

ETpedia™

Exams

500 ideas
for preparing
students for
EFL exams

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**ENGLISH
TEACHING**
professional

Contents

Introduction

10 reasons for using this resource	6
10 ways to use this resource	8
10 facts about the authors	10

Preparing to teach exam classes

Unit 1: 10 reasons why your students need to pass the exam	12
Unit 2: 10 ways that exam preparation lessons are different from teaching general English.....	14
Unit 3: 10 exams that you might have to prepare students for.....	16
Unit 4: 10 exam terms used in exam literature	19
Unit 5 10 questions to ask students at the beginning of an exam course	21
Unit 6 10 similarities and differences between paper-based and computer-based exams	23

Exam skills

Unit 7: 10 tips for providing exam practice in the classroom.....	26
Unit 8: 10 tips for managing student expectations	28
Unit 9: 10 questions about the exam that students should be able to answer before the exam	31
Unit 10: 10 study skills to teach your exam students	33
Unit 11: 10 mistakes that candidates often make that can be easily avoided	35
Unit 12: 10 classroom activities for checking exam knowledge and strategies	38
Unit 13: 10 Strategies and activities for preparing young learners for exams	41

Preparing students for writing exams

Unit 14: 10 types of text that students have to write in exams	46
Unit 15: 10 ways to generate ideas and plan writing	48
Unit 16: 10 ideas for teaching opinion-based essays.....	51
Unit 17: 10 ideas to develop paragraph and sentence structure.....	54
Unit 18: 10 tips and activities for working with graphs and charts.....	57
Unit 19: 10 tips and activities for working with processes, diagrams and maps.....	60
Unit 20: 10 tips and activities for working with emails, letters and business writing .	63
Unit 21: 10 tips and activities for working with reports, proposals and articles.....	66
Unit 22: 10 tips on how writing exams are often graded.....	70
Unit 23: 10 ways to give feedback on writing for exams	72

Grammar and vocabulary exam preparation

Unit 24: 10 types of questions that exams often include to test grammar and vocabulary	76
Unit 25: 10 things to say to students when preparing for an exam that tests grammar and vocabulary	80
Unit 26: 10 ideas for integrating grammar in the exam classroom	82
Unit 27: 10 ideas for integrating vocabulary in the exam classroom	87

Reading exam preparation

Unit 28: 10 text types often used in reading exams.....	92
Unit 29: 10 question types often used in reading exams.....	94
Unit 30: 10 strategies to teach students for the reading exam.....	97
Unit 31: 10 activities for developing a student's ability to read for global items	99
Unit 32: 10 activities for developing a student's ability to read for individual items	102

Listening exam preparation

Unit 33: 10 text types often used in listening exams	106
Unit 34: 10 question types often used in listening exams	108
Unit 35: 10 strategies to help students before, during and after listening	111
Unit 36: 10 activities for developing listening skills with exam recordings	114
Unit 37: 10 activities to improve micro-listening skills	117

Speaking exam preparation

Unit 38: 10 tips and activities on predictable language used in speaking exams....	122
Unit 39: 10 sets of questions that are often asked in exams.....	125
Unit 40: 10 speaking activities with exam photographs.....	127
Unit 41: 10 tips and activities for responding to a text (written or listening)	130
Unit 42: 10 activities for practising monologues and presentations	133
Unit 43: 10 game-like activities to develop a candidate's discussion skills	135
Unit 44: 10 typical exam discussion topics to practise regularly in class	139
Unit 45: 10 tips on how speaking exams can be graded	141
Unit 46: 10 ideas for giving feedback on speaking for exams	144

Writing your own exams and further development

Unit 47: 10 tips on writing your own exams.....	148
Unit 48: 10 tips for writing young learner exams	150
Unit 49: 10 ways to find out more about an exam before you start teaching it.....	152
Unit 50: 10 further resources about exams and teaching exams	154

Appendix	157
-----------------------	-----

Main ELT exams at a glance	189
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10 reasons for using this resource

1. Everything in one place

English language teachers who prepare students for exams and tests can find supplementary resources, teaching ideas, activities and tips in a multitude of places. The shelves of the staffroom may be full of published resource books and they may have access to folders of materials created by colleagues. Internet search engines provide links to thousands of websites offering instant lesson plans and ideas. The sheer amount of available material can be overwhelming, and finding a tip can be time-consuming. The aim of this book is to bring a collection of resources together in one place for faster reference.

2. From teaching English to exam preparation

One of the biggest challenges for teachers of exam classes is how to balance exam preparation with the need to keep improving a student's general level of English. The 50 units in this resource try to balance those two demands with a range of activities that offer language practice for everyday life with the requirements of the exam.

