

Guidance for candidates on individual examinations

Candidates are required to arrive at the examination centre 15 minutes before the scheduled time of their examination.

Where the syllabus offers an **EITHER/OR** option for a task the choice is made by the candidate.

Approximate timings for prepared material are provided for each grade and these should not be significantly exceeded. The examiner may ask a candidate to curtail an excessively long talk or presentation in order to ensure that there is sufficient time to complete all remaining sections of the examination.

The structure of graded examinations for individuals

All Communication Skills examinations for individuals follow the same general pattern and include several specific types of task as below.

Introduction

This is an informal, spontaneous and natural conversation intended to put candidates at their ease.

In this conversation the examiner may make reference to the format and content of the examination, the candidate's current situation in education and/or work, the conditions under which the examination is being held and so on. The candidate should aim to engage in a spontaneous exchange with the examiner, rather than giving a prepared formal introduction.

At Initial and Foundation grades candidates are awarded marks for this task.

Candidates will normally sit during this task.

Interactive task

At Initial and some Foundation grades candidates either tell a story and/or describe an event or the significance of an object or objects. The candidate may then be required to respond to questions about this from the examiner.

From Grade 3 upwards candidates attempt to persuade the examiner to do something (e.g. give them a job, lend them an object, go on holiday). At Grade 7 candidates engage in a radio/TV-type interview with the examiner. At Grade 8 the candidate and examiner negotiate in order to resolve a conflict.

In all these tasks there is an element of role play. The examiner will represent someone such as a friend, an employer or a potential supporter of a charity. In preparing these tasks, candidates should give careful thought to who they wish the examiner to represent. So for example at Grade 5 ('The candidate will attempt to persuade a defined person to support a charity or good cause') the examiner will ask '*Who do you wish me to represent?*' Possible responses might be: '*The President of the United States*' or '*Madonna*' or '*my headmaster*' or '*a total stranger whom I have just walked up to in the street*'. The choice will of course influence the way in which the candidate approaches the task and the examiner's responses.

The examiner will – within reason – accept any premise offered by the candidate and interact accordingly. In some cases the examiner may 'sketch in' an appropriate character but will not give a complete acted performance of, for example, a young child.

The examiner will interact with the candidate throughout the task. It is quite possible that the examiner will express reservations about ideas and suggestions offered by the candidate and/or suggest alternative views or approaches. As part of the preparation for the examination the candidate should consider possible objections and/or reservations and be prepared to deal with them. However, candidates should not think in terms of winning or losing an argument, but rather in engaging successfully in an interactive manner with the examiner.

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Although there will inevitably have been some degree of preparation for these tasks, candidates should aim to speak as spontaneously as possible and engage in an interactive discussion with the examiner throughout. Over-reliance on prompt cards may hamper the candidate's ability to do this effectively.

Candidates will normally be encouraged to sit for these tasks.

Talk

Candidates give a talk on an appropriate subject, using visual and/or audio aids as appropriate. This is a more formal scenario and candidates should stand to present their talks as if to an imaginary audience.

From Grade 7 upwards candidates must specify the audience to whom they are speaking. This could be quite straightforward (e.g. *'my class at school'*) or more ambitious (e.g. *'a group of potential employees for my firm'*, *'a group of one hundred senior policemen'*, *'the General Medical Council'*).

Candidates should project their voices to address an imagined audience, of which the examiner is but one member.

These talks should avoid giving the impression of repeating an essay or information learned parrot-fashion. The style of delivery should be fluent and suitably relaxed, demonstrating a personal engagement with the (imaginary) audience and awareness of techniques that may be employed to engage and sustain their interest.

While prompt cards may be used, the talk should not be written out in full nor read verbatim from a script. These examinations do not assess the skill of reading aloud. Oral communication differs from the language of written prose and candidates are expected to demonstrate their understanding of this.

For talks and presentations in which audio and/or visual aids are used, candidates should remember that these are primarily an aid to good communication and never a replacement for personal skill. Great thought should be given to the presentation, design and positioning of any visual aid in relation to the speaker and listener(s). It is the candidate's responsibility to set up and remove any such aids within the time allowed for the examination, and to ensure that any computer or other technical equipment is fully operational before the examination begins.

Summary task

In Grades 4-8 candidates are required to summarise an article read aloud by the examiner. The length and subject matter of each article is listed in the grade requirements listed overleaf.

The examiner reads the article aloud at a moderate pace, during which candidates may take notes. Candidates intending to take notes during this task must bring a notepad and pencil or pen into the examination with them.

Candidates will be given a few moments to review their notes, and then be asked to give a verbal summary of the content. At Grades 7 and 8 the summary is followed by a short discussion in which candidates may be asked to express some views on the content.

