems finding content, the quality of your language will suffer.

The important first step is to select something that is easy to talk about. Once you have something easy to talk about, you can concentrate on language features and ways to increase your score.

Easy topics should:

(A) Have lots of features

The more features your topic has, the easier it is to keep talking or developing your

Part Two. This is not always possible for every topic but generally it is easier to talk about "bigger" things than "smaller" specific things.

(B) Be expandable

This is similar to the point above, but you choose something that is expandable, i. e. you can keep adding points on to the end of your speech (maybe by telling a story).

(C) Include some "invented" aspects (i.e. lies)

The easiest things to describe are not always the true things. If you have only been on a trip once in your life and you went to the West Lake in Hangzhou, this does not give you much to talk about. It would be a good idea to say that you spent a week in Hangzhou, a week in Suzhou, a few days in Wuxi and a few days in Shanghai. You might be lying-but by doing so you are making your Part Two much, much easier.

It might not be possible to cover all the 3 points above but if the topic seems particularly difficult it is probably best to invent your content.

Ignore the adjective

Many people get distracted by the adjectives which often appear in the topic description, e.g., look at the following Part Two topic cards: "An interesting building in your city ... "

Don't try to think of a building that is particularly interesting. You don't lose marks if your building is not very interesting and you don't get more marks if your building seems very interesting. Just choose "any building" that fits the topic loosely.

Don't go with the first idea

Usually the first idea in your head is the worst idea. It is usually a good idea to ignore the first idea in your head and go with the second or even third idea that you come up with.

➤ **Activity**

Look at the following topics and use the selection method to choose "easy" subjects to talk about.

An interesting trip you have been on
An important building in your city
A subject you liked at school
Something interesting or unusual you do in your free time
A walk you take regularly
Some travelling you would like to do
A happy event in your life

Some examples of "easy selections" and "difficult selections"

Topic	Easy	Difficult
An important building	A shopping mall	Your school library
A trip	To Hong Kong	To Yellow Mountain
A famous person	A singer / actor	A politician/leader

Step 2 : Vocabulary

The next step in the one-minute preparation is to write down as many examples of uncommon vocabulary as possible. The vocabulary must be directly related to the topic.

A good method is to ask the following question: "Can this word be used for many other topics?" If the answer is "Yes" then that word is NOT directly related to the topic.

➤ Activity

Look at the following example. Topic: Describe some travelling you like to do.

Vocabulary

exciting	interesting	opportunity	tourism
sightseeing	attractive	backpack	explore
excursion	leave	special	mountain

Ask the question: "Can this word be used for many other topics?"

Topic-related words are:

tourism sightseeing backpack explore excursion

The other words are not directly related to the topic and could probably be used for many Part Two topics, e.g., interesting (this word could be used for almost every topic).

It is not wrong to use the common words during your Part Two talk, but at this preparation stage you need to find uncommon topic-specific words.

➤ Activity

Find uncommon topic-specific vocabulary for the following topics:

A film that you have seen	A song / piece of music
A school subject	A neighbour

Uncommon or topic-specific vocabulary is given for each topic card later in the book. Most of the vocabulary given in the Part One topic section of this book will be related to many of the Part Two topics and can be used in your Part Two talk.

Step 3 : Grammar Point

This is one of the most important considerations for your Part Two talk. Most candidates completely ignore this aspect. Different Part Two topic cards require

different grammar. Look at the following topics and think about the required grammar content for each.

Describe an object you use every day.

Describe a vehicle that you would like to own.

Describe a happy event in your life.

In Part Two, there are 3 basic tense requirements: some topics need mostly present tenses; others need past tenses; others need conditional tenses.

When you look at your topic card, decide which tenses you need to use.

Example:

1. Describe an activity you enjoyed in an English lesson.

(Mostly past tenses) eg: The teacher asked us to pretend...

2. Describe a place in a city that you know well.

(Mostly present tenses) eg: This place is quite special because it has...

3. Describe a vehicle which you would like to own.

(Mostly conditional tenses and some present tenses for describing).

eg: If I had a helicopter I would be able to ...

Helicopters are an expensive luxury.

When the examiner gives you paper and pencil for making notes, write down the type of tense on the paper. In this way when you look at your notes you will be reminded that you should be using a certain tense and this will significantly improve your grammar performance during your talk.

Preparation Summary

Remember you only have one minute to prepare so you really don't have time to write sentences or phrases. The most important thing to write on your paper is probably a few vocabulary items and a grammar reminder.

Example: Describe an item of clothing you like to wear.

<u>Pair of jeans</u>	
Present tense + Past tense	
designer brand	trendy
comfortable	

Describe a vehicle that you would like to own.

Helicopter
Conditional tense ... I would / could
a luxury millionaire

If you prepare in this way you are focusing on language and this will have a direct influence on score.

2.5. Producing a Good Quality Part Two Talk

The Fluency-based Strategy

This strategy focuses on the fluency aspect of the marking system. Earlier in this book we concluded that linking words and linking phrases can increase your "Fluency" score-this strategy is based on producing good quality linking structures in your two-minute talk and combines these with complex sentence structures.

First look at the following topic card.

Describe a sport that you like playing or watching.

You should say:

What the sport is

How often you play / watch it

Why you like it

Whether it is popular in your country.

The first thing to notice is that all topic cards have one thing in common.

Look carefully at the 4 prompts on any topic card and you should notice that they all share the same grammar feature.

What the sport is

How often you play / watch it

Why you like it

Whether it is popular in your country

Most people think that these are 4 questions. Look carefully - they are not questions; they are in fact a single clause or part of a sentence (statement). This fact is true for every Part Two topic card.

For this strategy, you can divide your talk into 4 parts (the 4 prompts). Take the first one for example: "What the sport is".

You can use this to create your opening sentence.

"I guess I could begin by saying something about what the sport is, and I think I would have to choose football. Most people know that football is ..."

This sentence has 3 strong features. It contains complex linking structures, redundant language and complex grammar (sentence structure).

Another advantage of using this type of structure is that you don't really need

much content because you will probably spend almost one minute producing the complex linking phrases.

If used correctly, this structure will have a positive affect on your "Fluency" and "Grammar" scores.

Now look at the second prompt

"How often you play / watch it (you need to change "you" to "I")

The sentence might be:

"Going on to my next point which is how often I play it, I really need to add that if I have enough time I usually play it about twice a week. In fact..."

And then the third prompt: "Why you like it". The third sentence could be

"And now with reference to why I like it, the point I want to make here is that..."

And the last prompt: "Whether it is popular in your country". The fourth sentence:

"And so finally then, if I have time, in answer to the question of whether it is popular in my country, really I should mention that..."

So the final structure (without content) might look like this

"I guess I could begin by saying something about what the sport is, and I think I would have to choose..."

Going on to my next point which is how often I play it, I really need to add that...

And now with reference to why I like it, the point I want to make here is that. ..

And so finally then, if I have time, in answer to the question of whether it is popular in my country, really I should mention that..."

Practice reading the structure above. Depending on the speed it should take you between 30~45 seconds. This means that you only need about one minute of content. As there are 4 points, you only to find about seconds of actual content for each point.

Now look at the next topic card with a complete structure with content.

Describe a famous person you would like to meet.

You should say:

Who the person is

Why he/she is famous

Why you would like to meet this celebrity

What you would like to do if you met this person.

"I guess I could begin by saying that something about who this person is, and I think I would have to choose the superstar Jackie Chan from Hong Kong.

Going on to my next point which is why he is famous, I really need to add that he is a would-renowned martial arts film star as well as being a successful director. In fact he was probably the first Chinese actor to achieve blockbuster success in Hollywood.

And now with reference to why I would like to meet this celebrity, the point I want to make here is that I have always been a big fan of martial arts movies, so if I had the chance to meet one of my childhood idols, it would be a dream come true.

And so finally then, if I have time, in answer to the question of what I would like to do if I met him, really I should mention that I would probably ask him to teach me a

few special Kung Fu tricks and I would possibly invite him out for dinner at a classy restaurant or something like that.”

The structure is complete in the example above but it probably needs slightly more content (maybe one more sentence for each point). However, there are many very good features in the example so far.

Analysis

“I guess I could begin by saying something about who this person is, and I think I would have to choose the superstar Jackie Chan from Hong Kong.”

(The first point is quite simple, but for most Part Two topics the first point is usually just a simple factual introduction.)

Fluency: the sentence begins with a liking phrase and contains redundant language.

Vocabulary: one topic-related word- “superstar”/

Grammar: complex structure and use of complex tense - “I would have to choose...”/

“Going on to my next point which is why he is famous, I really need to add that he is a world-renowned martial arts film star as well as being a successful director. In fact he was probably the first Chinese actor to achieve blockbuster success in Hollywood.”

Fluency: the sentence begins with a linking structure and contains 3 more connecting structures: “I really need to add that”, “in fact”, “as well as”.

Vocabulary: topic-related uncommon words: “world-renowned”, “blockbuster success”

Grammar: the use of the connecting structures makes it one long and complex sentences.

“And now with reference to why I would like to meet this celebrity, the point I want to make here is that I have always been a big fan of martial arts movies, so if I had the chance to meet one of my childhood idols, it would be a dream come true.”

Fluency: begins with a linking phrase, and contains 2 other connectives

Vocabulary: topic-related uncommon words: “childhood idol”; Idiomatic phrase “dream come true”

Grammar: the sentence is complex and contains examples of conditional tense- “so if I had the chance to meet one of my childhood idols, it would be...”

“And so finally then, if I have time, in answer to the question of what I would like

to do if I met him, really I should mention that I would probably ask him to teach me a few special Kung Fu tricks and I would possibly invite him out for dinner at a classy restaurant or something like that.”

Fluency: begins with a linking phrase, and contains redundant language - “or something like that”

Vocabulary: uncommon words: “tricks”, “classy”

Grammar: the sentence structure is complex and contains examples of conditional tense: “would probably”, “would possibly”.

Overall Analysis

Each of four points covered in this Part Two talk focuses on all 3 areas of the marking system (we can’t really work on pronunciation at this stage).

In summary , everything the candidate says is in some way increasing the speaking score.

Notice that the actual “content” that is presented doesn’t really make any difference to the score.

This style of response is probably the easiest way to achieve a score of 7 or higher in Part Two.

Important Note

Notice that in the answers, the candidate doesn’t change the wording from the topic card. If you start changing the wording you will begin to make grammar errors and this will reduce your “Grammar” score.

You can make very slight changes if you are 100% sure the change is correct, eg:

Who the person is → Who he is

Why you would like to meet this person → Why I would like to meet this star

Changing one or two words is fine but don’t change the actual structure of the clause on the topic card or your whole sentence could be grammatically wrong.

Language for the “Fluency-based Strategy”

As mentioned earlier in this section the four linking structures and four topic card prompts work for EVERY Part Two topic. You will need to create your own 4 linking

phrase structures.

The examples below can be combined in any order and they will all work with every prompt on every topic card.

When you choose your four structures, try to select sentences that don't repeat the same vocabulary (eg: "point", "subject" etc.).

Don't waste time and energy learning and memorizing every possible linking phrase given below. Choose one from each section and learn those 4 so that you can produce them perfectly and naturally. Practice using those 4 for as many Part Two topics as you can.

Most of the following language can also be used in Part One and Part Three; so if you have time to spare it will be useful to get used to this way of making sentences.

A. Opening phrase + the first prompt from card

Ok then, I guess I could start off by answering who the person is...

Alright then, in response to the first question of who the person is...

So to begin with, in reply to the initial point of who the person is...

Ok, I'll start the ball rolling by touching on the matter of who the person is...

Right then, I'd like to get cracking by pointing out who the person is...

So I suppose I should commence with the first aspect which is who the person is...

Initially then, I'd like to get started by looking at who the person is...

So, to start with I'll talk about who the person is...

So I guess I could kick off by stating who the person is...

Ok so my first point here would obviously be who the person is...

Before you add your content sentence, you need to add another linking phrase:

... and I think I would have to choose... ... and I'd have to go for...

...and I'd probably select... ...and my choice is going to be...

...and the one I'd pick is...

So your opening sentence might be:

“Ok, I'll start the ball rolling by touching on the matter of who the person is, and I'd have to go for Jackie Chan.”

It would be a good idea to develop this first sentence further using a simple linking structure:

Because, for the reason that, actually, who is, which is, where, in fact, although, particularly, especially, etc.

“Ok, I'll start the ball rolling by touching on the matter of who the person is, and I'd have to go for Jackie Chan for the reason that...”

Remember, the first point will probably be your shortest point; so don't worry if you can't develop it with lots of details.

B. The second point + the second prompt from card

Going on to my next point which is why he is famous...

Continuing then with the next point of why he is famous...

Now with regard to the next question of why he is famous...

Next then in response to the point of why he is famous...

Now on the subject of why he is famous...

Now concerning the matter of why he is famous...

Before you explain this point you need to add a second linking phrase (similar to your first point).

... and what I'd like to add here is that ...

... and what I need to emphasize here is that...

.. and what I ought to stress here is that..

...and the thing that needs to be highlighted here is that..

...and what I have to mention here is that ...

Notice that all of these linking structures end in “that” This means it is very easy to make a complex sentence structure by adding a simple clause.

So the second point might be:

“Now concerning the matter of why he is famous, the thing that needs to be highlighted here is that he is a world-renowned martial arts film star.”

You should develop this point using a basic linking word with one or two details which help to explain your first point.

Remember – you don’t really need to speak for more than 40 seconds on any of the 4 points, so don’t introduce too many details.

C. The third point + the third prompt from card

Progressing to the subject of why I would like to meet this celebrity...

Moving onto the business of why I would like to meet this celebrity...

Drawing attention to the matter of why I would like to meet this celebrity...

Proceeding with the issue of why I would like to meet this celebrity...

Moving forward onto the area of why I would like to meet this celebrity...

Now add your second linking phrase:

I would like to explain that...

You really have to understand that...

I suppose I should underline the fact that....

So the third point could be:

“Moving onto the business of why I would like to meet this celebrity, the chief explanation would most likely be that I would probably ask him to teach me a few special Kung Fu tricks.”

