

Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE)

Understanding results

SELT Grades 2, 3, 5 and 7



Contents

Introduction.....3

Grade 2.....4

Grade 3.....5

Grade 5.....6

 Topic phase..... 6

 Conversation phase.....7

Grade 7.....8

 Topic phase..... 8

 Interactive phase.....10

 Conversation phase..... 11

Select the text, number or arrows to jump to a section 

Charity number England & Wales: 1014792 | Charity number Scotland: SC049143
Patron: HRH The Duke of Kent KG | trinitycollege.com

Copyright © 2026 Trinity College London | Published by Trinity College London
Online edition, September 2026

Introduction

The candidate's performance is assessed in terms of one overall criterion, task fulfilment. This is assessed in each phase of the exam using **performance descriptors** and with reference to the requirements of the grade at which the candidate is being assessed.

The examiner assesses the candidate's performance in each phase of the exam by awarding a letter grade – A, B, C or D. In simple terms, these levels can be classified as follows:

- A – Distinction (reflects an excellent performance)
- B – Merit (reflects a good performance)
- C – Pass (reflects a satisfactory performance)
- D – Fail (reflects an unsatisfactory performance)

The descriptions on the following pages illustrate features of typical candidate performances and are to be considered in combination with the requirements of the respective grade.

Grade 2

Conversation phase

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade
A typical candidate may:			
Communicate confidently and naturally with the examiner, showing ease in beginning the interaction.	Communicate well with the examiner.	Respond to the examiner's questions, although answers may be short or require prompting.	Struggle to communicate and respond to questions, often relying on silence or gestures.
Ask either a basic, accurate open question using question words (eg 'Where do you live?') or a closed question using the appropriate form (eg 'Do you have a sister?') to elicit personal information.	Attempt to ask a simple question, although this may lack grammatical accuracy or fluency.	Struggle to ask a question without significant support, with attempts lacking clarity or relevance.	Be unable to ask a question, even with examiner support.
Demonstrate good control of grammatical structures, such as the present simple and 'there is/are' (eg 'There is a dog.', 'I haven't got a sister.'). Use a wide range of vocabulary relevant to the grade (eg family, home and days of the week) with minimal errors.	Use a good range of vocabulary and basic grammar structures, although minor errors may occur (eg 'He have a toy.').	Use limited vocabulary and grammatical structures (eg 'My room is bed, table and chair.'), often relying on memorised phrases or making frequent errors.	Demonstrate very limited vocabulary and grammar, with frequent errors that prevent communication (eg 'My bed is in the table.').
Pronounce words clearly, with correct intonation and stress as well as appropriate contractions, demonstrating understanding of conversational flow and making speech easy to follow.	Pronounce most words clearly, with only minor issues that do not impede understanding, and respond appropriately with occasional hesitation.	Pronounce words understandably, although errors in stress or intonation may make some speech harder to follow.	Pronounce words unclearly, with frequent mispronunciations that prevent understanding.
Understand and respond to short, simple questions and instructions (eg 'Where is your bag?') with prompt, clear and accurate answers.	Follow instructions and answer questions about familiar topics (eg possessions, family and friends) with mostly correct and relevant responses.	Understand simple instructions and provide basic answers, sometimes with pauses or repetition.	Fail to follow instructions or provide meaningful answers, even after repetition or simplification.



Grade 3

Conversation phase

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade
A typical candidate may:			
Initiate and respond fluently, demonstrating confidence and ease.	Communicate with the examiner fairly confidently, responding to questions appropriately with occasional hesitation.	Communicate with the examiner, although responses to questions may be short or hesitant.	Struggle to respond to questions, often relying on gestures or silence.
Form simple, accurate sentences to describe daily routines and ask questions (eg 'What do you do on Sundays?' or 'What do you do in your free time?').	Ask a simple question about everyday life (eg 'What is your job?').	Ask the examiner a question about everyday life but may need prompting and support from the listener (eg 'What is in your free time?').	Be unable to ask a relevant question even with examiner support, or the question may lack meaning (eg 'What is free time you?').
Use a wide range of Grade 3 vocabulary (eg weather, daily routines and places) and grammar, including the present continuous, past tense of 'to be' and prepositions of time and place.	Use a good range of vocabulary and grammatical structures to respond and ask questions, although occasional errors may occur (eg 'She is play football.' instead of 'She is playing football.').	Use limited vocabulary and grammatical structures to respond and ask questions, with frequent errors (eg 'I can swimming.').	Demonstrate very limited vocabulary and grammar when attempting to respond or ask questions, with frequent errors that prevent communication (eg 'My dad is job.').
Link ideas smoothly using basic connectors like 'and' or 'and then'.	Attempt to link ideas using simple connectors (eg 'and then'), although this may not always be smooth.	Struggle to link ideas or use connectors effectively, leading to disjointed speech.	Be unable to link ideas or maintain interaction, resulting in fragmented communication.
Demonstrate clear and accurate pronunciation, with natural intonation and minimal errors.	Pronounce words understandably, with minor mispronunciations that do not impede communication.	Pronounce common words understandably, although errors in stress or intonation may occasionally make speech harder to follow.	Pronounce words unclearly, with frequent errors that prevent understanding.
Show clear understanding of instructions and questions, responding promptly and appropriately.	Understand instructions and questions about daily life and routines, providing relevant answers.	Understand simple instructions and respond with basic, relevant answers, often requiring repetition or support.	Fail to follow instructions or provide meaningful answers, even with repetition or simplification.