One of the purposes of this task is to encourage careful and selective listening. Candidates should not attempt to write down as if from dictation every word of the article and then repeat it back verbatim. Rather they should listen carefully to the argument and/or views expressed in the article and note down those details that appear to be relevant. In reviewing their notes, they may wish to alter the order in which information is presented in the article. An effective verbal summary may be quite brief.

This is an informal task and candidates will normally be invited to sit before the examiner starts to read.

Guidance for candidates on group examinations

Graded examinations for groups

Group examinations are undertaken by groups of three or four candidates who are examined simultaneously. Normally candidates will know each other and have worked together prior to the examination, although this is not essential for Grades 1-5.

Grade examinations for groups progressively develop candidates' ability to respond to questions, to address a small group on a prepared subject, to give a persuasive address, to work with other candidates to prepare and deliver presentations, to listen carefully and summarise articles read aloud and to participate in group discussion.

All candidates must wear name tags throughout the examination.

While prompt cards may be used, talks and presentations should not be written out in full nor read verbatim from a script. These examinations do not assess the skill of reading aloud. Oral communication differs from the language of written prose and candidates are expected to demonstrate their understanding of this.

The style of delivery should be fluent and suitably relaxed, demonstrating a personal engagement with the other group members and the examiner and awareness of techniques that may be employed to engage and sustain their interest.

All Grade examinations for groups comprise two tasks.

Foundation level (Grades 1-3)

At this level candidates sit in a group with the examiner throughout the examination.

In **Task 1** the examiner asks candidates in turn questions on a specified subject.

In **Task 2** the examiner initiates a group conversation about a subject appropriate to the candidates' ages, cultural background and interests. The examiner will facilitate the discussion. All group members are required to make an approximately equal contribution to the discussion.

Intermediate level (Grades 4-5)

At the start of the examination the examiner will sit in a group with the candidates.

In **Task 1** candidates in turn address the group on a specified subject. If they wish, candidates may stand to give their talks.

At Grade 4 candidates introduce a favourite book, film or TV programme, suggesting reasons why other group members might enjoy it. Candidates should not simply give a summary of the plot/format but express some opinions about it. Other group members will ask appropriate questions.

At Grade 5 candidates are required to attempt to persuade group members to support a charity or good cause. Again, other group members will ask appropriate questions and are encouraged to offer alternative views/approaches.

In **Task 2** the examiner initiates a group discussion on some of the issues arising from Task 1 or on another subject appropriate to the group. Candidates will usually remain seated throughout this task.

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Advanced level (Grades 6-8)

In **Task 1** the candidates give a prepared presentation on a specified subject.

In these presentations there may be an element of role play, but this should not predominate. Candidates may take personal responsibility for delivering certain elements of the presentation but should not give elaborate performances or enact imaginary personalities.

Candidates prepare and design their presentation for a specific (imaginary) audience of which the examiner represents but one member. Candidates must inform the examiner of the size and nature of the audience. However, candidates are advised to design their presentations for a specific interest group rather than an individual. So while at Grade 6 they might design a presentation '*for a group of potential investors in our business proposal*' they should not design it '*for Bill Gates*'. The choice will of course influence the way in which the candidates prepare and deliver the presentation.

The examiner will – within reason – accept any premise offered by the group and interact accordingly in role at the question and answer session that follows the presentation.

Candidates may choose to change the layout of the examination room and stand or sit as they wish during the presentation. It is the group's responsibility to make any changes to the layout of furniture, equipment, etc. and to set up and remove any audio visual aids and equipment within the time allowed for the examination. It is also their responsibility to ensure that any computer or other technical equipment is fully operational before the examination begins.

For talks and presentations in which audio and/or visual aids are used, candidates should remember that these are primarily an aid to good communication and never a replacement for personal skill. Great thought should be given to the presentation, design and positioning of any visual aid in relation to the speaker and listener(s).

In **Task 2** candidates are required to respond to an article read aloud by the examiner. The length and subject matter of each article is listed in the grade requirements listed overleaf.

The examiner will read the article aloud at a moderate pace, during which candidates may take notes. Candidates intending to take notes during this task must bring a notepad and pencil or pen into the examination with them.

The candidates will be given a few moments to review their notes. The examiner will then ask the candidates in turn for a verbal response on the content, which will then lead onto a group discussion on related issues. At Grade 7 candidates are additionally required to offer some opinion on the issues raised in the article and at Grade 8 also to make suggestions on how a range of communication tools might be used in a related presentation. Candidates will normally be seated in a group with the examiner throughout the discussion.