Now use another linking word to develop this point in to a longer sentence (give reasons, details, explanations, etc.)

D. The fourth point + the fourth prompt from card

If you give fairly long responses for the other points, you might not have time to cover the last point. This is not a problem, as long as you have produced all of the linking structures in the first 3 points – your Part Two talk will be fine.

The last linking phrase:

Finally then, if there's time, I could deal with the last question of...
To end with, if I still have time, I could take care of the final question of...
As a final point, if time permits, I'd like to bring in the point of...
To cut a long story short, as my very last point, with reference to the question of...
It will probably unnecessary to develop this point because hopefully the examiner will stop you around this point.
Most people find that when they use this method, they reach the two-minute mark just after saying this final linking phrase.

Strategy Summary

The reason why this strategy is called the “fluency-based strategy” can be illustrated below.

Your overall answer will look something like this:

1. Linking phrase + prompt + linking phrase + details + connective...
2. Linking phrase + prompt + linking phrase + details + connective...
3. Linking phrase + prompt + linking phrase + details + connective...
4. Linking phrase + prompt + linking phrase + details + connective...

In the marking system, linking phrases and connectives feature heavily in the fluency scoring and so obviously an answer of this type has an enormous affect on your “Fluency” score.

It is interesting to note that most people only produce 3 or 4 linking phrases in their whole interview. However, if you use this system you will produce 8 of these in your Part Two talk alone!

It is also important to realize that the overall structure produces a large amount of complex grammar structures.

Advice

As the author of this book, an IELTS examiner for 5 years and an IELTS trainer for 6 years, I strongly recommend all candidates to use this strategy in Part Two. It instantly transforms what is usually the worst part of the speaking test into the highest scoring part.

Examples of Part Two Using the Fluency Method

Describe an animal that can be found in your country.

You should say:

What type of animal it is

Where it can be found
Whether you have seen it
What other people think of this animal.

***Preparation Notes**

<u>Panda</u>	
Present tense + Past tense)	
national symbol	natural reserve
endangered species	protected

Part Two Talk

“So to begin with, in reply to the initial point of what type of animal it is and the one I’d pick is the giant panda. Actually there are two types of panda, the lesser or red panda and the commonly known giant panda which is the national symbol of China.

Now concerning the matter of where it can be found, and what I ought to stress here is that because it is an endangered species it lives mostly in protected nature reserves in Western China although it is also possible to see them in zoos around the world.

Moving on to the business of whether I have seen it, I suppose I should underline the fact that I visited the Panda Sanctuary in Chengdu 2 years ago while I was travelling in Sichuan Province. It was actually a one-day tour of the pandas’ habitat which included lectures from conservation experts.

As a final point, if time permits, I’d like to bring in the point of what other people think of this animal. I guess that most Chinese people feel some sense of patriotism towards the giant panda because it is recognized globally the archetypal Chinese animal.”

Describe a useful skill that you would like to learn

You should say:

What the skill is

Why you would like to learn it

Whether it would be difficult to learn

Whether you think you will learn this skill in the near future.

***Preparation Notes**

<u>Tai Ji / Tai Chi</u>	
Conditional tense + Present tense	
would / could / might	

Part Two Talk

“Ok, I’ll start the ball rolling by touching on the matter of what the skill is, and I’d probably select the Chinese martial art Tai Ji, a skilled art which is used to promote physical and spiritual well-being.

Continuing then with the next point of why I would like to learn it, and what I ought to stress here is that I would really like to get in shape because at the moment I’m quite unfit. Ever since I was a kid I’ve been kind of fascinated by Tai Ji, especially the way it can help you to relieve stress and improve overall physical fitness.

Progressing to the subject of whether it would be difficult to learn, you really have to understand that it would probably be quite demanding at first, then again I’m sure I would be able to deal with the challenge, although it might be tough to master some of the complicated breathing exercises.

So to end with, if I still have time, I could take care of the final question of whether I think I will learn this skill in the near future, and I should say that I have in actual fact already signed up for a Tai Ji class which is run at the local martial arts centre near where I live.”

Describe your childhood home.

You should say:

What type of house / flat it was

Where it was located

What you liked about it

Whether you still live in this house / flat

*Preparation Note

Rural cottage
PAST TENSES !!

thatched roof

backyard

Part Two Talk

“ Right then, I’d like to get cracking by pointing out what type of house it was, and I’d have to go for the house that I was born in, which was a spacious rural cottage in a mountainous area of Northwest Hubei. Actually this was a single storey house with about five bedrooms.

Regarding the theme of where it was located, and the thing that needs to be highlighted here is that it was set in lush fields near a range of mountains near the border with Sichuan Province. Actually it was quite isolated – the nearest town was about 10km away and the roads were quite bumpy.

Moving forward onto the area of what I liked about it, I would like to explain that

although I don't remember too much about it, the things that has always stayed in my mind are the thatched roof which made it nice and cool in the hot summer months and the communal courtyard we shared with our neighbours.

Finally then, if there's time, I could deal with the last question of whether I still live in this house and as I've already mentioned I was born in this house but I moved out when I was about 5 years old.

2.6. Part Two Topic Analysis

The following pages offer most of the Past Two topic cards with suggested ideas for selection, uncommon vocabulary and some grammar tips.

The topics are arranged into basic groups, e.g. people, places, events etc.

Remember you do not need to memorise or learn the language on the topic card because you will be able to look at the card throughout your Part Two talk.

It is important to try to learn and remember uncommon vocabulary for each of the topic areas.

The most important thing to remember is that you can use the same content or vocabulary and grammar for many different topics (e.g. a teacher, an old person).

Section 1 : People

- (1) A famous person
- (2) A sports star
- (3) A singer or musician
- (4) A character from a story / film / TV programme
- (5) An old person
- (6) A teacher who has influenced you
- (7) A neighbor
- (8) A child you know
- (9) A family member
- (10) Compare two family members
- (11) Someone who you have studied or worked with
- (12) A friend
- (13) A happy person who you know
- (14) A successful leader who you admire
- (15) Someone you know who speaks another language

People 1 : A famous person

Describe someone who is famous in your country. (Or describe a famous person who you admire.)

You should say:

Who the person is

Why he / she is famous

Why you admire this person

What you would do if you met this person.

Suggestion

Choose a star who is famous in more than one area, such as a pop star who also acts in movies and TV shows (e.g. Mo Wenwei / Andy Lau).

Uncommon Vocabulary

a big name megastar

celebrity

renowned

well-

known

legendary

admirer

fan

Grammar Point

Use mostly present tenses. Use one example of “used to” to describe something in the past:

She used to be a TV show host.

Use an example of present of her for many years.

I’ve been an admirer of her for many years.

Use an example of “would / could / might” to talk about the last point:

If I met her I would like to have dinner with her.

People 2: A sports star

Describe a sports star who is famous in your country.

You should say:

Who the person is

Why he / she is famous

What is special about him / her

Whether you would like to meet this person.

Suggestion

Choose someone like Li Ning. This gives you the chance to talk about his sporting achievement as well as his successful business and clothing shops.

Uncommon Vocabulary

spectator sport

gymnastics

prodigy

world

champion

Olympic gold medal winner

Grammar Point

Use the same grammar as People 1: A famous person.

People 3 : A singer or musician

Describe a singer or musician that you admire

You should say:

Who the person is

What type of music songs he / she plays

Why you admire this person

Whether this person is popular in your country.

Suggestion

Choose the same person as People 1: A famous person (MoWenwei / Andy Lau)

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use the same vocabulary as People 1: A famous person, and also use some vocabulary from Part One Topic 6: Music.

Grammar Point

Use the same grammar as People 1: A famous person.

People 4: A character from a story / film / TV programme

Describe a character from a story / film / TV programme

You should say:

Who the character is

When you first saw or heard this story / film / TV programme

What kind of person this character is

Why you like this character.

Suggestion

You can cover all 3 characters by talking about a character from Journey to the West, Zhyu Bajie or Sun Wukong.

Uncommon Vocabulary

legend mythical fairy-tale amiable

good-humoured

Grammar Point

Use past tenses to describe when the story was first written etc.:

The story was originally written about 500 years ago.

I first read the story / saw the film / programme when I was living in Beijing.

Use present perfect tense:

I've always been a big admirer of Zhu Bajie.

People 5: An old person

Describe an old person who has influenced you.

You should say:

Who the person is

How you know this person

How he / she has influenced you

Whether this person has influenced other people.

Suggestion

Talk about a teacher (the same as the next topic).

Uncommon Vocabulary

old aged pensioner elucidate(=explain) put in plain words

well-respected

tutor

mentor

inspiring

Grammar Point

Use a mix of past tenses:

We first met when I was studying in my primary school.

He used to be my Chinese teacher.

Use future tenses:

I will always remember how he...

I will never forget how he...

People 6: A teacher who has influenced you

Describe a teacher who has influenced you

You should say:

Who the teacher is

Where and when you met him / her

How he / she has influenced you

Whether you still know this teacher.

(Exactly the same as People 5: An old person.)

People 7: A neighbour

Describe a neighbour who you get on well with.

You say:

Who the neighbour is

How long you have known this person

What you like about this person

How often you see this person.

(Exactly the same as people 5: An old person.)

People 8: A child you know

Describe a child that you know.

You should say:

Who the child is

How you know this child

What you like about this child

What things you do with this child.

Suggestion

Choose a young relative (cousin, brother or sister)

Uncommon vocabulary

Youngster	kid	youthful
relative	chummy	immature

(See also part one topic 14: friends)

Grammar point

Use a mix of past tenses:

I've known this kid ever since he was a baby.

He used to live in the same community with me.

Use future structures:

I will always remember how he...

I will never forget how he...

People 9: A family member

Describe a family member who you like

You should say:

Who the person is

Why you like this person

What things you do together

Whether you think you are similar to this person

(Exactly the same as people 8: A child you know)

People 10: Compare two family members

Compare two members of your family.

You should say:

Who the two people are

How they are similar

How they are different

What you like about these two people

You can use most of the same content from People 8: A child you know, but you can invent a twin brother or sister for that child, so you can talk about "my young cousins who are identical twins".

Uncommon vocabulary

identical impossible to tell apart like two peas in a pod

likeness outward appearance trait

Grammar point

You need to use some comparative structures:

A tends to be more...(adj.) whereas in contrast B seems to be more...(adj.) On the one hand, A is usually quite...(adj.) while B is often fairly...(adj.) One remarkable similar is that they both...One clearly distinguished distinction is that...

People 11: Someone you have studied or worked with

Describe someone you studied or worked with.

You should say:

How the person was

When you first met this person

Whether you had a good relationship

Whether other people liked this person

Suggestion

Invent someone, Don't talk about a real person. Choose a classmate or workmate who was also your friend and focus on friendship as well as studying or working.

Uncommon vocabulary

Use vocabulary from Part One Topic 14: Friends; Part One Topic 2a and 2b: Your

job, Your studies.

Grammar point

Use a mix of past tenses:

We always used to...

Use future structure:

I will always remember how we used to...

I will never forget about the times when we used to...

People 12: A friend

Describe a close friend.

You should say:

Who the friend is

Where and when you first met

What you like about this friend

Whether this person is popular with other people.

Exactly the same as people 11: Someone you have studied and worked with. Talk about your friendship in the past. Use past tenses to increase your grammar score.

Uncommon vocabulary

Use vocabulary from Part One Topic 14: Friends, Part One Topic 23: Happiness.

People 13: A happy person who you know

Describe a happy person who you know.

You should say:

Who the person is

How you know this person

What things you do together

Why you think this person is happy

Exactly the same as People 11: someone you have studied or worked with . Talk about friendship in the past. Use past tenses to increase your grammar score.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use vocabulary from Part One Topic 14: Friends: Part One Topic 23: Happiness.

People 14: A successful leader who you admire

Describe a successful leader who you admire

You should say:

Who the person is

What makes him/her a good leader

Why you admire this person

Whether this person has influenced you

Suggestion

Do not choose a famous leader or politician. Invent a leader or manager who you

work with. (If you are still a student, say that you used to have a part-time job.)

Uncommon Vocabulary

leadership quality supervision guidance support
encourage

Grammar point

Focus on the past tenses

He would always...

He frequently used to...

Use future structures:

I will always remember how he used to...

I will never forget about the times when he used to...

People 15: Someone you know who speaks another language

Describe someone you know who speaks another language.

You should say:

Who the person is

How you met this person

What other language he speaks

What you like about this person.

Suggestion

Use the same content as People 5: An old person; People 6: A teacher who has influenced you. (Say that your teacher speaks Korean or French.)

“People” Summary

As you can see, there are many different topic about “people”. It is not necessary to learn or produce different language for each topic.

Generally it is better to focus on past events when talking about people as this will increase your “Grammar” score. Most of the language presented for each topic can be reused for other topics.

Section 2 : Places

- (1) An important building
- (2) A history building/place
- (3) A famous building
- (4) A place of natural beauty
- (5) A peaceful place
- (6) A quiet place
- (7) A place in your city that you know well
- (8) A walk that you regularly take
- (9) A garden/park
- (10) A river, lake or sea you have visited
- (11) A shop
- (12) A library
- (13) A museum you have visited
- (14) Your childhood home
- (15) Your idea of an ideal house
- (16) A restaurant
- (17) A city you would like to visit
- (18) A country you would like to visit
- (19) A city/ town/ village you have visited
- (20) A monument
- (21) A hotel
- (22) Your favourite room

Place 1 : An important building

Describe an important building in your city

You should say :

Where the building is located

What it looks like

What it is used for

How often you visit this place.

Suggestion

It is quite difficult to describe traditional Chinese architecture in English, so it is best to avoid this area.

An easy building to describe is a multi-functional building, e.g. a shopping and entertainment centre.

Uncommon Vocabulary

prominent well-known landmark

See also Part One Topic 42: Buildings.

Grammar Point

Use past tenses:

It was originally constructed way back in 1890. Years ago it was primarily used as a government office. Now its main function is... I used to go there quite a lot when I was a kid.

Place 2: A historical building / place

Describe a historical building you have visited

You should say:

Where the building is located

What it looks like

What it is used for

Whether this building is popular with tourists.