Grade 5

Topic phase

Conversation phase >

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade
A typical candidate may:			
Talk confidently about their topic, using extended sentences and clear organisation.	Talk about their topic with some confidence, although parts may lack fluency or detail.	Talk about their topic briefly, although responses may lack organisation or detail.	Struggle to talk about their topic, with little or no meaningful speech.
Ask at least one clear and grammatically correct question related to their topic (eg <i>'What kind of sports do you enjoy?'</i>).	Ask a relevant question during the topic phase, although it may lack fluency or accuracy.	Attempt to ask a question, although it may be unclear or incorrect.	Be unable to ask a question.
Use a wide range of Grade 5 grammar, including the present perfect (eg <i>'I have lived here for five years.'</i>), future with 'will' and expressions of preference (eg <i>'I prefer playing football to watching it.'</i>). Use topic-specific vocabulary accurately and effectively to engage the examiner.	Use a good range of Grade 5 grammar, although with occasional minor errors (eg <i>'I have live here for five years.'</i>). Use sufficient vocabulary for the topic, although there may be some repetition or limitations.	Use Grade 5 level grammar and vocabulary with frequent errors (eg <i>'I not have go to the park yesterday.'</i>).	Fail to use appropriate Grade 5 vocabulary or grammar, relying on gestures or fragmented phrases.
Incorporate Grade 5 language functions, such as giving reasons (eg <i>'I like music because it makes me happy.'</i>) and talking about recent past events (eg <i>'I have just finished reading a book.'</i>).	Demonstrate Grade 5 language functions, such as quantifying and giving reasons, although these may lack complexity or precision.	Demonstrate limited control of Grade 5 language functions, such as expressing preferences (eg <i>'I prefer very much the car.'</i>).	Show no evidence of Grade 5 language functions.
Speak fluently, with natural intonation, stress and minimal pauses. There will be no signs of patterns of recited speech.	Speak clearly, with minor pronunciation or intonation issues that do not hinder understanding.	Pronounce words understandably but may have issues with stress or fluency, making speech harder to follow.	Pronounce words unclearly, with errors that prevent understanding.
Engage in a spontaneous discussion based around their topic points, consistently responding appropriately to examiner questions.	Engage in a reasonably spontaneous discussion based on their topic points, although they may not show full understanding of the examiner questions.	Answer some questions appropriately with examiner support and some initial reliance on memorised answers.	Be unable to respond to examiner questions appropriately even with extensive support and may rely on a memorised script.



Grade 5

Conversation phase

< Topic phase

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade
A typical candidate may:			
Engage in fluent and confident spontaneous discussion about familiar topics, such as festivals, entertainment and recent experiences.	Participate actively in the discussion, although some responses may lack detail or fluency.	Answer questions about familiar topics briefly, although responses may lack detail or clarity.	Struggle to engage in the discussion, providing little or no meaningful speech.
Ask at least one clear and grammatically correct question related to a conversation subject area (eg 'How do you prefer to travel?').	Ask a relevant question, although it may lack fluency or accuracy.	Attempt to ask a question, although it may be unclear or incorrect.	Be unable to ask a relevant question even when prompted.
Use a wide range of Grade 5 grammar accurately, including the present perfect (eg 'I have seen that film twice.'), and expressions of preference (eg 'I would rather watch comedies than action movies.'). Use varied and topic-specific vocabulary, making the conversation engaging and relevant.	Use a good range of Grade 5 grammar, with minor errors that do not impede communication (eg 'I have just see that film.'). Use sufficient vocabulary for the topics, although some repetition or limitations may occur.	Use Grade 5 grammar and vocabulary with frequent errors that occasionally affect understanding (eg 'I no like the movie because boring.').	Fail to use appropriate Grade 5 grammar or vocabulary or make frequent errors that prevent understanding.
Demonstrate Grade 5 language functions, such as talking about the future and quantifying (eg 'I have many hobbies, but my favourite is drawing.').	Demonstrate Grade 5 language functions, such as giving reasons and stating the duration of events, although with occasional inaccuracies.	Demonstrate limited use of Grade 5 language functions, often relying on memorised phrases.	Be unable to demonstrate any Grade 5 language functions.
Speak with clear pronunciation, natural intonation and minimal hesitation.	Pronounce most words clearly, with minor issues in intonation or stress.	Pronounce words understandably, but with errors in stress or intonation that may make speech harder to follow.	Pronounce words unclearly, with errors that make communication impossible.
Understand and respond to follow-up questions naturally and without hesitation, providing additional details.	Understand and respond to follow-up questions mostly appropriately with minor hesitation.	Respond hesitantly to follow-up questions, requiring examiner repetition or rephrasing.	Struggle to respond to questions even with extensive support from the examiner.



