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### Notes for English teachers on the speaking exams

- To start the test, the interlocutor should greet the student and help them feel at ease, ensure their full name is captured on the recording, then use the introductory prompt. Interlocutors should remain friendly and patient throughout to help put students at ease.
- Examiners should follow the format and prompts as provided on the exam paper in order to ensure consistency of testing for all students - noting that an element of choice and teacher's own input is incorporated within many of the test designs.
- You may give brief definitions of words if requested to by the student, but should move back to giving them opportunity to speak as soon as possible.
- If a student appears to give a rote-memorised answer, interrupt them and then ask them about questions about the content they have just provided e.g. "Sorry, you said you went to (Muscat), tell me more about what you saw there".
- If the student does not immediately answer/understand the question, mentally count to 5 before attempting a rephrase of the question, and then possibly moving from the more open-ended instructions to asking the more targeted closed and open back-up questions about the theme. It is imperative that you maximise opportunities for students to speak; do not interrupt candidates (unless interrupting a pre-memorised response) and allow them a few seconds of silence (if needed) to gather thoughts before speaking.
- Students should also be given space and opportunity to provide as much of an extended response as possible, particularly if the prompt is designed to elicit one. Once a candidate starts answering and then seems to come to a pause or end, again mentally count a few seconds and then start by using a hand gesture to indicate the students to continue or a phrase like "go on" or "tell me more". Only once the candidate has clearly indicated that they have exhausted the prompt, then move onto the follow-up questions to build on the ideas given.
- To ensure consistent testing, it is important to stick to maximum timings and not ask questions if it means it will take you over the time. This may particularly be the case with strong, fluent candidates who give extended responses. Note that it is not essential to complete all parts of the exam - if the student provides such extended responses that the maximum time is reached early within the exam format, the timing should still be adhered to and the speaking performance evaluated from the content provided.
- It is vital that interlocutors give no feedback to students within the exam in order to ensure fairness in assessment. This includes not responding to student answers with phrases like "very good", "great", "well done", etc. nor should interlocutors suggest in any way – verbally or not – that a candidate's response was weak or unclear. "Thank you" is a useful stock response to student's contributions.
- Some exam prompts may contain gaps e.g. "What do you like about \_\_\_\_\_?"; the idea is that these gaps are filled by referring to what the student has just said. In addition, some prompts may give a choice of gender e.g. your brother/sister. In these cases, use the gender which matches with the candidate i.e. ask boys about 'brothers'.
- If students are required to respond to a picture prompt, the interlocutor should ensure that the picture prompt is clearly presented to the student at the appropriate time.

### Speaking test marking – using the rubrics

It is essential for an effective assessment system to be reliable – for different markers to give the same or very close marks for the same exam performance. This means that, when it comes to assessing speaking, teachers cannot just give a mark out of 10 based on how they feel about a student's performance or their own criteria. The solution to making open speaking assessment more reliable is to have specific marking rubrics and criteria which all assessors use. In addition, the rubrics need to be sufficiently clear and quantifiable so that exam performance can be clearly matched against them.

At all levels, the rubrics are divided into five categories for speaking. These are designed to align with the speaking outcomes outlined in the NECLF. In addition, they are consistent with common aspects of assessment in other external speaking exams. The criteria for assessment (with some variation between their wording across different levels) are:

Appropriacy of responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Are the answers accurately related to the questions?</li> <li>&gt; Are there occasional misunderstandings and/or do they need support to answer?</li> <li>&gt; At higher grades, are the responses stylistically appropriate for the interaction? Do they meet the functional requirement of the prompt (e.g. giving recommendations)?</li> </ul>
Fluency / Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Does the student give extended responses to the prompts? Do they use full sentences instead of single words? Do they extend their responses with reasons and examples?</li> <li>&gt; Are the extended responses coherent and easy to follow (i.e. the ideas are connected to each other and it is clear why the current content relates to what has just been said)?</li> <li>&gt; At higher levels, are they able to repair and maintain the discussion?</li> </ul>
Range of vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Does the student use a variety of words and phrases appropriate to the topic/prompt?</li> <li>&gt; Does the variety of vocabulary allow the student to provide increased detail for the topic under discussion, and elaborate on their opinions?</li> <li>&gt; Are words and phrases used appropriately or are their occasional misuses? Are some words used repetitively?</li> </ul>
Use of grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Do the responses contain a range of basic and complex structures as appropriate to the prompt? For example, are a range of verb tenses and modals used? Are sentences made more complex through subordinating structures (e.g. conditionals, relative clauses)?</li> <li>&gt; Does the student have good control over the accuracy of these structures? Are any mistakes made minor (i.e. do not affect the comprehensibility of the utterance)?</li> </ul>