3. Units of 10

Each unit contains 10 points. These can take the form of tips, ideas, examples of question types or checklists of general guidelines. Why 10? Because we believe that a list of 10 provides enough information to both inspire and encourage you to develop your skills further.

4. New teachers

If you are just starting out in English language teaching, you might not have received much previous training in what ELT exams tend to be like. You may be wondering in what ways exam preparation courses differ from general English ones. This resource gives you an extensive introduction to every aspect of exam teaching, which will get you up to speed before entering the classroom.

5. Experienced teachers

If you have been teaching exams for a while, this resource may both remind you of the techniques needed for exam preparation and also give you some fresh ideas for your lesson.

6. Studying for an ELT qualification

Perhaps you are planning to take the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), or studying for another teaching qualification, such as a CELTA or Cert TESOL. On these kinds of courses, you will need to be able to demonstrate knowledge of key exams and the basic principles of how exams are written. For teachers taking higher-level qualifications, such as the DELTA, Diploma in TESOL or an MA with a component in exams and testing, this book will be an invaluable reference.

7. Writing your own exams and tests

Maybe you are a teacher who has to write tests and exams from time to time, or you are a published writer who needs to include exam practice or tests in your materials. If so, this resource offers a useful set of checklists that you can turn to when you're in need of a few extra ideas – or looking for a quick alternative way to design a test or write a type of question.

8. Teacher trainers

If you are a teacher trainer, senior teacher or director of studies who delivers staff training on a range of topics, then use the lists of ideas that this resource offers as the basis for training sessions related to teaching exam classes.

9. Additional materials and advice

At the end of this book, you will find an Appendix with additional photocopiable materials. These can be used as they are, or adapted and developed to suit your own context. Throughout the book you will also find quotes from experienced teachers, sharing their views, ideas and experiences on preparing students for exams.

10. More time

If you are familiar with the other ETpedia resource books, you'll know that the books aim to save you time. The one thing that all teachers (and full-time materials writers) say they lack is time. We hope that by sharing this collection of ideas, based on our many years of experience of writing for our own classes and, later, as published authors, we can save you time when it comes to producing your own materials.

“ETpedia saves hours of planning time and opens opportunities for variation, adaptation and even creating my own materials inspired by the ideas it offers.”

Ayat Al-Tawel, English teacher, Egypt

10 ways to use this resource

This resource has been written for teachers who are preparing students for exams. It could be for internal exams used by the school you work in, or it could be for an exam set by an external exam board such Cambridge First or the IELTS exam. It can be read and used in different ways according to your needs, interests and level of experience.

1. Cover to cover

If you are new to teaching and preparing students for a specific exam, then you might be using this resource as an introductory text to the subject. If so, it's worth reading the book from cover to cover in order to get a thorough overview and grounding in how to approach teaching an exam course for the first time.

2. Read a section

The contents page will direct you to different sections containing groups of units. If your exam doesn't involve a speaking exam, then you can ignore the section on speaking for now. On the other hand, if you have to prepare students for a writing exam, then that section will support you with a wealth of background knowledge and classroom activities.

3. Go to the unit

If you have been teaching exam courses for a while and you are teaching the same lesson again, go straight to the relevant unit for some ideas to help you find new ways of doing things.

4. Planning your exam lessons

There are differences in emphasis between teaching general English and preparing students for an exam. This affects the way you plan a lesson and the type of approach you take. By dipping into the relevant section or unit, you'll find plenty of straightforward advice on how to adjust your lesson planning accordingly.

5. Get inside the examiner's mind

When teaching new exams, it's always useful to understand why an exam is structured the way it is or what the examiner is testing. Because this book has been written by people who have also written exam materials, it helps you to get the 'inside story' on analysing question types.

6. Supplement your coursebook

Teachers sometimes find that they need to offer their students more practice than is found in their coursebook, or that the coursebook material needs to be adapted to suit their students' exam needs. You will find plenty of ideas in this book to help you supplement and enhance your existing resources.

7. Quick reference

With so many exams available now, it's hard to keep up with all the requirements. In the appendix you'll find one-page summaries of the main exam suites. Unit 50 gives you tips on other resources you can refer to.

8. Writing your own exams and tests

Most teachers also have to prepare their own exams and tests from time to time. You'll find plenty of units in the book with outlines of the typical text types you could include on different exams and suggestions for the different types of questions you could use. Units 47 and 48 also give advice on how to write your own exams and tests.

9. Sharing ideas

When you work with other teachers, you often find that a colleague needs help with a class or a lesson. Or perhaps they can't find a suitable activity to help their students improve their skills in a particular area. Use ETpedia with your colleagues and point them to the right unit.