Grade 7

Topic phase

Continued >

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade

A typical candidate may:

Discuss a suitably complex topic that allows them to demonstrate a wide range of the language functions and communicative skills of the grade (eg a topic that has two sides or an issue that people have different opinions about).	Discuss a reasonably complex topic that allows them to demonstrate a good range of the language functions and communicative skills of the grade (eg the advantages and disadvantages of a certain topic or issue).	Discuss a topic that allows them to demonstrate a limited range of the language functions and communicative skills of the grade (eg a descriptive or one-sided topic).	Discuss a topic that is too concrete and familiar for this level and gives no opportunity for the functions to be demonstrated (eg a simple discussion of the candidate's family or country).
Confidently and coherently communicate facts, ideas, opinions and explain viewpoints about their chosen topic, with some spontaneity. Initiate the topic discussion by giving information on the topic, inviting comment and engaging the examiner in the discussion. Be prepared to ask and answer questions about the content and the examiner's views and handle interruptions.	Talk about their topic with some confidence, though there may be lapses in coherence at times and the examiner may not always be invited to express their views. Be able to initiate discussion and invite comments and ask questions of the examiner to engage them in the discussion, although this might not always be successful. Have slight difficulty understanding how to handle interruptions.	Talk about their topic but may omit to mention different viewpoints. Be unable to actively seek examiner involvement in the discussion, meaning topic development depends on the examiner taking control. Be unable to handle interruptions.	Be unable to have a discussion on their topic, limiting it to simple facts, possibly memorised. Be unable to handle interruptions and have difficulty in responding to examiner attempts to focus the topic on the requirements of the grade. Be unable to attempt to engage the examiner or be unable to successfully engage the examiner.
Use effective turn-taking strategies to initiate, maintain and end the discourse, including verbal cues (eg 'I'd just like to add...'), active listening comments (eg 'Really?', 'Oh dear!', 'Did you...?'), falling intonation to show the end of a turn and recovery strategies to continue a turn if interrupted (eg 'Well, as I was saying...').	Use some effective turn-taking strategies to initiate, maintain and end the discourse.	Have problems using effective turn-taking strategies to initiate, maintain and end the discourse.	Be unable to use effective turn-taking strategies to initiate, maintain and end the discourse.



