

Teaching Tips for the London Tests of English – Speaking 3

The LTE Speaking Test is conducted with candidates in pairs and they are expected to communicate with each other, not just with the interviewer. Marks can be gained or lost depending on how much and how well candidates interact. The following tips focus on this area of the test.

Listening

Although listening is tested elsewhere in the LTE exam, listening matters in the Speaking Test, too. An important point here is that candidates need to listen carefully to each other, not just to the interviewer. When a candidate pays attention to, and responds to his or her partner's contributions, this comes across clearly to the assessor, and is likely to be marked more highly than when a candidate engages with the interviewer alone. In class, get your students into the habit of listening to one another. When someone is speaking in English, ensure that everyone else has a reason to listen (e.g. checking whether they agree with what is being said) and encourage them to comment (politely, of course!) on each others' contributions.

Reacting and using intonation

People demonstrate that they are listening to each other not only by what they say but also by how they say it. Unfortunately many otherwise very capable candidates can let themselves down by failing to use intonation effectively either in their contributions or in their reactions to what their partners have just said. When getting students to speak in class it is important to ensure that they convey their feelings or point of view through the way they speak.

To focus on this, give your students a list of short statements or questions, e.g.

- 1) Yes.
- 2) That's not true.
- 3) Open the door, please.
- 4) You could be right.
- 5) Did you see Marta?

In pairs, get your students to look at each statement in turn, think of several contrasting situations in which someone might say it, and then decide on the

different ways in which it might be said. They should then compare their ideas with the rest of the class.

You can also get your students to focus on stress and intonation by having them hum dialogues together. If there is a dialogue in your class text book, first ask the students to read it to themselves and to think about how each part should be said. Then put them in pairs and tell them to hum the dialogue *without saying any words*. This allows students to stop worrying for a moment about how to pronounce individual words, and so lets them focus exclusively on prosodic features. Get them to keep practising the dialogue to make the intonation sound as effective as they can. Then get them to perform the dialogue with words. This approach, concentrating on intonation first and on individual words second, is often more effective than trying to improve pronunciation the other way around.

Responding, and varying vocabulary

LTE candidates should aim to have a variety of language available to them, so that they can express the same idea in a number of different ways. Command of synonyms, antonyms and paraphrase enables candidates to think of ways to express themselves when they are not sure about precise terminology. It also enables them to use different language when responding to what their partners say. For example, if a candidate says 'This is a very good idea', the assessor will be more impressed by a partner who responds 'Yes, it's an excellent suggestion' or 'Yes, it's not bad at all', than by a partner who repeats vocabulary and says 'Yes, it's very good'..

In some languages, it is usual in writing or in conversation to repeat words which have just been used. English is not like this, and LTE candidates should strive to vary their vocabulary. Here is a game that encourages students to develop this skill:

Collect some small pieces of card and write one word on each. Put your students into teams of four or five, and give each team about twenty cards in a pile face down between them. On your signal, one student in each team takes the top card from their pile, and silently reads the word written on it. They then try to get their team mates to say the word on the card, without saying the word themselves. For example, if the word is *cat*, they might say 'a small animal which lives with people and says miaow'. When the team mates have guessed the word, another student takes a card and continues the game. Each team works as fast as possible to be first to get through all the cards in their pile.