(Exactly the same as Place 1: An important building)

Place 3: A famous building

Describe a famous building in your city.

You should say:

Where the building is located

What it looks like

What it is used for

How often you visit this place.

(Exactly the same as Place 1: An important building)

Place 4: A place of natural beauty

Describe a place of natural beauty that you have visited

You should say:

Where the place is located

What kind of place it is

What you did there

What is special about this place.

Suggestion

Invent one – don't talk about a real one. You can talk about "a newly-developed riverside park with botanical gardens".

Uncommon Vocabulary

a bamboo wooded area

tranquil

lush shrub

tropical plant

gorgeous flower

stunning plant life

rock sculpture

unspoiled

get away from the hustle and bustle of the city

get closer to nature

Grammar Point

Use present perfect tense:

I've actually been there a few times.

Use past continuous and past simple:

The first time I visited this place I took quite a few photos while I was walking around.

Use future tense:

It's going to be enlarged next year; it will include a boating lake.

Place 5: A peaceful place

Describe a peaceful place that you have visited

You should say:

Where the place is

When you visited this place

What you did there

Why you think it was peaceful.

(Exactly the same as Place 4: A place of natural beauty.)

Place 6: A quiet place

Describe a quiet place that you know

You should say:

Where this place is

What type of place it is

How often you go to this place

Whether there are other quite places where you live.

(Exactly the same as Place 4: A place of natural beauty.)

Place 7: A place in your city that you know well

Describe a place in your city that you know well

You should say:

What type of place it is

How often you go there

What you do there

Whether it is a popular place.

(Exactly the same as Place 4: A place of natural beauty.)

Place 8: A walk that you regularly take

Describe a walk that you regularly take

You should say:

Where you walk

How often you walk there

Why you like to walk there

Whether other people like to walk there.

(Exactly the same as Place 4: A place of natural beauty.)

Additional Vocabulary

go for a stroll

amble

get a breath of fresh air

Place 9: A garden/ park

Describe a garden or park that you know.

You should say:

Where it is located

How often you go there

What you do there

Whether there are other places like this where you live.

(Exactly the same as Place 4: A place of natural beauty.)

Place 10: A river, lake or sea you have visited

Describe a river, lake or sea that you have visited

You should say:

Where this place is

Why you went there

What you liked about this place

Whether you would like to go there again.

Focus on a river or lake but describe the park area beside the river or lake. By doing this you can use the content from Place 4: A place of natural beauty.

Place 11: A shop

Describe a shop that you like

You should say:

Where the shop is
What type of shop it is
How often you visit this shop
What you like about this shop.

Use some of the content from Place 1: An important building. Combine this with vocabulary from Part One Topic 24: Shopping.

Place 12: A library

Describe a library that you have visited.

You should say:

Where the library is located
What you use it for
How often you visit this place
What special features it has.

Suggestion

Talk about the central library in your city. (Invent this if you don't know about it.) Say that the library is a well-equipped multimedia library.

Uncommon Vocabulary

old publication	specialist journal	historical record	facility
interactive software	internet access	audio-visual	borrow
lend	overdue	(pay a) fine	

Grammar Point

Use past tenses:

It was first established in 1995.

I used to borrow textbooks and course books when I was studying.

Use an "if" clause:

They never fine you, even if the returned books are overdue.

Place 13: A museum you have visited

Describe a museum you have visited.

You should say:

What type of museum it is
Why you visited this place
What you liked about it

Whether you would like to go there again/

Suggestion

You can talk about a provincial or metropolitan museum, eg, Hubei Provincial Museum/ Beijing Metropolitan Museum.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use vocabulary from Part One Topic 44: Museums.

Place 14: Your childhood home

Describe your childhood home.

You should say:

Where this place is located

What type of house it is

How long you lived there

What you liked about this place.

Suggestion

It is quite difficult to describe city accommodation. It is probably easier to talk about a home in the countryside. (Even if you have never lived in the countryside, you should be able to describe a typical countryside house.)

Uncommon Vocabulary

single-storey	an isolated rural community	central
courtyard		
meadow	a typical rustic style bungalow	veranda
thatched roof	dried grass	close-knit

Grammar Point

Use a mix of past tenses:

I used to live..

I lived there for 7 years.

While I was living there...

We moved out when I was 11 years old.

Use present tenses:

My relatives are still living there.

I've been back there a few times.

Place 15: Your idea of an ideal house

Describe your idea of an ideal house

You should say:

What type of house it would be

Why you would like to live there

What special features it would have

Whether you think you will ever live in a house like this.

Suggestion

Use the same content as Place 14: Your childhood home.

Grammar Point

You must use conditional tenses (if+ would/could/ might)

If I could choose my dream house, I would probably opt for...

It would have...

If I could pick and choose, I would like it to be/ have...

If it was...then I might be able to...

If it had...then I would be able to...

Place 16: A restaurant

Describe a restaurant that you have visited.

You should say:

Where the restaurant is located

What type of restaurant it is

What you liked about this place

Whether you would recommend this place to others.

Suggestion

Say that the restaurant is located within the important building as described in Place 1: An important building. Expand this by adding details about the food, service and interior décor.

Uncommon vocabulary

Use a mix of vocabulary from: Part One Topic 13: Restaurant; Part One Topic 3: Cooking; Part One Topic 36: Food.

Grammar Point

Use a conditional structure to express a recommendation:

If I asked, I would most definitely recommend this place on the basis that...

Use past tenses to describe experience in the restaurant. Use present tenses to describe the features of the food etc.

Place 17: A city you would like to visit

Describe a city you would like to visit

You should say:

Where the city is

Why you would like to visit this city

What you know about this city

Whether you think you will visit this place in the future.

Suggestion

Choose any city that you know something about. The trick with this topic is to talk about a city in a different country, eg. New York.

Uncommon Vocabulary

native custom renowned indigenous culture landmark

(Use vocabulary from Part One Topic 34: Travelling)

Grammar Point

You must use conditional sentences because the topic card says – “a city you would like to visit” (i.e. a city you haven't visited already):

If I had the option to choose any city, I would probably pick...

The reason why I would select this place is because I would love to...and I might be able to...

Use a present perfect tense + past simple tense:

Ever since I was a kid I have always had a real yearning to visit this place.

Place 18: A country you would like to visit

Describe a country you would like to visit

You should say:

What the country is

Why you would like to visit this country

What you know about this country

Whether you think you will visit this place in the future.

Use the same content, vocabulary and grammar as Place 17: A city you would like to visit, but change it to country and focus on one city in that country. eg. USA, New York City.

Place 19: A city/ town/ village you have visited

Describe a city/ town/ village you have visited.

You should say:

When you went there

What you did there

What you like about this place

Whether you would like to visit this place again.

Use the same content, vocabulary as Place 17: A city you would like to visit, but say that you have actually visited this place. Talk about a city that you know something about, eg. a famous city – London or Paris.

You do not need to use conditional (if + would) grammar for this topic. You must use a mixture of past and present tenses:

I spent a week in...

I had never been there before so I was rather enthusiastic about this trip.

One the second day, while I was shopping, I saw...

I haven't been back to this place since that first visit.

Place 20: A monument

Describe an important monument in your city or country.

You should say:

Where it is located

What it looks like

Why it is important

Whether it is famous.

Suggestion

This is quite a difficult topic to talk about. Because the topic is a monument, it is not really acceptable to describe a building. The most common type of monument is probably a statue in memory of something or someone; so this is the easiest one to talk about. Use the basic content from Place 4: A place of natural beauty as an introduction and then continue by talking about a monument in the park or garden.

Uncommon Vocabulary

historical memorial	shrine	place of pilgrimage	carved
cenotaph	bronze sculpture	dedicated to	engraved
honouring	commemorative plaque		

Grammar Point

Use mostly present tenses, include some past tenses:

I remember when I first saw ythis bronze sculpture. I was quite impressed by the engraved commemorative plaque.

Place 21: A hotel

Describe a hotel you have stayed in or visited.

You should say:

Where the hotel is located

When you stayed there/ visited this place

Why you went there

What you liked about it.

Suggestion

Use a combination of Place 1: An important building and Place 16: A restaurant. Say that you haven't actually stayed in this hotel but you have dined in the restaurant.

Place 22: Your favourite room

Describe your favourite room in your home.

You should say:

What room it is

What it looks like

What you use it for

Why it is your favourite.

Suggestion

The easiest room in the house to describe is the living room. You can describe all the electronic equipment (DVD player, Hi-fi etc.) and all the activities you do in this room (reading; watching TV, films etc.)

Uncommon Vocabulary

sitting room (=living room)	furnish	redecorate
all mod cons (=many modern appliances)		

Grammar Point

Try to use a mix of tenses:

When I was at school, I used to do my homework on the sofa.

When I was kid, I always played in the living room.

I've been living in this house for about 10 years.

Section 3: Experiences

- 1 Something difficult that you did well
- 2 Something you would like to succeed in doing
- 3 A skill you would like to learn
- 4 A short course
- 5 A happy event
- 6 A party
- 7 A special meal
- 8 A wedding you have attended
- 9 Some important advice
- 10 Some help that you received
- 11 Some important news
- 12 Some important family news
- 13 An important letter you received
- 14 An important letter you sent
- 15 An interesting trip you have been on
- 16 The best holiday you have been on
- 17 Some long distance travel you would like to do
- 18 An activity in an English lesson
- 19 An important decision
- 20 An important change in your life
- 21 An event that changed your life
- 22 A busy time in your life
- 23 A festival that is popular in your country
- 24 Something dangerous you would like to do

Experience 1: something difficult that you did well

Describe something difficult that you did well

You should say:

What you did

Why it was difficult

How you managed to do it

Whether you think you will do this thing again

Suggestion

Talk about a skill that you have learned. The obvious choice is a language (NOT English- choose another language, eg, Korean, Japanese or Vietnamese). You will need to lie for this topic. It is quite easy to do – just describe your experience of learning English but change in another language.

Uncommon vocabulary

Use vocabulary from part one topic 19: learning English and Part one topic 21: learning languages. You can also use vocabulary from People 6: A teacher who has influenced you. Additional words:

easier said done (= difficult)

get to grips with (= get familiar with)

overcome

tricky

deal with

Grammar Point

You can use some present tenses to describe some aspects of the language:

Japanese is based in Chinese scripts

Use mostly past tenses to describe your learning experience:

At the outset I found it quite tricky; I used to get confused by...

Experience 2: Something you would like to succeed in doing

Describe something you would like to succeed in doing

You should say:

What you would like to succeed in

Why you would like to do this

Whether you think it would be difficult

Whether you think you will achieve this in the near future.

Suggestion

Although this topic is not actually a real “experience”. I have included it in this section because it is almost the same as Experience 1: something difficult that you did well. Talk about the same (or language) but change the grammar.

Grammar Point

Use some present tenses to describe the language. You must use some conditional structures:

I imagine that the grammar would be quite tricky

I might have problem with the pronunciation

I guess I would be able to cope with the written script

If all goes to plan, I would like to start learning this next year.

Experience 3: A skill you would like to learn

Describe a skill you would like to learn in future.

You should say:

What the skill is

Why you want to learn this skill

Whether you think it would be difficult

Whether you think you will learn it in the near future

Suggestion

Use exactly the same content, vocabulary and grammar as Experience 2: Something you would like to succeed in doing.

Experience 4: A short course

Describe a short course that you have taken or would like to attend

You should say:

What the course is about

Where you did it or would do it

Why you choose or would choose this course

How it has benefited or will benefit you

Suggestion

Use exactly the same content as Experience 1: something difficult that you did well and Experience 2: Something you would like to succeed in doing. This topic card gives you the choice of a course you have attend or a course you would like to attend. Talk about a course “you would like to take”. If you do this you must use conditional tenses (if + would/could/might) and this will increase your grammar score.

Experience 5: A happy event

Describe a happy event in your life

You should say:

What the event was

What you did

Why it was happy

Whether this type of event is common in your country

Suggestion

The obvious choice for this topic is a birthday party.

Uncommon Vocabulary

celebrate celebration a birthday bash(= a birthday party)

Use the vocabulary from Part one topic 13: restaurant, Part one toptic 23: happiness, Part one topic 36: food, Part one topic 37: Birthdays.

Grammar Point

Use a mix of past tenses:

It was my 18th birthday: at that time I was studying at...

I had never had a birthday party before so I was quite thrilled

Use a future tense+past tense:

I don;t think I will ever forget the cake that my friends had bought.

Experience 6: A party

Describe a party you have been to

You Should say:

Where the party was held

Who attended the party

What you like about the party

Whether you often go to parties.

Suggestion

Use exactly the same content, vocabulary and grammar as Experience 5: A happy event.

Experience 7: A special meal

Describe a special meal that you have eaten

You should say:

Where you had this meal

What food you had

Why it was special

Whether this type of meal is common in your country

Suggestion

Use exactly the same content, vocabulary and grammar as Experience 5: A happy event. Focus more on the food aspect. Use Part one topic 13: restaurant, Part one topic 36: food.

Experience 8: A wedding you have attended

Describe a wedding you have attended

You should say:

When it was

Who got married

What happened at the wedding

Whether this was a typical wedding in your country

Suggestion

This topic is not very flexible. Choose any wedding or invent one.

Uncommon vocabulary

Use part one topic 32: Weddings.

Grammar point

Use a mix of past tenses:

I had never attended a wedding reception before so I was quite thrilled.

Some guests were quite drunk towards the end because they had been drinking all day.

Experience 9: Some important advice

Describe Some important advice you received

You should say:

Who gave you the advice

What the advice was

Why it was important

How this advice helped you

Suggestion

At first this topic appears to be quite difficult. The easiest choice is to talk about a teacher who advised you to learn another language (not English). If you talk about this then you can use vocabulary from other topics.

Uncommon vocabulary

recommendation guidance suggestion beneficial

Use Part one topic 9: learning English; Part one topic 21: learning languages; People 6: A teacher; Experience 1: Something difficult that you did well.

Experience 10: Some help that you received

Describe Some help that you received

You should say:

Who helped you

What the help was

Why you needed this help

How you felt after receiving this help

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Experience 9: Some important advice.

