

Tips for preparing learners for the Trinity ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening exam

Introduction

It's important for learners to be prepared for Trinity ESOL Skills for Life Speaking and Listening exams. You can help by creating and maintaining an environment where they can learn authentic communication skills. See below for some tips and examples of how to accomplish this.

Tip 1 – Build confidence in class

To enable learners to build confidence, it's helpful to provide classroom practice of natural conversation in a safe and supportive environment. They should be prepared to engage with the examiner by asking questions, asking for clarification and asking the examiner to repeat themselves when necessary. It's useful to review set phrases and practise using key language items to ensure that they have a repertoire of structured sentences along with the ability to develop their own.

Tip 2 – Engage learners in group discussion

In the exam, candidates are required to maintain a conversation and develop a discussion using their own contributions and their active listening skills. Role-play style tasks can be a very useful classroom exercise and learners can switch roles between candidate and examiner. This task can increase confidence, encourage them to produce more language and strengthen their ability to contribute and listen appropriately.

Tip 3 – Learn characteristics of active listening

Active listening throughout the exam is key to achieving Trinity's Skills for Life Speaking and Listening Award. As in any natural communication, candidates can use body language and eye contact to help them communicate effectively. Candidates should question the examiner and clarify meaning while reflecting on and summarising the examiner's responses. Trinity's online videos are a useful resource to help increase knowledge of the exam. Pausing videos after examiner questions and asking learners how they might respond can be useful. They can also video themselves, review the footage and analyse their own skills.

Tip 4 – Familiarise learners with exam procedures

A learner's understanding of their role in each task can be helpful. As a teacher you will be familiar with the specifications and assessment criteria at each level, which, when shared and explained to learners can help both their preparation and exam performance. Teachers could create learner-specific exam information packs. It is also helpful to prepare for task timings – some of the tasks may feel quicker than expected! It is also important to practise using language in context and, where appropriate, use the full range of language listed.

Tip 5 – Practise outside the classroom

Conversing with English speakers, reading newspapers, watching television, using social media and listening to music or an audiobook are useful tools to maximise a learner's exposure to authentic English. This can help a learner in many ways, including expanding their vocabulary. They could note one piece of vocabulary or language that they learnt outside the classroom and present it to the class together with the original context. Skills learnt outside the classroom can help them develop learning strategies and communications skills while increasing confidence, not only for an exam, but for success in real life communication.

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