Pronunciation	<p>&gt; Are the phonemes (e.g. the vowel and consonant sounds) pronounced correctly? Or, do they mix up e.g. /k/ and /g/, /p/ and /b/ or /i/ and /e/?</p> <p>&gt; Do they use word stress correctly? e.g. say 'APPLE' rather than 'appLE' or 'inforMAtion' rather than 'inFORmation'?</p> <p>&gt; Is there general rhythm and stress pattern natural and accurate across sentences? Do they use appropriate weak forms? Considerations here include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* stressing content words e.g. 'I'd LIKE to GO' rather than 'I WOULD like TO go'</li> <li>* using contracted forms e.g. 'I'm EIGHT' rather than 'I AM EIGHT'</li> <li>* chunking words together in a natural way e.g. 'we-went to-the-beach' rather than 'then-we went-to the-beach'</li> </ul> <p>&gt; Do they use intonation to help carry their meaning e.g. going up to check understanding ('how do you mean?'), showing surprise or enthusiasm ('really? brilliant!'), or at higher levels carrying implied meaning ('we <u>could</u> do that' with implied doubt)?</p> <p>&gt; Where there are errors in pronunciation, what effect do they have? Can you still understand the candidate easily? Or do you have to strain and focus more to follow?</p>
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We recognise that this may be daunting at first for teachers/markers. In order to be reliable and to avoid ambiguity, the rubrics need to be quite detailed. However, ever-increasing practice and familiarity will make it quicker and easier to use these rubrics for marking. Within the first response or two, orient yourself to which bands of the rubric you are more likely to be choosing between. Try and listen to all aspects of their speech – picking out positive uses and inaccuracies – but you may also find it useful to move your focus at times so that you are particularly concentrating on e.g. their pronunciation, their grammar, etc. As hard and unnatural as it might seem, try and focus more on the delivery of what they are saying rather than the content of their speech itself. You may wish to make notes during the exam but if you wish to write down band scores, use coded symbols rather than numbers. Balancing exam delivery and assessment takes time and is difficult at first, which is why we recommend having a second teacher in the room who simply listens and notes down their assessment, if possible.

One important point to consider is not to 'double fault' students. In other words, when choosing marks from the rubric, be careful not to penalise the candidate for the same error under two different columns. For instance, if there are frequent disfluent (in the sense of speech delivered very slowly), then they will likely get a lower mark for the "fluency" criteria; however, do not take this factor into consideration when considering 'pronunciation' but rather consider phoneme use, word stress, intonation, etc. instead. However, memorised speech is an exception (see below)

If the answers given in speaking are off-topic, then the first thing examiners should do is re-ask and/or rephrase the question (if necessary, interrupting the candidate where a long off-topic answer is being given). This should then be considered 'support' under 'Appropriacy of Responses'. Marks for other criteria can still be considered normally as it is important not to double fault students - i.e. penalise them across multiple criteria for one error. However, if the candidate's delivery/body language suggests that the answers are memorised then – as before – examiners should interrupt the candidate either: a) if the answers are off-topic, to re-ask or rephrase the questions, or b) if the answers are on-topic to the questions asked, to ask more about what the candidate has just said. In the case of marking

candidates who produce some memorised answers, it is better practice to consider only the spontaneous speech when comparing to the rubric. If speech which sounds memorised makes up most answers, though, this may be considered across multiple criteria - particularly Appropriacy of Responses, Fluency/Coherence and Pronunciation.

Since the score given will be out of 15 (adding the five columns up), and Al Manhal will not accept half-marks, you cannot give half marks for any of the criteria. In other words, you need to decide whether a candidate's e.g. fluency is band 2 or 3, you cannot give 2.5 because you feel it is a bit of both. Therefore, ensure all the positive descriptions in the higher band observable match to the spoken performance before rewarding the higher band.