Experience 11: Some important news

Describe some important news that you have received.

You should say:

What the news was

how you heard about this news

Why it was important

Whether it influenced you.

Suggestion

It should be quite easy to talk about passing an exam. Choose an important exam like the “Zhong Kao”. If you do this it will give you a good opportunity to paraphrase.

Uncommon Vocabulary

compulsory

state administered exam

conscientiously

multi-discipline(=many subjects)

test-preparation

taxing(=difficult)

pass mark

certificate

of great consequence

Grammar Point

Use a variety of past tenses:

Around that time I was studying in a local middle school.

I had been preparing quite conscientiously for quite a while.

I was quite surprised that I had passed because I had found it quite taxing.

The news arrived by post; it was delivered while I was sitting down to breakfast.

Experience 12: Some important family news

Describe some important family news

You should say:

What the news was

How you heard about this news

Whether it was important

How you felt when you heard this news.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Experience 11: Some important news.

Experience 13: An important letter you received

Describe an important letter you received

You should say:

When you received this letter

What the letter was about

How you felt when you read it

Why it was important.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Experience 11: Some important news.

Experience 14: An important letter you sent

Describe an important letter you sent

You should say:

When you sent it

What it was about

Why it was important

Whether it influenced you.

*Why you would choose this place
Whether the trip would be expensive.*

Suggestion

This topic is not actually an experience because the card states “would like to do”. It has been included in this section because the actual vocabulary and content can be exactly the same as Experience 15: An interesting trip you have been on; Experience 16: The best holiday you have been on. Remember to use vocabulary from Part One Topic 34: Travelling.

Grammar Point

You must use conditional tense:

If I had the option to travel to any destination, I would probably pick...

The reason why I would select this trip is because I would love to...and I might be able to...

Use a present perfect + past simple tense:

Ever since I was a kid I have always had a real burning desire to visit this place.

Experience 18: An activity in an English lesson

Describe an activity in an English lesson that you enjoyed

You should say:

What the activity was

Why you enjoyed it

What you learned from this activity

Whether you would like to do a similar activity again.

Suggestion

Talk about a play or performance that your English class produced.

Uncommon Vocabulary

a drama production	theatrical performance	English
script		
an adaptation of a famous play	scene	take part in
stage	costume	audience

Grammar

Use past tenses to describe the event. Use passives to describe the details:

The play was performed by...

The script was written by...

The costumes were made from...

The scenery was made of...

Experience 19: An important decision

Describe an important decision that you made

You should say:

When you made this decision

What the decision was

Why this decision was important

Whether this decision changed your life.

Suggestion

Describe your decision to start learning a new skill or language. Use some of the content from Part One Topic 9: Learning English; Part One Topic 21: Learning languages; Experience 1: Something difficult that you did well. Say that this decision was important because you made many new friends on this course. Use some vocabulary from Part One Topic 14: Friend; Part One Topic 16: meeting new people.

Grammar Point

All of the sentences should use past tenses.

Experience 20: An important change in your life

Describe an important change in your life.

You should say:

When this change happened

What the change was

Why it was important

How this event has influenced your life.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Experience 19: An important decision.

Uncommon Vocabulary

transformation

have an influential effect on

inspire a change

a fresh start

transformed

Experience 21: An event that changed your life

Describe an event that changed your life.

You should say:

When this event happened

What the event was

How you felt after this event

How this event changed your life.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Experience 19: An important decision; Experience 20: An important change in your life.

Experience 22: A busy time in your life

Describe a busy time in your life

You should say

When this time was

Why it was busy

How you felt during this time

Whether you would like a similar experience in the future

Suggestion: Talk about preparation for Spring Festival (describe the shopping and other arrangements that you prepared before the actual festival).

Uncommon vocabulary

hectic	essential	preparation	arrangement
necessity	eventful	luxury	

Grammar Point

All sentences use past tenses:

While I was shopping, I remember that the shops were really packed out (= crowded).

I felt exhausted because I had been shopping non-stop for a whole week.

Experience 23: A festival that is popular in your country

Describe a festival that is popular in your country:

You should say:

What the festival is

What time of year it is

What people do during this festival?

Whether this festival has changed in recent years

Suggestion

Describe the same aspect of Spring Festival from Experience 22: A busy time in your life (describe the preparation for the festival).

Uncommon Vocabulary

See Part One Topic 15: Festivals; Experience 22: A busy time in your life.

Experience 24: Something dangerous you would like to do

Describe something dangerous you would like to do.

You should say:

What the activity is

Why you would like to do it

Why you think it is dangerous

Whether you think you will do this in the future.

Suggestion

This is quite a strange topic and it can be difficult if you haven't prepared for it. The easiest choices are extreme sports, such as mountain biking, snowboarding, parachuting etc.

Uncommon Vocabulary

extreme sports	adrenalin sports	risky (dangerous)
hazardous	breathtaking	take risks
(dangerous)	(exciting)	

Grammar point

You must use some conditional structures:

I'd love to have the chance to have a go at mountain biking.
It would without doubt be quite risky.
It would need quite a lot of careful preparation.
I doubt I'll ever have the chance to actually do it.

Section 4: Media

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) A TV program | (7) A newspaper or magazine |
| (2) A radio program | (8) A website |
| (3) A film | (9) An advertisement |
| (4) A story from your childhood | (10) A photo |
| (5) A book | (11) A piece of art |
| (6) A song or piece of music | |

Media 1: A TV program

Describe a TV program that you have seen

You should say:

What type of program it is

What it is about

How often you watch it

Whether it is popular in your country

Suggestion

Choose a famous TV series such as *Journey to the West* or another long-running series based on a historical legend.

Uncommon vocabulary

See Part One Topic 5: Television.

long-running

be based on

air (=broadcast)

cast

episode

series

Grammar Point

Use a mix of present and past tenses:

I remember when I originally saw the first episode...

The show is still running to this day.

They have aired repeats of the show many times over the years.

Media 2: A radio program

Describe a radio program that you have listened to

You should say:

What type of program it is

What it is about

How often you listen to it

Whether it is possible in your country

Suggestion

You can use the same contents as Media 1: A TV program, but change it into a radio program (eg, a radio version of *Journey to the West*).

Uncommon Vocabulary

radio station radio play long-running series narrator

broadcast audio effects the script(=the words)

Grammar Point:

The same as Media: A TV program

Media 3: A film

Describe a film that you enjoyed watching

You should say:

What type of film it was

When you saw it

Why you enjoyed it

Whether this film was popular in your country

Suggestion

Choose a recent famous movie. (Hollywood movies are easier to describe.)

Uncommon Vocabulary

See part One Topic 25: Films

a Hollywood blockbuster a box-office smash a big-budget production
animated special effects an impressive script an unforgettable soundtrack
a strong cast (=famous actors/actresses)

Grammar Point

Use a mix of present and past tenses:

When I originally saw the film, it had been out for a quite while (be out = release).

It has been aired on TV a couple of times.

It has recently been released on DVD.

Media 4: A story from your childhood

Describe a story that you remember from your childhood

You should say:

What the story was about

How you first heard this story

Why you remember this story

Whether it is still popular today

Suggestion

Use the same story as Media 1: A TV program (eg, *Journey to the West*).

Uncommon Vocabulary

See People 4: A character from a story / film / TV program.

hand down over the generations

the outline of the story

fairy-tale

be founded on

Grammar Point:

Use a mix of past tenses

The story itself has been retold hundreds of times.

The tale was first read to me by my grandfather.

It was originally written by...

Media 5: A book

Describe a book that you enjoyed reading.

You should say:

When you first read it

What it was about

Why you enjoyed it

Whether this book is popular in your country

Suggestion

Use a similar story to Media 1: A TV program; People 4: A character from a story / film / TV program (eg, *Journey to the West*).

Uncommon Vocabulary

See also Part one Topic 7: Reading

a masterpiece
of classic fiction

the complete
unabridged edition

hardback version

paperback version
the pilot based on four
central characters

illustrated edition

the narrative style

Grammar Point

Use a mix of past tenses:

The book has been reprinted hundreds of times; It was originally written hundreds of years ago.

When I first read it, I had already seen the TV production of the story.

Media 6: A song or piece of music

Describe a song or piece of music that you like

You should say:

What the song or piece of music is

When you first heard it

Why you like it

Whether it is popular in your country

Suggestion

It is quite difficult to describe to a pop song. An easier choice would be the Vietnamese national anthem (the National Song).

Uncommon Vocabulary

It was originally composed by...

The lyric are very patriotic.

It has a very catchy tune (The song is very memorable).

It is usually performed by a full orchestra.

Grammar point

Try to use some past tenses:

I used to hear it every day at school.

It was written about 50 years ago.

Media 7: A newspaper or magazine

Describe a newspaper or magazine that you have read.

You should say:

What type of newspaper or magazine it is

How often you read it

What you like about it

Whether it is popular in your country.

Suggestion

It is probably easier to describe a magazine for this topic because magazines usually have more features than newspaper. Choose a general lifestyle and interest magazine such as Hope, Time, National Geographic or Cosmopolitan.

Uncommon vocabulary

Publish	monthly	regular	feature
Editorial	comment	photo-journalism	
film and book reviews			

Grammar point

Try to use some past tenses as well as present tenses:

I first came across this magazine when I was in university.

I have been reading it for about 2 years now.

I used to have a subscription (It was delivered to my address by post).

Media 8: A website

Describe a website that you have used.

You should say:

What the website is

What you used it for

How you found out about it.

Whether you have used other websites similar to this one.

Suggestion

At first this seems like a difficult topic. If you choose a “big” website with many features it is much easier. A good choice is “cina.com” or Baidu.com, because they have so many functions.

Uncommon vocabulary

Multi-functional	web-based community	
Message forums	music downloads	online games

Grammar point

Try to use some past tenses:

I first discovered it by accident – I followed a link from another website.

I have been using for it about 2 years now.

Now it's much more popular than it used to be.

Media 9: An advertisement

Describe an advertisement that you have seen.

What type of advertisement it is

What it is about

When you first saw it

What you like about it

Suggestion

The easiest choice is to describe a government TV advertisement about an environment issue such as energy conservation or anti-litter campaign.

Uncommon vocabulary

A long-running TV campaigns

public awareness

energy conservation

Influence

alter one's lifestyle

Grammar point

Try to use a mix of tenses:

I can remember the first time that I saw it.

It used to be broadcast every night at prime time.

It is still being shown today.

Media 10: A photo

Describe a photo that you like.

You should say:

What the photo is

When it was taken

Why you like it

Whether you have other photos in your home.

Suggestion

This can be difficult topic if you select the wrong photo. An easy option is a holiday photo – then you can describe some aspects of the holiday.

Uncommon vocabulary

See Part One Topic 40: Photography.

Bring back	fond	memory
Frame	original print	enlarge

Grammar point

Use mostly past tenses:

I took the photo whilst on holiday 3 years ago.

While I was on that holiday I spent a lot of time travelling.

The thing that I remember most about the holiday was when I

I've hung the photo on my wall.

Media 11: A piece of art

Describe a piece of art that you have seen.

You should say:

When / where you saw it

What it looked like

What you liked about it

Whether you have seen any other types of art.

Suggestion

This can be difficult topic. An easy topic is to describe sculpture-then you can use the same content as Place 20: A monument.

Uncommon vocabulary

See Place 20: A monument

Grammar point

Use a mix of tenses:

When I first saw it I thought it looked like a

When I look more closely I noticed that it had

I have seen a similar sculpture in ...

Section 5: Objects

- (1) Something useful
- (2) An object you see every day
- (3) A piece of equipment you use every day
- (4) Something electronic that you use often
- (5) An item of clothing or jewellery
- (6) Something old
- (7) A piece of furniture
- (8) Something you made yourself
- (9) A toy
- (10) A vehicle you would like to own
- (11) Something expensive you would like to buy
- (12) A gift or present you have received
- (13) Something you bought which you were not happy with
- (14) A handicraft
- (15) A national product

Object 1: something useful

Describe something useful you use every day.

You should say:

What the object is

What you use it for

Why it is useful

Whether it was expensive to buy.

Suggestion

Many people describe computer or mobile phones. These are fine but you must remember to use some complex language in your description – don't just list the different functions and features.

Uncommon vocabulary

Handy (= useful)

versatile

valuable to sb

make use of

Multipurpose

multifunctional

indispensable

Grammar point

You can use many different tenses for this topic:

I make use of it ...

I've had it for 2 years ...

I originally bought it

My life would be difficult without it because ...

I couldn't imagine life without it.

Object 2: An object you use every day

Describe an object you use every day.

You should say:

What the object is

What you use it for

Whether other people use it

How your life would be harder without it.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Object 1: Something useful.

Object 3: A piece of equipment you use every day

Describe a piece of equipment you use every day.

You should say:

What the piece of equipment is

What you use it for

Whether other people use it

How your life would be harder without it.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Object 1: Something useful.

Object 4: Something electronic that you use often

Describe something electronic that you use often.

You should say:

What it is

Where /When you bought it

What you use it for

How your life would be harder without it.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Object 1: Something useful.

Object 5: An item of clothing or jewellery

Describe an item of clothing or jewellery that you like to wear.

You should say:

What the item is

Where / When you bought it

What it looks like

How often you wear it.

Suggestion

Clothing is quite hard to describe. It is probably easier to describe an old watch that you own. (Lie if you don't own one!)

Uncommon Vocabulary

Antique

Old-fashioned design

precious

Of great personal value

Hand down

show off

Grammar Point

You can use a mix of past tenses:

I've had it for years.

It was made in 1903.

It has been repaired a couple of times.

It used to belong to my great-grandmother.

Object 6: Something old

Describe something old which has been in your family for a long time.

You should say:

What the thing is

How old it is

What it is used for

Whether it is valuable.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Object 5: An item of clothing or jewellery.

Object 7: A piece of furniture

Describe a piece of furniture in your home.

You should say:

What it is

What it looks like

What it is used for
Whether it was expensive.