Grade 7

Topic phase continued

Interactive phase >

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade
A typical candidate may:			
Anticipate questions the examiner may ask and be able to give further examples, explanations and clarifications when asked.	Be able to give some further examples, explanations and clarifications when asked, but there may be some hesitation when thinking of what to say.	Be able to give some further examples, explanations and clarifications when asked, but these may be isolated samples and may be inaccurate or very basic responses.	Struggle/be unable to give some further examples, explanations and clarifications when asked. Provide responses which are too simple for this level or inaccurate.
Use a wide range of appropriate grammatical structures accurately, including complex structures (eg <i>'It was built in...'</i> , <i>'It may be due to...'</i> , <i>'It used to be the case that...'</i>).	Use a good range of appropriate grammatical structures, including some complex structures (eg <i>'It was built in...'</i> , <i>'It may be due to...'</i> , <i>'It used to be the case that...'</i>). Make minor errors when attempting complex structures but these are unlikely to impede comprehension.	Use a range of grammatical structures. Attempt some complex structures (eg <i>'It was built in...'</i> , <i>'It was due to...'</i> , <i>'It used to be the case that'</i>). Make frequent errors when attempting complex structures, with some errors impeding comprehension (eg <i>'I am used to...'</i> instead of <i>'I used to...'</i>).	Rely on simple structures. Be unable to use complex structures or make errors when using complex structures that impede comprehension.
Demonstrate the full range of Grade 7 language functions and incorporate them into their chosen topic, such as advantages and disadvantages, agreement and disagreement (eg <i>'On the one hand some people believe...'</i> , <i>'but others hold the opinion that...'</i>). Be able to use a wide variety of topic-specific vocabulary. Be able to use expressions of interest/awareness of speaker (eg <i>'Really?'</i>). Be able to use fillers to give themselves time to think (eg <i>'Well...'</i> , <i>'Let me think...'</i>).	Demonstrate some Grade 7 language functions and incorporate these into their chosen topic, such as advantages and disadvantages, agreement and disagreement, although these may lack complexity at times. Be able to use a variety of topic-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some expressions of interest/awareness of speaker (eg <i>'Really?'</i>). Be able to use some fillers to give themselves time to think (eg <i>'Well...'</i> , <i>'Let me think...'</i>).	Demonstrate some isolated samples of Grade 7 language functions but may be either reliant on the examiner to elicit them or have chosen an overly simplistic topic that does not naturally incorporate a range of Grade 7 functions. Be able to use some topic-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some expressions of interest/awareness of speaker (eg <i>'Really?'</i>). Be unable to use many appropriate fillers to give themselves time to think.	Only be able to express a very limited range of Grade 7 functions, or these may be completely absent. Express functions in a simplistic way and/or make errors that impede comprehension. Use a limited range of simplistic topic-specific vocabulary. Use a limited range of expressions to show interest or use inappropriate expressions. Be unable to use fillers, instead relying on silence.
Be able to use rising intonation to express interest/surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn. Be able to correctly pronounce topic-specific vocabulary. Be able to use intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries.	Be able to use some rising intonation to express interest/surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn. Be able to correctly pronounce most topic-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries.	Be able to use some rising intonation to express interest/surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn, but this will not be consistent. Be able to correctly pronounce some topic-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries, although use may be inconsistent.	Have problems using intonation and may not pronounce topic-specific vocabulary correctly. Be unable to use features of intonation and connected speech across sentence boundaries or use may be infrequent and/or with errors that cause confusion for the listener.
Understand and use some complex and extended speech used in the discussion of reasonably familiar subjects.	Understand and use some examples of complex and extended speech used in the discussion of reasonably familiar subjects.	Need support from the examiner to understand some complex speech.	Have difficulty understanding complex speech and be unable to respond appropriately.



Grade 7

Interactive phase

< Topic phase

Conversation phase >

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade
A typical candidate may:			
Be able to control and maintain the interaction effectively. Be able to ask the examiner questions and request further information, which they will then relate closely back to in their responses fully addressing the prompt.	Generally be able to control and maintain the interaction effectively. Be able to ask the examiner questions and request further information, which they will then relate back to in their responses, but these may lack some detail. Require some prompting/ repetition to stay on track, but mostly address the task prompt.	Attempt to control and maintain the interaction. Be able to ask the examiner some questions and request further information, but responses may not always relate back to the examiner's contributions, instead relying on the candidate's own experience of the situation in general.	Be unable to take control of the interaction and/or maintain it for 4 minutes. Only be able to respond to basic factual information provided by the examiner rather than the full meaning intended.
Be able to use appropriate language to express the functions that should arise naturally from each prompt.	Be able to use mostly appropriate language to express the functions that should arise naturally from each prompt.	Be able to use some appropriate language to express the functions that should arise naturally from each prompt.	Struggle to find sufficient appropriate language to express the functions needed to complete the task appropriately.
Be able to use rising intonation to express interest/ surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn. Be able to correctly pronounce prompt-specific vocabulary. Be able to use intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries.	Be able to use some rising intonation to express interest/ surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn. Be able to correctly pronounce most prompt-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries.	Be able to use some rising intonation to express interest/ surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn, but this will not be consistent. Be able to correctly pronounce some prompt-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries, although use may be inconsistent.	Have problems using intonation and may not pronounce prompt-specific vocabulary correctly. Be unable to use features of intonation and connected speech across sentence boundaries or use may be infrequent and/or with errors that cause confusion for the listener.
Be able to understand and use the functions of the grade to have a meaningful exchange.	Be able to understand and use most of the functions of the grade to have a fairly meaningful exchange.	Have some difficulties understanding and using functions of the grade requiring support from the examiner.	Misunderstand the prompt or the functions expressed in the prompt, meaning contributions are limited or inappropriate.



