

IELTS Speaking Key Assessment Criteria

There are nine bands and four criteria: Fluency and Coherence; Lexical Resource; Grammatical Range and Accuracy; and Pronunciation.

1. Fluency and Coherence

This refers to the ability to talk with normal levels of continuity, rate and effort, and to link ideas and language together to form coherent, connected speech.

Key indicators of fluency

- speech rate: ideally, not too slow (hard to keep links between words/propositions in mind)
- speech continuity: ideally, flow of speech will not be excessively interrupted by false starts, backtracking, functionless repetitions of words and phrases, and/or pausing during which the test taker searches for words.

Key indicators of coherence

- logical sequencing of 'spoken sentences'*
- clear marking (with appropriate use of pausing, and spoken discourse markers and fillers) of stages in a discussion, narration or argument
- relevance of spoken sentences to the general purpose of a turn
- use of cohesive devices within and between spoken sentences (e.g. logical connectors, pronouns and conjunctions).

*A 'spoken sentence' is the unit of speech which most closely corresponds to a written sentence. It is usually the same as a simple or complex written sentence, but may also include verbless structures, sometimes involving ellipsis, which perform a sentence-like function but lack elements which would be found in acceptable writing. Such units will usually be further distinguished by a pause at the end, which may be very brief, and 'final' intonation, typically a pitch fall.

2. Lexical Resource

This refers to the range of vocabulary at the test taker's disposal, which will influence the range of topics which they can discuss, and the precision with which meanings are expressed and attitudes conveyed.

Key indicators of lexical resource

- variety of words used
- adequacy and appropriacy of vocabulary in relation to the requirements of:
 - referential meaning (the correct labelling of things and concepts)
 - style (formal/informal)
 - collocation (including idiomatic expressions)
 - indicating the speaker's attitude to content (whether favourable, neutral or unfavourable)
- ability to use paraphrase (getting round a vocabulary gap by using other words), with or without noticeable hesitation.

3. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

This refers to the accurate and appropriate use of syntactic forms in order to meet Speaking test requirements, and to the test taker's range of grammatical resources, a

feature which will help to determine the complexity of propositions which can be expressed.

Key indicators of range

- the length of spoken sentences
- appropriate use of subordinate clauses within clauses and phrases
- complexity of the verb phrase (correct use of auxiliaries in continuous/perfect aspect, modality and passive voice)
- complexity of other phrases (use of pre- and post-modification: items before and after the head noun/adjective, etc.)
- range of sentence structures, especially to move elements around for information focus.

Key indicators of accuracy

- error density (the number of grammatical errors in a given amount of speech)
- the communicative effect of error (its effect on intelligibility and precision or expression).

4. Pronunciation

This refers to the accurate and sustained use of a range of phonological features to convey meaningful messages.

Key indicators of pronunciation

- the ability to divide speech into meaningful utterances or chunks within spoken sentences
- the appropriate use of rhythm and stress timing, and the linking of sounds, using features such as elision to produce connected speech
- the use of stress (e.g. emphatic/contrastive) and intonation to enhance meaning
- the production of sounds at the word and phoneme level (e.g. word stress, vowel and consonant production), and the degree of effort required of the listener to understand these
- the overall effect of accent on intelligibility.