Suggestion

This is quite difficult if you choose something basic like a sofa or bed. It is a good idea to lie for this topic – describe an antique piece of furniture. You can use some of language and phrases from Object 5: An item of clothing or jewellery.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Professional furniture restorer delicate fragile
Ornamental decorative

Grammar Point

Exactly the same as Object 5: An item of clothing or jewellery.

Object 8: Something you made yourself

Describe something you made yourself.

You should say:

What the thing was

How you made it

Why you made it

Whether you still have this thing today.

Suggestion

This topic is quite difficult if you choose something basic like a greeting card. A good suggestion is a kite which you made yourself.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Assemble put together attach glue (v.)

Grammar Point

This topic need mostly past tenses:

I created all the parts from scratch (=I made them all myself).

It took me about a day to complete it.

I had never made a kite before so it was quite tricky.

I used to play with it every day.

I have no idea what happened to it – I think it got thrown away.

Object 9: A toy

Describe a toy that you enjoyed playing with as a child.

You should say:

What the toy was

Who bought it for you

Why you liked it

Whether you still have this toy.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Object 8: Something you made yourself. (A kite could be defined as a toy.)

Object 10: A vehicle you would like to own

Describe a vehicle you would like to own

You should say:

What the vehicle is

Why you would like to own it

Whether it would be expensive to buy

Whether you think you will buy this vehicle in the future.

Suggestion

Many people describe cars or bicycles – there are too simple and do not give you enough content to be able to keep talking and use complex language. It is easier to select something quite unbelievable like helicopter, luxury yacht or private jet plane. (The question is “would like to own”), so can you be quite imaginative.)

Uncommon Vocabulary

extravagant show off status symbol high-speed
luxurious pricey(=expensive) price-tag

Grammar Point

Use conditional structures:

It’s just a fantasy; I doubt I’ll ever be able to afford this.

If I owned this vehicle I might be about to...

I would most probably use it to...

Object 11: Something expensive you would like to buy

Describe something expensive you would like to buy.

You should say:

What the thing is

Why you would like to buy it

What you would use it for

Whether you think you will buy this thing in the future.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Object 10: A vehicle you would like to own.

Object 12: A gift or present you have received

Describe a gift or present you have received.

You should say:

What the gift was

Who gave it to you
Why they gave it to you
How you felt when you received it.

Suggestion

Use the same content as Object 5: An item of clothing or jewellery. Say that one of your family members gave you this old piece of family jewellery as a birthday gift or graduation gift.

Object 13: Something you bought which you were not happy with

Describe something you bought which you were not happy with.

You should say:

What the thing was
Where / When you bought it
Why you were not happy with it
What you did about the situation.

Suggestion

The best way to deal with this topic is to focus on the problem and solution rather than the actual object. Use any object from the previous topics (e.g. computer or mobile phone) and focus on the reason why you were not happy with it.

Uncommon Vocabulary

purchase(=buy) splash out on(=pay a lot of money for)
break down
go wrong get one's money back
manufacturer
offer a refund / replacement technical fault
retailer

Grammar Point

Use mostly past tenses and some conditional structures:

I would never purchase this brand again.
I would probably pay a little extra next time and choose a well-know brand

Object 14: A handicraft

Describe a handicraft that can be found in your country.

You should say:

What the handicraft is
How it is made
What it is used for
Whether it is easy to find.

Suggestion

Do not try to describe the famous Chinese “red knots” – these are very difficult to talk about for 2 minutes. A much easier option is bamboo furniture.

Uncommon Vocabulary

practical furniture armchair stool versatile
raw materials fast-growing an creative skill
durable
long-established traditional technique environmentally sustainable

Grammar Point

Use some past tenses:

This long-established traditional technique has been practiced for thousands of years.
It has remained unchanged for centuries.

Object 15: A national product

Describe a product from your country that is famous

You should say:

What the product is

What it is used for

Where it can be found

Whether it is useful.

Suggestion

Exactly the same as Object 14: A handicraft.

Section 6: Hobbies and Activities

- (1) A free-time activity
- (2) A hobby you would like to take up
- (3) Something you do to help you relax
- (4) A sport (a)
- (5) A sport (b)
- (6) An outdoor activity
- (7) A game
- (8) Something you like to do at weekends

Hobby / Activity 1: A free-time activity

Describe a free-time activity that you enjoy doing.

You should say:

What the hobby is

What you like about it

Why you started doing it

Whether this hobby is popular in your country.

Suggestion

This is probably the easiest of all Part Two Topics. It really doesn't matter what hobby you describe – remember to use complex vocabulary.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use the vocabulary from Part One Topic 3: Hobbies / Free-time activities.

Grammar Point

You can use a wide range of tenses:

I've been doing this for years.

I originally took up this activity 4 years ago.

I used to do it every day but now I only spend a few hours a week doing it.

I will never forget the first time I tried this.

Hobby / activity 2: A hobby you would like to take up

Describe a hobby or activity that you would like to take up in the future.

You should say:

What the hobby is

Why you want to do it

Whether it is popular in your country

Whether you think you will start doing this in the near future.

Suggestion

With this topic you can choose any hobby but remember this is a "would-like" question so you must focus on why you would like to do this in the future.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use the vocabulary from Part One Topic 3: Hobbies / Free-time activities.

Grammar Point

You must use conditional structures:

If I could choose any hobby, I guess I'd like to take up...

I suppose it would be quite fascinating.

I might have the chance to...

I'm not sure if I will actually be able to start doing this.

Hobby / Activity 3: Something you do to help you relax

Describe something you do to help you relax

You should say

What the activity is

How often you do this
Why you like this
Whether this is popular in your country.

Suggestion

A common problem with this topic is when candidates describe a sport such as football. A physical sport is not a form of relaxation, so a description of a sport will often be judge as “irrelevant” or “off-topic” by the examiner. You should actually describe something “you do to help you rest”. The easy choices are music, reading, TV or radio etc. (in the past I have heard candidates try to describe “sleeping” – I think it almost impossible to describe sleeping for 2 minutes.)

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use vocabulary from Part One Topic 26: Weekends; Part One Topic 45: Relaxation.

Grammar Point

The same as Hobby / Activity 1: A free-time activity

Hobby / Activity 4: A sport (a)

Describe a sport that you enjoy watching or playing.

You should say:

What the sport is

Where / When you play or playing ot

Why you like watching/playing this sport

Whether it is popular in your country.

Suggestion

It is actually quite difficult to describe many common sports such as football or basketball because each sport has its own specialist vocabulary. It is much easier if you choose a range of sports such as athletics. It is probably easier to describe why you like playing it (especially the physical benefits).

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use Part One Topic 4: Sports.

Grammar Point

The same as Hobby / Activity 1: A free-time activity

Hobby / Activity 5: A sport (b)

Describe a sport that you like to try.

You should say:

What the sport is

Why you would like to try it

Whether this sport is popular in your country

Whether you think you will start doing this in the near future.

Suggestion

It is important to notice that this is a sport that you have not tried before. One option is to describe an extreme or dangerous sport. (see Experiences 24: Something dangerous you would like to do.) A second option is to take the sport from the previous topic card and say that you have never tried this sport before.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use Part One Topic 4: Sports; Experiences 24: Something dangerous you would like to do.

Grammar Point

Use the same structures as: Hobby / Activity 2: A hobby you would like to take up; Experiences 24: Something dangerous you would like to do.

I'd love to have the chance to have a go at mountain biking.

It would without doubt be quite risky.

It would need quite a lot of careful preparation.

I doubt I'll ever have the chance to actually do it.

Hobby / Activity 6: An outside activity

Describe an outside activity that you enjoy doing.

You should say:

What the activity is

How often you do it

Why you enjoy it

Whether it is a popular activity in your country.

Suggestion

This topic is so general that you have many options to choose from. You can repeat the content from the following: Hobby / Activity 4: A sport (a); Place B: A walk that you regularly take.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Outdoor in the open air fresh air invigorating

Refreshing bracing energizing

Grammar Point

Use some past tenses:

When I wasn't so busy I used to do this more frequently.

I've been doing it on and off for about 2 years now (on and off = irregularly)

I initially took up this activity after I left school.

Hobby / Activity 7: A game

Describe a game that you enjoyed playing when you were a child.

You should say: What the game was

How the game is played

Why you enjoyed it

Whether this game is still played today.

Suggestion

It is important to realize that this topic card is about game and not sport. The easiest options are children's games that involved pretending to be adults, such as hospitals, war, families, shop etc.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Amuse oneself	make-believe	imagination	play-acting
Act out the role of	imaginary	iminate	mimic

Grammar Point

Topic needs mostly past tenses:

I can recall that we regularly used to amuse ourselves by ...

Whenever we have free time, we would often...

I can still remember how we sometimes used to ...

Hobby / Activity 8: Something you like to do at weekends

Describe something you like to do at weekends.

You should say:

What the activity is

Why you do it at weekends

What you like about this activity

Whether it is popular in your country.

Suggestion

This is very simple topic. You can select content from any of the previous Hobby / Activity topic cards.

Uncommon Vocabulary

See Part One Topic 26: Weekends.

Grammar Point

Use the same grammar as Hobby / Activity 6: An outside activity

Section 7: Other Part Two Topics

- (1) An animal
- (2) An environmental problem
- (3) A subject that you liked at school
- (4) An ideal job
- (5) Food
- (6) Type of clothes
- (7) Favourite month or season
- (8) Type of weather
- (9) Extreme weather
- (10) Something good about your personality
- (11) A future plan or ambition
- (12) An important invention
- (13) A form of public transport
- (14) A public event

The following Part Two topics are those which cannot be put into any of the previous groups.

Other 1: An animal

Describe a wild animal that can be found in your country.

You should say:

What the animal is

Where it can be found

How people in your country feel about it

Whether you have seen it

Suggestion

The obvious choice here is the giant panda. (There is a full example of a Part Two description of a panda in the section of this book entitled “Examples of Part Two Using the Fluency Method”.)

Uncommon Vocabulary

National symbol endangered species nature reserve
Protected natural habitat conservation

Grammar Point

Use a mix of present and past tenses:

I have seen it once.

It used to be more common but now it is extremely rare in the wild.

I visited the Panda Sanctuary last year.

Other 2: An environmental problem

Describe an environmental problem in your country.

You should say:

What the problem is

Whether it is serious

What can cause this problem

How it can be solved.

Suggestion

Many candidates choose “air pollution” or “water pollution”. These are ok but it is not easy to use complex vocabulary because they are both quite general problems. It is better to choose a more specific problem such as “air pollution from car exhaust fumes”. Do not choose “noise pollution” or “light pollution” – these are too difficult to describe for two minutes.

Uncommon Vocabulary

car exhaust emissions carbon monoxide fumes leader petrol
global warming climate change rising sea level
global resolution international agreements

Grammar Point

You can use past, present and future tenses:

The problem started back in the 1970’s.

It has been getting worse ever since.

It will continue to worsen if we don’t find a way to deal with it.

If we don’t act soon, it might be too late to reverse the climate changes.

Others 3: A subject that you liked at school

Describe a subject that you liked at school.

You should say:

What the subject was

Why you like it

Whether you were good at this subject

How this subject helped you later in life.

Suggestion

Some subjects are easy to describe: sport, languages, music or art. Other subjects are more difficult to describe: mathematics, Chinese or history. The easiest choice is probably a

foreign language.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use Part One Topic 9: Learning English; Part One Topic 21: Learning languages;
People 6: A teacher who has influenced you.

Grammar Point

You need to use mostly past tenses:

At that time I was studying in the middle school.

My favourite subject used to be...

I used to enjoy it because...

I remember the teacher always used to...

Others 4: An ideal job

Describe your idea of an ideal job.

You should say:

What the job is

Why you would like to do this job

Whether it would be easy to do this job

Whether it would be easy to find a job like this.

Suggestion

Choose any job that involves a variety of activities such as a travel guide or journalist. Then you can talk about the travel aspect of the job as well as the job itself.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use the vocabulary from Part One Topic 2a: That you do – your job.

Grammar Point

You must use conditional structures:

I guess my dream job would be something like...

It would allow me to...

I would have the opportunity to...

It might even be possible for me to...

Others 5: Food

Describe the type of food that you like eating.

You should say:

What type of food it is

How often you eat it

Why you like it

Whether this food is popular in your country.

Suggestion

Choose a “style” of food rather than one particular dish. For example, it is much easier to describe “seafood” than “lobster”. It is not easy to describe a regional style of Chinese cooking, eg, Sichuan food, because most of the vocabulary needed for this would

be Chinese. Some easy examples include: seafood, vegetable food, fast food, junk food, home-cooked food etc. Don't tell the truth. Don't describe your favourite food – describe any type of food that you can easily talk about for 2 minutes (even if you don't actually like this food).

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use Part One Topic 13: Restaurants; Part One Topic 31: Cooking; Part One Topic 36: Food.

Grammar Point

Try to include some past tenses:

I used to eat this food quite a lot.

I remember the first time that I tried it.

When I was younger I wasn't so keen on this food but I've become quite fond of it now.

Others 6: Types of clothes

Describe the type of clothes you like wearing.

You should say:

What type of clothes you like

Why you like them

Where you buy them

Whether these clothes are popular in your country.

Suggestion

Remember the topic card states "type of clothes", not a particular item of clothing. Some examples could be sports clothes, traditional Chinese clothing, expensive designer label clothes or fashionable clothes.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use Part One Topic 11: Clothes.

Grammar Point

Try to include some past tenses:

When I was younger I used to prefer wearing...

As I got older I started to get into trendy clothes.

This style of clothing didn't use to be so fashionable.

It started becoming trendy about 5 years ago.

Others 7: Favourite month or season

Describe a month or season that you particularly like.

You should say:

What the month or season is

Why you like it

What you do during this month or season

What makes this month or season special.

Suggestion

It is easier to describe a season. For example, if you choose summer, you can describe seasonal food, summer activities, summer clothes and the weather.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use Part One Topic 22: Weather; Part One Topic 38: Seasons.

Grammar Point

Try to include some past tenses:

When I was a kid I didn't use to be so fond of summer because...

I remember in the summer months we often used to...

As I got older, I started to appreciate summer more because...

Others 8: Type of weather

Describe your favourite type of weather.