Grade 7

Conversation phase

< Interactive phase Conversation phase continued >

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade

A typical candidate may:

Confidently participate in a genuine exchange of information, ideas and opinions on two of the conversation areas chosen by the examiner, sharing the responsibility for maintaining the conversation. Be able to take steps to resolve any breakdowns in communication.	Participate in a genuine exchange of information, ideas and opinions on two of the conversation areas chosen by the examiner, with a reasonable level of confidence. Share some responsibility for maintaining the conversation. Be able to take steps to resolve breakdowns in communication on most occasions.	Participate in some exchange of information, ideas and opinions on two of the conversation areas chosen by the examiner, though the scope and direction of the conversation may be limited. Be unable to share responsibility for maintaining the conversation, relying on the examiner's direction. Rely on examiner support to resolve some breakdowns in communication.	Struggle to exchange information, ideas and opinions on two of the conversation areas chosen by the examiner or respond inappropriately. Be unable to share responsibility for the conversation and be mainly reliant on the examiner to direct the conversation. Be unable to resolve breakdowns in communication even with examiner support.
Use a wide range of appropriate grammatical structures, including complex structures (eg <i>'My grandparents used to live in a village.'</i> , <i>'The government should do more to prevent pollution.'</i>).	Use a good range of appropriate grammatical structures, including some complex structures (eg <i>'My grandparents used to live in a village.'</i> , <i>'The government should do more to prevent pollution.'</i>). Make some minor errors when attempting complex structures but these do not impede comprehension.	Use a range of grammatical structures and attempt some complex structures (eg <i>'My grandparents used to live in a village.'</i> , <i>'The government should do more to prevent pollution.'</i>). Make frequent errors when attempting complex structures with some of these impeding comprehension.	Rely on simple structures. Be unable to use complex structures or make errors when using complex structures that impede comprehension.
Demonstrate Grade 7 language functions and incorporate them into the conversation, such as advantages and disadvantages, agreement and disagreement, possibility and uncertainty (eg <i>'Living in a village might be boring.'</i>). Be able to use a wide variety of conversation area-specific vocabulary. Be able to use expressions of interest/awareness of speaker (eg <i>'Really?'</i>). Be able to use fillers to give themselves time to think (eg <i>'Well...'</i> , <i>'Let me think...'</i>).	Demonstrate some Grade 7 language functions and incorporate some into the conversation, such as advantages and disadvantages, agreement and disagreement, possibility and uncertainty, although the expression of these may lack complexity at times. Be able to use a variety of conversation area-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some expressions of interest/awareness of speaker (eg <i>'Really?'</i>). Be able to use some fillers to give themselves time to think (eg <i>'Well...'</i> , <i>'Let me think...'</i>).	Demonstrate some isolated samples of Grade 7 language functions but may be reliant on the examiner to elicit them. Be able to use a limited range of conversation area-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some expressions of interest/awareness of speaker (eg <i>'Really?'</i>). Be unable to use many appropriate fillers to give themselves time to think (eg <i>'Well...'</i> , <i>'Let me think...'</i>).	Either be unable to express a range of Grade 7 functions, express functions using simplistic language and/or make frequent errors. Use a limited range of simplistic conversation area-specific vocabulary. Use a limited range of expressions to show interest or use inappropriate expressions. Be unable to use fillers, instead relying on silence.



Grade 7

Conversation phase continued

< Conversation phase

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Distinction	Merit	Pass	Fail
Candidates who demonstrate excellent ability	Candidates who perform well	Candidates who meet the requirements of the grade	Candidates who do not meet the requirements of the grade
A typical candidate may:			
Be able to use rising intonation to express interest/surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn. Be able to correctly pronounce conversation area-specific vocabulary. Be able to use intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries.	Be able to use some rising intonation to express interest/surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn. Be able to correctly pronounce most conversation area-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries.	Be able to use some rising intonation to express interest/surprise and falling intonation to indicate the end of a turn, but this will not be consistent. Be able to correctly pronounce some conversation area-specific vocabulary. Be able to use some intonation and features of connected speech across sentence boundaries, although use may be inconsistent.	Have problems using intonation and may not pronounce conversation area-specific vocabulary correctly. Be unable to use features of intonation and connected speech across sentence boundaries or use may be infrequent and/or with errors that cause confusion for the listener.
Be able to fully understand and respond appropriately to both examiner questions and comments.	Be generally able to understand and respond appropriately to both examiner questions and comments.	Be able to understand some examiner questions and comments and respond appropriately at times with some support from the examiner.	Consistently have difficulty understanding examiner questions and comments and struggle to respond appropriately even with support from the examiner.

