

Guide to the Cambridge speaking exam

Candidates usually take their Cambridge speaking exam in pairs. However, if there is an odd number of candidates on exam day, there is the possibility of doing it as a group of three.

The test has four parts. In the first two parts of the exam, the candidates only interact with the examiner. In parts 3 and 4, candidates can talk to each other.

There are two examiners. The “interlocutor” talks to the candidates and gives them one mark on their global performance. The second examiner, the “assessor,” does not talk to the candidates. They listen carefully to each candidate and mark them on a variety of specific criteria, such as the clarity of their pronunciation and how well they interact with their partner.

Note that there are videos of the speaking exam in the **Teacher’s app**, along with accompanying worksheets, which are very useful for familiarising students with the format of the exam. Also, the READY FOR series contains a **Ready for Speaking** section specifically dedicated to this part of the exam.

PART 1 ► INTERVIEW

What do candidates have to do?

The examiner asks each candidate a few relatively easy questions. These questions focus on personal information, for example, where candidates live, their hobbies and interests, etc.

What is being tested?

This part of the test is designed as a sort of warm up, to give candidates time to settle down and get comfortable speaking English before doing the more difficult tasks to follow.

How long does this part last?

Two minutes.

Any common mistakes to avoid?

Candidates sometimes rehearse mini speeches about typical topics, for example, the city they are from. This is not a good use of time and will not help their score. Examiners are trained to ignore anything that sounds rehearsed, and they will often interrupt students who do this and ask them a new question.

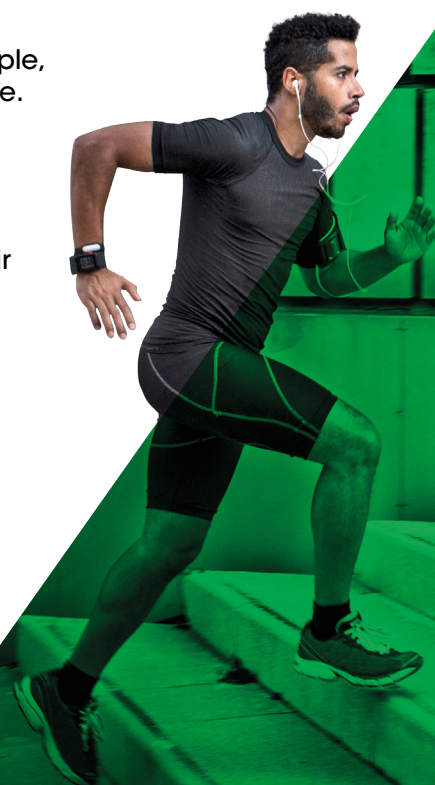
How can students prepare for this section?

In general, create opportunities for your students to practice talking about their everyday lives. In *Ready for B2 First*, there is an extra communicative activity in the Teacher’s App called “Speaking Part 1 cards,” which is designed to give students practice answering typical questions from this part of the exam.

On the opening page of each unit in the READY FOR series you will find a list of Part 1 questions related to the topic of the unit.

How is C1 Advanced different to B2 First?

There is no real difference. The questions are slightly harder on the C1 exam because they include higher level grammar and vocabulary associated with the C1 level.



PART 2 ► LONG TURN

What do candidates have to do?

Individually, candidates have to compare two photographs, and then answer one question (B2) or two questions (C1) about the photographs. After the first candidate finishes their monologue, the second candidate answers a question about their partner's photograph.

What is being tested?

This part of the exam tests candidates' ability to talk fluently on their own without any help or interruption. Candidates need to show they can organise their thoughts in a coherent way while they compare the photos and answer the questions. They will also need to show the ability to give opinions and speculate.

How long does this part last?

Each candidate has one minute for their "long turn". Candidates have around 30 seconds to answer a question about their partner's photographs.

Any common mistakes to avoid?

Candidates should spend a minimum amount of time describing the photos. Describing what you see in a picture is a B1 skill. At B2, and especially at C1, candidates need to speculate and express opinions about the topic of the photos. It's better for candidates to focus on answering the question (B2) or questions (C1), referring to the photos as they do so.

How can students prepare for this section?

In class, make sure to give students plenty of practice talking about a topic for an extended time, using, for example, peer presentations. Invite them to time themselves. This will help them know what a minute "feels" like.

There are numerous Speaking Part 2 tasks in the READY FOR series. Along with the tasks, there are **Useful language**, **How to go about it** and **What to expect in the exam** boxes, which will help students improve their performance in this part of the exam.

How is C1 Advanced different to B2 First?

On the B2 First, students are given two photos and one question. On C1 Advanced, they are given three photos and two questions. C1 candidates choose which two photos they want to talk about. They are expected to discuss both questions.



PART 3 ► COLLABORATIVE TASK

What do candidates have to do?