You should say:

What the type of weather is

What you do during this type of weather

Why it is your favourite

Whether people often talk about the weather in your country.

Suggestion

Use the same content as Other 7: Favourite month or season.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use the vocabulary as Other 7: Favourite month or season.

Grammar Point

Use the same grammar as Other 7: Favourite month or season.

Others 9: Extreme weather

Describe some extreme weather that you have experienced.

You should say:

What the extreme was

Where/ When you experienced it

Why it was extreme

Whether this type of weather is common in your country.

Suggestion

The topic card states "extreme weather", so it is not possible to use exactly the same content as the previous topic. The easiest choice is probably a summer "heat wave" (an unexpected period of unusually hot weather), or a winter "cold snap" (an unexpected period of unusually cold weather).

Uncommon Vocabulary

heat wave

cold snap

unanticipated

out-of-the-blue (=without warning)

severely hot/ cold

Use also Part One Topic 22: Weather.

Grammar Point

You can use a mix of tenses:

When I was younger the weather used to always be quite predictable.
I had never experienced such extreme temperatures.
I hope I never have to witness these weather conditions again.

Others 10: something good about your personality

Describe something good about your personality

You should say: what this thing is

Why you think it is good

How it influences your life

Whether other people would agree that this is a good thing

Suggestion

This is not an easy Part Two topic. The easiest option is to choose "honesty".

Uncommon Vocabulary

Truthful vouch for straightforward a reputation for tell the truth
down to earth put one's cards on the table (idiom)

Grammar Point

Try to use some conditional sentences:

My friends would vouch for my honesty.

I would say that I have a reputation for being down to earth.

If I am in a difficult predicament I will always put my cards on the table.

Others 11: a future plan or ambition

Describe any future plan or ambition you have.

You should say:

What the plan/ambition is

How long you have had this plan/ambition

Why you want to do this

Whether you think you will do this in the near future.

Suggestion

Choose the easiest option - say that you would like to move to another country. This gives you lots of lifestyle aspects to describe (including work and study).

Uncommon Vocabulary

Aspiration Desire motivated have big ambitions

build castles in the air (idiom)

a dream come true (idiom)

Grammar Point

Use mix of tenses, especially future and conditional tense:

Ever since I was a kid I have had the desire to ...

I have never been the kind of person to build castles in the air.

It would really be a dream come true if I could ...

I really hope that I will be able to ...

Others 12: An important invention

Describe an important invention before the age of computers.

You should say:

What the invention is

How it has changed people's lives

Why you think it is important

Whether it is still used today.

Suggestion

There are many possibilities for this topic, but remember the topic card states that the invention must be "before the age of computers". Easy options include: the telephone, the jet aircraft, the generation of electricity or gunpowder.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Discovery conceive innovation revolutionize creator think up

Grammar point

Use a mix of tenses:

The idea was originally conceived and thought up by an inventor (I can't remember his name)

I think it was created some time in the twentieth century.

It has played an important part in people's lives.

Life wouldn't be the same without it because it has enabled people to ...

Others 13: A form of public transport

Describe your favourite form of public transport.

You should say:

What type of the transport it is

How often you use it

Why it is your favourite

Whether it is popular in your country.

Suggestion

Candidates often misunderstand the meaning of “public transport”. Public transport includes: trains, buses, taxis, river ferries, underground trains (metro) and trams. It does not include bicycles, cars or air travel. Buses or trains are probably the easiest to describe.

Uncommon Vocabulary

Use part One Topic 33: public transport.

Grammar Point

Use a mix of tense:

When I was younger I used to take the train about one year.

If I have the choice, I will generally opt to take a bus.

The train system has recently been upgraded.

Others 14: A public event

Describe a public event that you enjoyed.

You should say:

What the event was

When and where you saw it.

Why you liked it

Whether you would like to see this kind of event again.

Suggestion

There are many possible choices for this topic but the easiest is probably the Olympic Games. This topic is easy because there are many different features that you can talk about. Some people might argue that the Olympic Games is not actually a public event; in fact this topic is quite confusing (even to an examiner), because the word “public event” is so vague and unspecific. For this reason it is perfectly acceptable to select the Olympics Games.

Uncommon Vocabulary

International occasion

Prestigious competition

The world's most celebrated sports meeting

Globally renowned

Grammar Point

You need to use many examples of past tenses

It was actually the first time I had seen this prestigious sporting competition.

It was broadcast live on TV.

I spend hours watching the main events.

I was quite surprised to notice that ...

Others 15: A sporting events

Describe a sporting event that you have seen.

You should say:

What the event was

Where or When you saw it

What you liked about it

Whether you would like to watch this type of event again.

Suggestion

Use exactly the same content and language as Others 14: A public event.

Finishing or “Rounding Off” Part Two

After your two-minute talk the examiner might ask you one or two very basic questions about your Part Two content. Examiners call these questions “rounding off” question.

For example, in Part Two your topic was “Describe your favourite form of public transport”. Let's say you described buses. After you have finished talking, the examiner might ask questions like:

“Are the bus cheap in your country?”

“Did you travel to the test today by bus?”

The simple questions are used to close Part Two of the speaking test. You DON'T need to give a complex answer to these questions. This is the only time in the speaking test when you should give simple answers. It would be fine to answer:

“Yes, about 2 yuan for a single journey.”

“No, actually I came by taxi.”

The examiner will want to move on Part Three as quickly as possible – so do not try to give long responses to these questions.

In some situations the examiner will not ask these questions and will move straight to Part Three.

Do not worry if the examiner does not ask these questions – it means that the total timing for Part Two has reached 3 minutes. This is actually a positive thing because it means

your Part Two was quite long.

3. Part Three of the Speaking test

3.1. The Format

You know when Part Three has started because you will hear the examiner say:

“Ok we’ve just been talking about (public transport) and now I’d like to ask you one or two general questions related to this topic. So first of all let’s talk about ...”

Part Three should take 4-5 minutes. This includes the time it takes for the examiner to introduce topics and ask questions.

It is important to realize that in Part Three the focus of questions and topics changes.

As we have already seen, in Part One and Part Two the focus of the topics and questions is “you” and “your life”.

Part One	Part Two
Do YOU like ... How often do YOU ... Tell me about X in YOUR city.	Describe YOUR favourite Describe something YOU like doing... Describe something that is popular in YOUR country.

In Part Three, there is a definite change in the focus. The questions are no longer about you and your life. The general focus of Part Three is “other people” or “society in general”. The questions in Part Three may be based on things in your country, things in general (no particular place) or they may be about global issues.

There is a direct relationship between your Part Two topic and your Part Three topics. However, it is important to realize that your Part Three topics will not be exactly the same as your Part Two topic.

For example, in Part Two your topic was:

Describe an interesting trip you have been on.

(You described a trip to Hong Kong.)

In Part Three, your examiner might ask you questions about:

Different types of trips and holidays.

Travelling abroad/ travelling in your own country.

The importance of tourism.

The examiner will NOT ask about:

Travelling to Hong Kong

Your favourite ways of travelling

Why you like travelling.

This aspect of Part Three is important to understand because the content in your answers must be based on “general ideas” and not your “personal information”.

It is important to remember that your ideas are not being tested – the examiner is only testing your ability to express your ideas in spoken English.

Candidates who continue to talk about themselves in Part Three will lose marks.

Part Three questions and strategies are given later in this chapter.

3.2. Part Three and Score Adjustment

It is quite obvious that Part Three is the most demanding section of the speaking test. This is because the questions and topics are more complex than Part One and Part Two.

There is a specific reason for the increased difficulty in Part Three. An experienced examiner can accurately award a speaking score midway through Part Two. At the end of Part Two, if your examiner has decided that you are a speaking 6 he or she will then use Part Three to push you to your language limit – eg, push you “linguistically” to see if you can actually get 7.

Part Three seems difficult because the examiner is pushing you to your “linguistic limit”.

Generally speaking, most people’s score stay the same after Part Three. In other words, the examiner decided that you were a 6 after Part Two, and your performance in Part Three didn’t make him change his or her mind.

In some circumstances, the score may be reduced in Part Three. This usually happens with candidates who have recited a lot of Part One and Part Two content, they usually find that it is not possible to use recited content in Part Three.

More importantly, it is possible to use Part Three to increase your score. If you fully understand the functions of Part Three questions, you can produce language that should increase your score.

In this chapter we will focus on one particular strategy for dealing with Part Three questions.

It is also important to remember that your actual opinion is not being marked in Part Three.

Many people like to call Part Three a “discussion”. I would rather not use this word because it gives us the idea that content is important. As with all parts of the speaking test, you are being marked on your linguistic ability – NOT your ideas or content.

3.3. Part Three Question Types

Part Three actually contains a wide number of different topics and questions. It would be almost impossible to memories answer in Part Three.

The best strategy for Part Three is to ignore the actual topic and question and focus on the “language function” of Part Three questions.

These language functions require specific grammar aspects, so for this reason, most of our Part Three responses will be based on grammar.

Look at the following question:

Are houses nowadays the same as houses 50 years ago in your country?

With all Part Three questions, it is a good idea to ask the following question:

Why is the examiner asking me this question?

With the example the answer should be:

The examiner is testing my ability to demonstrate my ability to compare two things.

This will be our first type

Part Three Question Type I: Comparing

This is one of the most common Part Three question types. It usually appears very early in Part Three (the first or second question). The comparing question can be asked in different ways:

Time comparison

Are houses nowadays, the same as houses 30 years ago in your country?

(This type of comparison question requires the use of mixed tenses).

Social group comparison

Do men and women like the same types of books?

Do old and young people like the same holidays?

Geographic comparison

Are houses in North China are same as houses in South China?

Although these questions look quite different, they all require a very similar answer. The important thing to remember is that you do not get marks for the “differences” that you describe. Some candidates simply list a number of differences – this does not produce a

good quality answer. For this question type you need to use “comparative” structures. Look at the following answer:

“Do men and women like the same hobbies?”

“I think men and women like different hobbies, for example men are fond of many type of sporting activities such as football and basketball. Also they prefer things like watching action movies and going to bars, but women likes hobbies such as shopping, watching TV, singing TV and chatting online”.

This answer is simply a list of different hobbies; it is focused on content. It does not produce the “comparative” language that is required for this type of question.

Now look at the next answer to the same question:

“Well obviously there are a number of clear differences. However, I guess that the most significant would be that men tend to prefer sporting activities such as football or basketball. Whereas in contrast women prefer things like shopping for clothes. In addition to this, another possible distinction might be that men usually watching films; while on the other hand, women are more likely to prefer watching soap operas on TV.”

This second answer contains similar content to the first answer but the content is presented with comparative structures. The comparative language here is: whereas, in contrast, while on the other hand. These two comparative linking structures will increase your score. Now you need to build your own comparative answer.

Begin with an opening linking phrase:

Well obviously ...

Well clearly ...

Sure, without a doubt ...

Well undoubtedly ...

Well unmistakably ...

Unquestionably

Now say that there are some differences:

There are a number of underlying differences here.

There are a variety of possible differences here.

There are a range of potential distinctions here.

Now introduce the first difference:

However, I guess that the most significant would be that ...

Though I suppose the most obvious would be that ...

But I would say the most fundamental would be that ...

Now use a sentence to describe the first difference. For example, "...men tend to prefer ..."

Develop this first difference with a simple linking word: especially, particularly, in fact, such as, for example, specifically.

Now use your first comparative linking structure:

Whereas on the other hand

On the contrary ...

Though quite the opposite ...

Now add your next sentence. For example, "...women are generally more keen on ..."

Develop the second part of the first difference with a simple linking word: especially, particularly, in fact, such as, for example, specifically.

So you have described one difference. Now you need to introduce a second difference.

Begin with a linking word:

In addition ...

Additionally ...

As well as this ...

On top of this

Moreover ...

After that ...

Say there is another important difference.

... a second key distinction would be that ...

... a subsequent contrast could be that ...

... a further distinction might be that ...

Now describe the second difference. For example, "... men are quite keen on ..."

Now use your second comparative linking structure.

While on the other hand ...

Alternatively ...

Conversely ...

Then again, in opposition ...

Then give a sentence to describe the second part of the second difference. You only need to describe two differences.

Tenses for Time Comparison

Sometime people call these questions “changes” questions. However the question “How has X changed in recent years?” is actually the same question as, “Is X nowadays the same as X in the past (20 years ago, 50 years ago etc.)?”

The answer is actually the same, because if you describe the changes you are simply describing the difference between past and present.

In your answer, when you describe the past, the easiest tense to use accurately is “used to”. For example:

X used to be much smaller ...

X always used to be more ...

X didn't use to have as many ...

X didn't use to be as ...

Now use your own answer structure to practice the following compare questions.

Are schools nowadays the same as schools in the past?

Are TV programmes nowadays the same as TV programmes in the past?

Are restaurants nowadays the same as restaurants in the past?

Are free-time activities nowadays the same as 20 years ago in your country?

Are shops nowadays the same as shops when you were younger?

Are trips nowadays the same as trips that your parents had when they were young?

In what ways are magazines different to newspapers?

Do adults and children make friends in the same ways?

Are families nowadays the same as families in the past?

Are buildings nowadays the same as buildings 100 years ago?

Is public transport nowadays the same as public transport 20 years ago?
Do old and young people like the same hobbies?
Do men and women have the same attitudes to shopping?
What's the difference between things made by hand and things made by machines?
Do people nowadays eat the same food as people 50 years ago?
Is the weather in North China the same as the weather in South China?
How has education changed in recent years in your country?
Nowadays, do people make new friends in the same way as people 20 years ago?
Are the ways in which people become famous nowadays the same ways that people became famous 100 years ago?

This is not a complete list of every comparison question in Part Three, but if you can confidently use your comparative structure for all of these questions, you will have no problem answering this type of question – regardless of the topic.

Part Three Question Type 2: Predicting

Look at the following question: “What will house be like in the future?”

Now ask yourself: “Why is the examiner asking me this question?”

The answer is simple: “the examiner is testing my ability to use future prediction structures.”

