

# London Tests of English for Children

## Teaching Tips for the Speaking Test

In the second stage of the LTEfC Speaking Test, candidates pick up cards which tell them what topic to speak about. The cards are illustrated to help the children understand the topic or to suggest what to talk about.

### 1) Personalising the topic

When confronted with a topic, children are most likely to think of something to say if they can relate it to their own lives and experience. For example, it is easier to speak about 'Rainy Days' if you consider how you last spent a rainy day, or what you might do tomorrow if it rains, than if you try to discuss rainy days in general. Children can think of more to say about 'An Interesting Place in my Town' if the place they choose to talk about is one that they have visited recently rather than, for example, a famous attraction which they themselves have little to do with. For this reason, when giving your students speaking practice, it is a good idea to encourage them to bring their own perspectives and experience to the topic under discussion.

In the exam, the children need to understand the purpose of the illustrations on the topic cards. These generally provide *an example* of the thing that candidates are expected to talk about; they are *not* intended to prescribe precisely what the candidates are to say. For example, the topic card below has a picture of two girls getting wet while out walking, just as an example of a terrible day.



**A Terrible Day**

Candidates are not required to say anything about rain, or bicycles, or about anything else which happens to be in the picture. They are expected simply to talk about a terrible day, and the terrible day they talk about will most likely be one which they have experienced themselves. This is an important point

to make clear to young children, who, unlike adults, tend to take their cue from pictures rather than from text.

It is worthwhile showing children example topic cards, and getting them used to relating the topics to their own lives, and to focusing on the topics rather than on the illustrations. This will encourage them to think of relevant things to say, and should stop them misunderstanding what the illustrations on the topic cards are for.

## **2) Overcoming shyness**

Many students, of all ages, are reluctant to speak in front of a number of people, especially in a foreign language. Children should not be made to feel inadequate or guilty about this as such feelings only make the situation worse. With most children it is more effective to give praise and signs of appreciation for efforts made. One must be careful with very shy children, however, as they may be upset by any remarks which draw attention to them, whether those remarks happen to be positive *or* negative.

One way to overcome reluctance to speak English is to turn the activity into a game or a role play. You can use dressing-up clothes (police uniforms, hats, wigs and so forth), or let the children wear glove puppets. When given an opportunity to lend their voice to an imaginary character in this way, people often become less self-conscious, and more willing to say something. Once you have used this technique to overcome your students' initial shyness, you should find that they become increasingly confident about speaking English.

## **3) Listening and asking questions**

In the exam, candidates are expected to listen to each other talking on a topic and then to ask questions. This is important, as the LTEfC is a test of communication in English: candidates need to show that they can convey ideas, and respond relevantly.

Whenever your students speak English it is important that others in the class have a reason to listen. This will encourage the speaker to speak clearly and accurately, and the listener to focus on what is said. For example, you might tell your students to listen and decide whether they agree with the speaker's opinion, or whether they have had a similar experience.

Here is an activity you can use frequently to encourage your students to listen to each other.

1. Make a list of questions or topics, as in this example:

What is your favourite day of the week?  
What do you do after school?  
Tell me about your favourite clothes.  
Tell me about your favourite animal.  
Tell me about your next birthday

2. In pairs, the children ask each other these questions and – very importantly – they must remember their partners' answers.
3. When the pairs have finished discussing the questions, get one student to report how his/her partner answered the first question. Tell the rest of the class to listen, and to raise their hands if the answer is the same as what was said by *their* partners.
4. Now pick one or two of the students whose arms are not raised. Ask them questions such as 'Does Kristof like the same day as Maria?' 'Is Kristof's answer the same as Maria's?' 'How is Kristof's answer different from Maria's?' This should generate answers such as '(No) He likes Tuesday but Maria likes Thursday.'
5. Next, get other students to report on their partners' answers to each of the remaining questions. Again, the rest of the students should listen and raise their hands if the answers are the same as their partners', and should be ready to talk about the differences if they are not. Vary the questions and structures used according to your students' level eg 'What did Anna tell you?' 'What is Luc going to do on/for his next birthday?'
6. Finally, consider getting the students to ask the questions instead of you.

Because this activity requires communication, you will find that the children work hard to understand each other and to make themselves understood. It also helps them to remember language, because the language used in the initial discussion stage (2.) is recycled and practised again in the subsequent feedback stages (3.-5.). Finally, because the activity gets the children to reformulate what they have heard their partners say, it encourages them to refine the language as best they can to make it communicatively effective.