There are two parts to Part 3. In the “discussion phase”, candidates are given a piece of paper with a mind map on it. In the centre is a question. Around the centre are prompts related to the question. Candidates discuss the prompts in relation to the question. In the second part, called the “decision phase”, candidates do a decision-making task related to the question and prompts.

What is being tested?

This part of the test focuses on interaction. Candidates have to show they can express and justify their opinions, make suggestions, agree/disagree, evaluate options and negotiate towards a decision, etc. Candidates also need to demonstrate they can actively listen to their partner and engage with what they say.

How long does this part last?

Candidates talk for two minutes during the discussion phase. Then they have one minute to do the decision-making task.

Any common mistakes to avoid?

Students often think they have to talk about all the prompts or they will lose points. This is not true. It's fine if you only talk about two or three. In fact, it's better to select a limited number of prompts and discuss them in depth, rather than rushing through all of them and only talking about each one superficially.

In the decision phase, it's not necessary for students to actually reach a decision; they won't lose points if they don't. They just have to show they have worked towards a decision.

How can students prepare for this section?

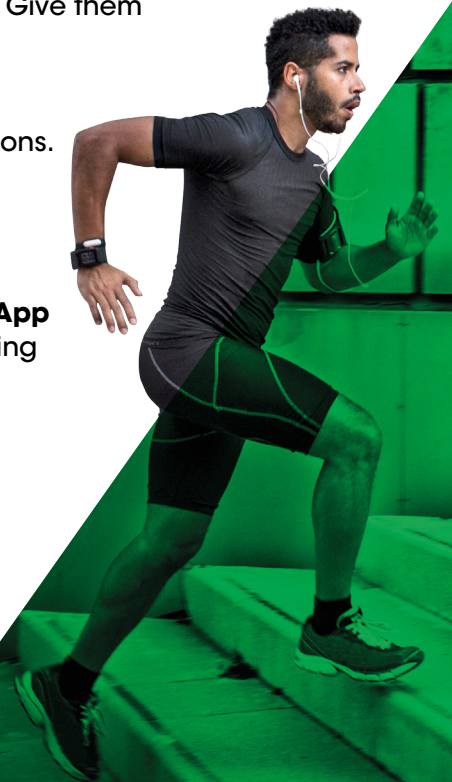
In class, create opportunities for your students to work in pairs or small groups. Give them questions to discuss, problems to solve, options to evaluate, etc.

It would be useful for students to note down a variety of useful language for agreeing/disagreeing, interrupting politely and other relevant language functions. This will help them avoid sounding repetitive. These can be found in the **Useful language** boxes that accompany the Speaking Part 3 tasks in the READY FOR series.

In *Ready for B2 First*, there is an extra communicative activity in the **Teacher's App** called “DIY Speaking Part 3”, which guides students through the steps of creating their own Speaking Part 3 task. In *Ready for Advanced*, there is also an activity called “Collaborative task with a twist”, also available to download as PDF from the **Teacher's App**.

How is C1 Advanced different to B2 First?

There is no real difference. The tasks are exactly the same, but the questions and accompanying prompts on the C1 Advanced are more abstract, and therefore more demanding to discuss.



PART 4 ► DISCUSSION

What do candidates have to do?

The examiner asks candidates questions related to the topic of the collaborative task (Part 3). They have to either answer these individually to discuss them together with their partner.

What is being tested?

In this part of the exam, candidates need to show they can discuss topics in more depth than in other parts of the exam. The focus is on expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing/disagreeing and speculating. Candidates also need to demonstrate they can actively listen to their partner and engage with what they say.

How long does this part last?

Four minutes at B2; five minutes at C1.

Any common mistakes to avoid?

At times, candidates may find they have little to say about some of the topics, but they should always find something to say and give an opinion. It's important to give full answers to the questions. Remind students that it doesn't matter if what they say is particularly interesting, or even if it's true! They are being assessed on their language, not their ideas.

How can students prepare for this section?

Create as many opportunities as possible for students to give their opinions about the topics from the READY FOR series. After reading and listening tasks, there is usually a **SPEAK** section with questions for students to discuss ideas and opinions.

For extra practice, give students topics and ask them to write their own discussion questions about them. In *Ready for B2 First*, there is extra communicative activity in the **Teacher's App** called "Useful phrases", which students could use to discuss their questions.

In addition to the Speaking Part 4 tasks within the units, the **Ready for Speaking** section provides students with extra exam-focused speaking practice. Near the official exam date, invite students to roleplay the speaking exam. Put one student in the role of the interlocutor, who reads the questions and keeps the time, and the other two in the role of candidates.

How is C1 Advanced different to B2 First?

At C1, Part 4 is slightly longer: five minutes, instead of four at B2. This gives the candidates time to discuss the questions in greater depth. The questions are also more abstract at C1, and therefore more demanding to discuss.