The following answer is quite common for this type of question:

“I think that in the future, houses will be much bigger, and maybe they will be in some strange places such as on the moon or under the sea.”

The answer above directly answers the question with acceptable “prediction”. However, the language used to present these predictions is very basics. Now look at the next answer to the same question:

“Certainly, I'm sure that most people would agree that there will be a number of major changes related to this. Initially, I guess that we might begin to see houses that are much bigger. At the same time, I suppose it's quite probable that we may have houses under the sea. And who knows, it could even be possible that we'll see that arrival of houses on the moon.”

The content of this answer is basically the same as the first answer but the language used is much more complex. The answer lists 3 different predictions and prediction is presented with a different future structure:

... I guess that we might begin to see...

... I suppose it's quite probable that we may have...

... who knows, it could even be possible that we'll see...

Now you will build your own "predicting answer structure". Begin with an opening linking phrase:

Certainly, I'm sure that most people would agree that there will be a number of major changes related to this.

I'm sure that in years to come we will be a number of major changes related to this.

I reckon that in the not so distant future, we will witness some major changes with regard to...

Introduce your first prediction:

Initially, I guess that we might begin to see...

To begin with, I'd predict that we will most likely have...

Primarily, it looks quite probable that we are going to have...

First of all, I would envisage that we are going to have...

Use a sentence to describe your first prediction. Try to use basic future tenses when giving details. Try to develop the sentence with a basic linking word.

"Initially, I guess that we might begin to see houses that are made of plastic materials because these will be much cheaper and easier to construct."

Now introduce your second prediction.

At the same time, I suppose it's quite probable that we may have...

As well as this, some people claim that we will probably start to see...

On top of this, I imagine it's quite likely that we will soon have...

Likewise, I would imagine that we may even be able to see.

Use a sentence to describe your second prediction. Try to use basic future tenses when giving details. Try to develop the sentence with a basic linking word.

"At the same time, I suppose it's quite probable that we may have houses that are controlled by computer because this will make home life much easier."

Now introduce your 3rd prediction. It is now always possible to make 3 realistic predictions, so you can make your final one quite unrealistic.

And who knows, it could even be possible that we'll see the arrival of ...

And you never know, it could even transpire that we'll have...

And I know it's a bit of a crazy thought, but one day we may even have...

And who knows, there's even a chance that we will have...

It is probable not necessary to develop your last prediction, but if you can add a detail use a basic future tense. Practice your prediction structure with the following questions:

- What will schools be like in the future?
- What will restaurants be like in the future?
- What types of people will become famous in the future?
- What will shops/shopping habits be like in the future?
- What will public transport be like in the future?
- What types of hobbies will become popular in the future?
- What types of trips/holidays will people take in the future?
- What will cars be like in the future?
- What will TB programs be like in the future?
- What kinds of gifts will people give in the future?
- What kinds of skills will become important in the future?
- What new inventions do you think we will see in the future?
- What environmental problems will we see in the future?
- Do you think we will see any changes in the weather in the future?.
- Do you think we will read books in different ways in the future?
- Do you think we will get news in different ways in the future?

It is important to remember that some of these prediction questions are quite difficult in their content. It is not always easy to think about the future. As a basic guideline the following changes should be useful for many topics.

- Changes in variety (There will be a wider variety.)
- Changes in price (Things will become cheaper or more expensive.)
- Changes in size, materials or appearance
- Changes in location
- Changes in location
- Changes in form (Things will become internet base. /There will be electronic versions.)

Part Three Question Type 3: Why questions

There are some “Why” question in Part One of the speaking test but they are more commonly asked in Part Three. Look at the following question and answer:

“Why do so many people want to be famous?”

“In my opinion there are many reasons. Firstly people think they can make more money, live in a big house, drive an expensive car and travel around the world.”

The reasons in this answer are quite acceptable, but they are presented in a basic structure which lacks linking phrases. This answer also lacks complex vocabulary. Now look at the next answer:

“In my opinion I guess u would have to say that there are probable a number of factors involved. Primarily, one key motivation would be because they think they would be able to make more money. As well as this a subsequent incentive might be because they want to live in a big house and drive an expensive car.”

This answer actually contains less ideas or reasons, but it presents the reason with complex linking structures. The word “reason” is also replaced with 3 different complex vocabulary items (factor, motivation and incentive).

Now build your own “why” structure. Begin with a linking phrase:

Well in my opinion I guess I would have to say that...

Well in my view, I suppose I would say that...

Will in my estimation, I guess that...

Well generally it’s my belief that...

Now use a structure to say that “there are many reasons”:

There are probably a number of factors involved.

There are obviously a number of motives surrounding this idea.

There are unquestionably a number of explanations for this.

There undoubtedly a variety of justifications behind this.

Now introduce the first reason:

The chief cause might be that...

The main basis is probably because///

Introduce the second reason”

As well as this, a subsequent factor could be because...

At the same time, a secondary motive could be that...

Additionally, a further rationale might be due to the fact that...

If you want to talk about a third reason, you can use a similar structure to the ones above. Remember try not to repeat the vocabulary, i.e. if you have used “factor” in one sentence, in your next sentence use a different word, e.g. “motive”. The more “reason” words you use, the higher your vocabulary score.

Now practice using your structure for the following “why” question.

- Why is it important to protect old/historical building?
- Why do so many people move from the countryside to cities?
- Why is it important to protect the environment?
- Why do people like to know about the private lives of famous people?
- Why do many people want to live abroad?
- Why do people like travelling to foreign countries?
- Why is it important to learn a foreign language?
- Why do children find it easier to learn to play a musical instrument?
- Why are supermarkets so popular nowadays?
- Why is it important to play sports?
- Why is watching TB so popular around the world?

Part Three Question Type 4: Advantages

These questions sometimes appear in Part One, but they are much more common in Part Three. Look at the following question and answer:

“What are the advantages of travelling by trains?”

“I think there are many advantages; for example it is quite cheap, it’s usually faster than road travel, you can usually take a train to any destination and you can sleep on the train.”

Although this answer describes some advantages, it does not use appropriate language to express these advantages. In fact, the only word used “advantage” is recycled from the question. Now look at a different answer to the same question:

“Well, I suppose that there are quite a few clear benefits, but I would probably say that for the most part, the one thing that really stands out is that trains are really cheap, especially for long distance travel – you can travel from one side China to the other for a few hundred yuan. I guess that another obvious plus point is that it is much faster than travelling by road – so you can save time by travelling on trains. Along with this, a further merit is that you can sleep quite comfortably on long train journeys.”

In this answer, the candidate has used appropriate language to express “advantages”: clear benefits, obvious plus point, further merit.

Now create your own “advantages” structure. (You will build a structure that develops each advantage.) Begin with an opening linking phrase that explains that “there are many advantages”.

Well I suppose that there are quite a few clear benefits.

Clearly there are a number of obvious merits.

Sure there are few favorable aspects.

Obviously there are a number of positive features.

Now highlight the most obvious:

But I would probably say that for the most part, the one things that really stands out is that...

But it goes without saying that the most apparent would be that...

Although I guess that the most visible would be that ...

However, I guess that the most evident would be that...

Add a simple sentence which describes the advantage: "...trains are really cheap..."

Now develop this advantage with one of the following structures:

This is obviously favorable because...

This is undoubtedly positive for the simple reason that...

This is without doubt beneficial because...

Add a simple sentence to explain why it is an advantage: "...you can travel from one side China to the other for a few hundred yuan..."

Now introduce your second advantage:

At the same time a second bonus might be that...

Besides this, a second plus point could be that...

As well as this a further favorable aspect would be that...

Add a simple sentence to explain the advantage and develop it with one of the following:

This is clearly advantageous because...

This is definitely valuable since...

This is surely a positive feature because...

For most questions, two advantages should be enough to produce a good quality answer. There is no need to list every advantage.

A common problem for this type of question is when candidates also try to describe disadvantages in their answer. This is unnecessary because usually (now always) the examiner will ask about disadvantages in the next question. Now use your advantages structure to practice answering the following questions.

What are the advantages of travelling by air?

What are the advantages of having a private car?

What are the advantages of zoos?

What are the advantages of playing team sports?

What are the advantages of being famous?

What are the advantages of watching films in a cinema?

What are the advantages of living in cities?

- What are the advantages of using a public library?
- What are the advantages of spending time in a foreign country?
- What are the advantages of getting news from newspapers?
- What are the advantages of online (Internet) shopping?
- What are the advantages of listening to the radio (compare with TV)?
- What are the advantages of advertising?
- What are the advantages of hand made products?

Part Three Question Type 5: Disadvantages

An advantage question is often followed by a disadvantage question

“What are the advantages of train travel?”

(Your answer)

“Are there any disadvantages?”

Your disadvantages answer should be similar to your advantage answer. You need to use appropriate vocabulary to describe the disadvantages. Begin with a linking structure to explain that there are some disadvantages:

I think it’s fair to say that there are few negative aspects

I’m sure most people would agree that there are some drawbacks.

Of course there are a couple of shortcomings.

Now introduce your main disadvantage:

I guess the most impractical characteristic would be that...

I suppose the most unfavorable quality might be that...

Unquestionably, the most adverse feature would be that...

Describe the main advantage with a simple sentence, for example “...trains are often overcrowded...”

Now use a linking structure to develop this disadvantage:

Most people would agree that this is problematic because...

This is an obvious weakness because ...

This is a clear limitation because...

Add a simple sentence to explain why it is a disadvantage, for example: “... on a long journey you might not be able to find a seat.”

Now describe your second disadvantage.

Correspondingly, an additional weak point may be that...

Supplementary to this, a further handicap may be that ...

At the same time, another stumbling block might be that ...

Add a simple sentence and develop it with one of the following structures:

And the trouble with this is that ...

And this can be a hassle because...

This is usually an aggravation because...

So a complete answer to the question might look like this:

“What are the disadvantages of train travel?”

“I think it’s fair to say that there are a few negative aspects. I suppose the most unfavorable quality might be that trains are often overcrowded at certain times of year. This is a clear limitation because on a long journey you might not be able to find a seat which means you have to stand up for hours. At the same time, another stumbling block might be that train tickets are sometimes difficult to buy, especially around Spring Festival, and this can be a hassle because it means you can’t always travel on the actual day that you want to.”

When the examiner hears this answer, the first thing he will notice is the appropriate disadvantage language: negative aspects, unfavorable quality, clear limitation, stumbling block, hassle. Because you have used these words in complex linking structures, it affects your score in three ways: fluency-grammar-vocabulary.

Now use your disadvantage structure to practice the following Part Three Questions”

What are the disadvantages of air travel?

What are the disadvantages of shopping in supermarket?

What are the disadvantages of using technology in education?

What are the disadvantages of going on holiday in foreign country?

What are the disadvantages of having a fixed daily routine?

What are the disadvantages of machine-made products?

What are the disadvantages of zoos?

What are the disadvantages of eating out in restaurants?

What are the disadvantages of online (Internet) shopping?

What are the disadvantages of being famous?

What are the disadvantages of living in cities?

What are the disadvantages of living in the countryside?

What are the disadvantages of living near the sea?

What are the disadvantages of living in an old building?

What are the disadvantages of advertising?

Part Three Question Type 6: Problems

This type of question is not as common as the previous five types, but it is often used in topics that deal with nature, environment, social problems, or global problems, Example: “What problems are caused by the increase in use of private cars?”

As you should now understand, your aim here is to present two problems using appropriate “problem” vocabulary. Begin with an opening linking phrase to explain that there are problems:

Obviously we can say there are quite a lot of dangers with regard to this issue.

It’s universally accepted that there are a few hazards involved with...

This issue is weighed down with a hew problems.

Now highlight your main problem:

At the outset, the most crucial predicament is that...

First and foremost, one major worry is probably that...

Essentially, one fundamental concern is probably that...

Add a simple statement and develop it with one of the following structures:

This is clearly alarming because...

This fact is unmistakably perturbing because...

This need to be seen as a sensitive matter because...

Now introduce your second problem with one of the following linking phrases:

Additionally, another major cause for concern has to be the fact that...

Equally worrying is the suggestion that...

Another matter which causes unease is the point that...

Add a simple statement and develop it with one of the following:

And the short-term and / or long-term implications of this are that...

And the underlying repercussions of this are that...

And the principal upshot of this is probably that...

So a final answer to our first question might look like this:

“It’s universally accepted that there a few hazards involved with the increase in the use of private cars. Essentially, one fundamental concern is probably that it leads to an increase in pollution. This fact is unmistakably perturbing because we are facing huge global pollution problems at the moment.

Additionally, another major cause for concern has to be the fact that cars consume huge amounts of our energy resources. And the underlying repercussions of this are that we will soon be confronted with a global energy crisis.”

Some candidates try to offer solutions to the problems in the same answer. In most cases the examiner will follow the “problem” question with a “solution” question, so do not offer the solutions until you are asked this question.

“What are the problems associated with the increase in car use?”

(Your answer)

“How could these problems be solved?”

Use your “problem” structure to answer the following questions:

What problems are caused by international tourism?

Tourism can cause problems in natural areas. What are these problems?

What environmental problems are common in your country?

What are the problems facing the natural environment?

What problems are associated with overcrowded cities?

What problems are associated with the Internet?

What problems are associated with globalization?

What problems are caused by the use of too much technology?

What problems are associated with the news media (journalists)?

Part Three Question Type 7 : Solutions

If the examiner asks a “problem” question, it will normally be followed by a “solution” question. It is a good idea to make a back reference to the two problems that you described in your previous answer. For this idea it is a bad idea to describe more than two problems in the previous answer, because you might forget what the actual problem were. First, begin with a general statement :

In my view there are a number of actions that could be taken.

I honestly believe that there are a few ways to tackle these problems.

Well I think we could go about this in a number of ways.

Highlight your first solution:

When dealing with first problem, it is the easiest way to work it out would be to..

In reaction to the initial issue, the most effective way to get to the root of the problem would be to...

Give a brief statement to explain the solution. Now offer a solution to the second problem.

Now taking into account the second challenge, the only way to get to the bottom of this dilemma would be to...

So the complete answer might look like this :

“ what are the problems associated with the increase in car use ? “

(See answer to previous problems)

How could these problems be solved ?

“In my view, there are a number of actions that could be taken. When dealing with the first problem, the easiest way to work it out would be to develop new technology for car engines which does not cause serious air pollution, maybe some special kind of exhaust filter. Taking on the second problem, the most successful way to confront this would be to invest heavily on research into alternative energy resources. In fact, I have heard that we have already produced a car which runs on water.”

If you are confident enough, you might want to develop these points further, but don't do it if you are not sure that you have the vocabulary to continue producing good quality language. It is better to produce a medium length that is accurate in its language than a longer answer that contains many mistakes.

Go back to problems question section and practise your “solution” structure for the problems that you thought about for each example question.

Summary of Part Three Question Types

There are some question in Part Three that have not been covered in this section. However the 7 types that have been explained are definitely the most common.

If you are asked a answer that does not fit any of these structures, you can try to adapt the language to fit that question.

Remember the basic rule should always be : begin with a linking phrase, introduce an idea then develop it a linking structure. Do not list ideas. Separate your ideas with linking phrases. Most Part Three questions only need 3 ideas.

As I have stated before, to score 7 in speaking you do not need to produce great answers to every question – you just need to produce some great language in respond to some of the questions.

4. Additional Tips

Giving example

Paraphrasing

Vague language

Asking for help

Example interview scripts

Suggested further reading

4.1. Giving examples

Sometimes you can finish your answer with an example structure but you do not need to do this with every question; one or two times in the speaking test is more than enough.

Look at the previous answer to the “problem” question.

“It’s university accepted that there a few hazards involved with the increase in the use of private cars. Essentially, one fundamental concern is probably that it leads to an increase in pollution. This fact is unmistakably perturbing because we are facing huge global pollution problems at the moment.

Additionally, another major cause for concern has to be the fact that cars consume huge amounts of our energy resources. And the underlying repercussions of this are that we will soon be confronted with a global energy crisis.”

It would be quite easy to add an example to this answer:

“ Actually I think this idea is best illustrated with the example of oil which is running out at an alarming rate.”

You don’t get extra marks simply for adding an example. However, your score will be influenced because you have used a complex linking structure:

“ Actually I think this idea is best illustrated with the example of...”

Use the following structures to introduce an example:

In fact, this concept can be illustrated by the example of...

As a matter of fact, this point can be demonstrated with the case of...

In actual fact, this notion can be confirmed by the example of...

4.2. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is extremely important in the speaking test because it directly affects your vocabulary score.

To achieve a vocabulary score of 7 or 8, the examiner needs to hear at least one example of effective paraphrasing.

Paraphrasing means saying or explaining something in your own words. In the speaking test it is used to explain vocabulary gaps (words that you don't know in English).

A good tip for paraphrasing is the “forget-explain-remember” rule. With this strategy you deliberately forget a particular word, then you explain the word and then you remember the word. Look at the following example:

“ An additional problem with cars is that they produce a lot of ...err... I can't remember the word, but it's the gas that comes out of the car exhaust...oh yeah...carbon monoxide. That's what I mean.”

In this example the candidate has produced some effective paraphrase and used a complex vocabulary item(carbon monoxide), so the vocabulary score has been influenced in two ways.

It is usually a good idea to think of some examples of this before the test, but the following examples should be quite helpful because they can be used for many topics.

For building: architecture, interior décor, elevator, escalator

For people: optimistic, open-minded, assertive, sarcastic

For objects: warranty, guarantee, replacement

It really doesn't matter which word you decide to paraphrase as long as it's an uncommon vocabulary item.

In addition, many Chinese words can be paraphrased, especially if there is no exact English equivalent, such as:

“ Huo Guo, it's a type of dish that is served in a pot and the pot is usually heated on the table, so the food is cooked in front of you.”

This example of paraphrasing is worth more marks than simple saying “hot-pot”.

Placeholders

Placeholders are words that replace something when a speaker does not know or cannot remember the name of something or someone: “You need to use a thingummy when you open a bottle of red wine.”

Grammatically these simply replace the name of the person or object that the speaker cannot remember and never change their form. Other placeholders include:

whatsitcalled

thingy

thingummyjig

When you paraphrase, try to use one of these placeholders. Look at the following example:

“ One of the major problems with shopping online is that there are loads of err... what is called...”

You may think this is not a very good way to impress your examiner, but this is exactly what native speakers do when they forgot a word.

When you paraphrase you need to first let the examiner know that you have forgotten the word (or you don't know the word in English).

Use the following linking phrases to begin paraphrasing:

I can't remember the English word; I'll have to explain what I mean here.

Actually, I can't seem to remember the word; let me try to put it into plain words.

The word has slipped my mind; I'll try to paraphrase it for you.

Use the following language to explain your word:

Well what it is...it is a kind /type of... In some ways it's similar to...

It's actually something like a...

Continue your paraphrasing with:

And it's made from... It's often found...

It's used by.... It involves...

One of the most unique features of X is that... And I should also mention that...

Then "remember" the word:

Oh... I think I've just remembered it; the word I'm looking for is X.

4.3. Vague language

One language feature that sounds like native-speaker style English is vague language. Vague language is best described language that is not exact.

Look at the following example:

"You usually need to buy them in a special shop like a craft shop or somewhere like that."

The phrase "or somewhere like that" is vague language.

Use the following vague language in your answers:

Rounding up the the time:

I arrived about half past six.

When I arrived it was almost half past six.

When I arrived it was half six-ish.

It was nearly half past six when we arrived.

List completers include words such as things and stuff.

I usually watch documentaries and things like that.

I usually watch documentaries and stuff like that.

I'm quite fond of reading magazines and things/stuff.

I might buy a book or something like that.

I usually buy books and DVDs or stuff like that.

I might buy a book or whatever.

I might go to the park or wherever.

I might go with my classmates or whoever.

Do not use too many list completers in your speaking test. A good guideline would be 4 or 5 examples across the whole interview.

Quantities

Vague language is very common with numbers when expressing quantity, frequency or the time. Lower numbers are often expressed by phrases such as: a couple of, a few. Whereas, larger numbers are rounded up with: about, around or replaced with: lots of, loads of.

I usually get up at around three or four o'clock.

It costs around 15 yuan or so.

It's about a 1,000 yuan.

The weather caused loads of/ lots of problems.

With vague language, “a couple” does not usually mean “two”; it can mean “up to three” or even “four”. When you do not want to give accurate numbers, you can use the following:

There were about 30 odd students in my class.

There were about 30 or so people at the party.

She's not that old. I'd say she's about 40-ish.

There are a lot of / lots of / loads of choices.

I've been to Beijing a couple of / a few times.

I think I saw about / around 10 or so.

4.4. Asking for help

In the speaking test there are strict rules about how much help the examiner can give you. These rules are different for each part of the test.

In Part One the examiner is allowed to repeat the question TWO TIMES if you don't understand it. If you don't understand a certain word and ask about that word, the examiner is not allowed to explain it; the question will be repeated in exactly the same way.

If you do not understand the question in Part One or if you just didn't hear it clearly, it is fine to ask the examiner to repeat it.

Use the following language:

I'm sorry I didn't quite catch the question; could you ask it again please?

I'm sorry I missed that one; could you repeat it please?

As a rule, if this happens two or three times in Part One, there will be no problem. If it happens more than 4 times, then the examiner will reduce your fluency score (usually by one point, i.e. 5 will be reduced to 4).

In Part Two, it is unlikely that you will need the examiner to repeat anything because the examiner doesn't actually say much. However, if there is a word on the topic card that you don't understand, then the examiner is allowed to quickly explain that word to you (usually by replacing it with an easier word or giving an example). You can avoid this problem by checking all the topic cards featured in this book.

In Part Three the rules are less strict. The examiner will explain vocabulary, change the wording of questions or simplify the questions whenever necessary. This shouldn't happen very often because when Part Three begins the examiner should have a very clear idea of your language level and he/she will ask the questions in a way in which you should be able to understand quite easily.

4.5. Example interview scripts

The following pages give a clear picture of what a complete interview looks like.

Remember that your interview might be slightly different to these because the number of questions asked will depend on the length of your answers.

This section is only intended to give you a full picture of what the whole interview looks like on paper. For the first example there are suggestions of what type of answer structure to use.

Interview 1

Good afternoon, my name is... Can you tell me your full name please?

OK, can I see your ID card please?

In this first part I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself. So first of all let's talk about where you live. Do you live in a house or a flat?(Simple direct answer)

Tell me the good things about your house or flat(Use Part One "Liking" structure)

Is there anything you don't like about it?(Use Part One "Disliking" structure)

Do you think you will move to another area in the future?(Use Part One "Would" structure)

Now let's move on to talking about reading. Do you like reading?(Use Part One "Liking" structure)

How often do you read?(Use Part One "It depends" structure)

Where do you normally read?(Use Part One "It depends" structure)

What types of books are popular in your country nowadays?(Use Part One "Types of" structure)

Let's talk about music now. What types of music do you like listening to? (Why) (Use a mix of Part One "Types of" and "Liking" structures)

How much time do you spend listening to music?(Use Part one "It depends" structure)

Where do you usually listen to music?(Use Part One "It depends" structure)

OK, now I'm going to give you a topic and I'd like you to talk about it for one to two minutes. Before you talk you'll have one to two minutes to think about what you are going to say and you can make some notes if you wish, do you understand?

I'd like you to describe the type of clothes you like wearing.(One minute preparation)

OK, so remember you have one to two minutes for this so don't worry if I stop you. I'll tell you when the time is up...Can you start speaking now please?

Topic Card

Describe the type of clothes you like wearing.

You should say:

What kind of clothes you usually like to wear

Why you like these clothes

Where you buy them

Whether these clothes are popular in your country

OK, we've been talking about clothes that you wear and now I'd like to discuss with you one or two more general questions related to this. So first of all let's consider clothes and fashion. Do men and women have different ideas about fashion? (Use Part Three "Comparing" structure)

Why do teenagers like to follow fashion? (Use Part Three "Why" structure)

What are the disadvantages of following fashion? (Use Part Three "Disadvantages" structure)

OK, now let's move on to talk about uniforms. Why do some companies prefer their staff to wear uniforms? (Use Part Three "Why" structure)

Interview 2

Good afternoon, my name is... Can you tell me your full name please?

OK, can I see your ID card please?

In this first part I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself. So first of all let's talk about where you live. Tell me about the area that you live in.

What do you like about the area?

Is there anything you don't like about the area?

Do you think you will continue to live in this place for a long time?

Now let's move on to talk about films. How often do you watch films?

What type of films do you like watching?

Do you prefer watching films alone or with someone else?

Is it better watching films at home or in the cinema?

Let's talk about birthdays now. Do you usually spend your birthday with your friends or with your family?

What do children generally do on their birthdays in China?

Are birthdays important?

What is the most important birthday or age which is celebrated in China?

OK, now I'm going to give you a topic and I'd like you to talk about it for one to two minutes. Before you talk you'll have one to two minutes to think about what you are going to say and you can make some notes if you wish, do you understand?

I'd like you to describe some help which you received in the past. (One minute preparation)

OK, so remember you have one to two minutes for this so don't worry if I stop you. I'll tell you when the time is up... Can you start speaking now please?

Topic Card

Describe the help which you received in the past.

You should say:

What type of help you received

Who helped you

Why you needed this help

How you felt after you received this help.

OK, we've been talking about the help that you received in the past and now I'd like to discuss with you one or two more general questions related to this. So first of all let's consider different kinds of help. Generally, what kinds of help do people often need in their lives?

Do you think, in general, society is helpful?

Do you think people were more helpful in the past than they are nowadays?

What kinds of help with people need in the future?

Interview 3

Good afternoon, my name is... Can you tell me your full name please?

OK, can I see your ID card please?

In this first part I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself. So first of all let's talk about what you do. Do you work or are you a student?

What are you studying?

Why did you choose this college/ university?

What's good about where you're studying?

What would you like to do after your studies?

Now let's move on to talk about collecting things. Have you ever collected anything?

What things do people collect in your country?

Why do people collect in your country?

Would you like to start collecting something new in the future?

Now let's talk about weather. What's the weather like where you live?

What do you do when the weather is bad?

What type of weather do you like best?

Would you like to have that type of weather all year round?

OK, now I'm going to give you a topic and I'd like you to talk about it for one to two minutes. Before you talk you'll have one to two minutes to think about what you are going to say and you can make some notes if you wish, do you understand?

I'd like you to describe your childhood home. (One minute preparation)

OK, so remember you have one to two minutes for this so don't worry if I stop you. I'll tell you when the time is up... Can you start speaking now please?

Topic Card

Describe your childhood home.

You should say:

Where this place is located

What type of house it is

How long you lived there

What you liked about this place.

OK, we've been talking about your childhood home that and now I'd like to discuss with you one or two more general questions related to this. So first of all let's consider different kinds of houses. Are houses nowadays different to houses in the past?

What kinds of houses will be common in the future?

What are the advantages of living in an old house?

Why do some people like to move to a different house?

4.6. Suggested, further reading

Most book stores stock a wide variety of IELTS books of varying quality.

If you have read this book, then you will have noticed that it is very language orientated and does not offer many ideas and content for topics and questions. As I have stated many times, content is really not very important in the speaking test; however, if you find it difficult to think of ideas and content, then there are a number of books which can help you. I would recommend that you combine the ideas and content of those books with the language structures presented throughout this book.

Your best strategy for further improvement is to focus on two key aspects of the marking system: vocabulary and grammar.

If you want to buy a vocabulary book, I would strongly recommend that you choose one that organises the words by topic. In this way you can study the topics that are IELTS-related and ignore those which do not appear in the test. A good example is: English Vocabulary Organiser by Chris Gough (available in China).

In addition, I would suggest learning more idioms and phrasal verbs (especially if you want to score 7 or higher).

In the same series as the above title:

English Idioms organiser by Jonathan Wright available in China).

Phrasal Verbs organiser by John Flower (available in China).

To improve your overall grammar performance I would recommend the following two titles:

English Grammar in Use by Raymond Murphy (available in China);

Advanced Grammar in Use by Martin Hewings (available in China).