10. Write your own ten

ELT materials writing is constantly evolving, particularly in the area of online materials. As you explore the subject more deeply, and expand your own skills, you are bound to come up with your own ideas and find aspects of materials writing for which you would like to make your own list of ten tips. Add your ideas to page 230 and share them with colleagues who are also writing their own materials. You could even share them with the whole world by visiting www.myetpedia.com, where we regularly post lists of '10 ways' from people who use the ETpedia books. Visit the website for information on sharing your ideas.

"My teachers and I have successfully contributed in the past to the myetpedia.com blog and it's a great platform and springboard to share your ideas with like-minded teachers from around the world."

Glenn Standish, Director of Studies, IH Toruń

10 facts about the authors

Louis Rogers...

- ▶ has prepared students for a wide range of exams including BEC, Cambridge First, Advanced and Proficiency, IELTS and TOEFL.
- ▶ has authored and co-authored numerous exam books including IELTS Intensive (DELTA), *Proficiency Masterclass* (OUP) and *Foundation IELTS Masterclass* (OUP).
- ▶ has written high-stakes English exams for university entry, and online tests and test CD-ROMs for major general English courses.
- ▶ was the 2014 joint winner of an ELTon award in 'Innovations in Learner Resources'.

John Hughes...

- ▶ has prepared students for English exams including Cambridge First, Advanced, BULATS and BEC. He has also been an examiner for the Cambridge and Trinity exam boards.
- ▶ wrote the exam preparation books *Spotlight on First* and *Success with BEC Vantage* (National Geographic Learning).
- ▶ originated and wrote the very first ETpedia title for Pavilion Publishing. He is now the series editor for the ETpedia resource series and regularly writes blogposts for www.myetpedia.com.

Vanessa Reis Esteves...

- ▶ is a well-known specialist and presenter in the field of ELT for Young Learners and teenagers, and has prepared young learners for the Cambridge Young Learners exams.
- ▶ is the author of *ETpedia Young Learners*, and has co-authored coursebooks for young learners and teenagers in Portugal.
- ▶ is currently working on her PhD in 21st Century Skills and Learning.

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10 game-like activities to develop a candidate's discussion skills

One of the problems of exam preparation courses is that they can sometimes lack the fun elements of a normal language lesson. These 10 activities do, however, manage to combine some game-like elements, while allowing you to target the development of certain speaking subskills. If a student questions why time is being spent on these kinds of fun activities, be prepared to explain your rationale using the information in the ideas below.

1. Giving reasons for your opinions

When a student gives an opinion in an exam, they should also learn to add their reason with no prompting from the examiner or their partner. For controlled practice of this, draw a substitution table on the board. Column 1 contains useful phrases for expressing an opinion. Column 2 can include any topics that might come up in an exam. Column 3 contains only the word because.

I think that the city is nicer to live in than the countryside ...	because ...
In my opinion my grandparents' life was less stressful ...	
I agree that regular exercise is good for you ...	
I don't agree that it's important to have a good work-life balance ...	
I believe people shouldn't spend so much time on social media ...	

Students work in pairs and take turns to create statements using the words in the table, adding their own reasons for the opinion, for example:

I agree that it's important to have a good work-life balance because too much work can make you ill.

To extend the task, the student who is listening can continue the conversation by responding. This task highlights the importance of adding a reason with the word because. You can change the phrases and topics in the table from time to time to reflect the language and topics you have studied in recent lessons.

2. Closed questions and open questions

Questions are used in different ways in speaking exams; the examiner might be the one who acts as the 'interviewer', but students might also be expected to ask questions, especially when they are working in pairs. Students should get used to asking open questions, as these will generate better responses than yes/no questions. For practice, write a series of questions on the board that will elicit a 'yes' or 'no' answer, such as: *Do you live in a city? Are you studying English? Does your family often go on holiday? Do you think technology is a good thing?* You can write any that have come up on past papers or in coursebooks. Students work in pairs. They take turns to ask a closed question. Their partner answers 'yes' or 'no' and then the questioner must follow up with an open question, which they create. So, the dialogue might go:

A: *Do you live in a city?*

B: *Yes, I do.*

A: *What do you like about living in a city?*

B: *Well one thing I like is the shopping ...*

Students can take the conversation as far as they like. They then swap roles so that B starts the next conversation. It's good training for thinking on your feet in the exam and coming up with generative questions.

3. Question generator board game

This board-game activity practises asking questions and answering them fluently. Make one copy of the board game (page 182 of the Appendix) per group of three or four students. The board is designed so that there are typical exam topics on the outer track and question words on the inner track. Each player needs two counters (coins or small objects). Place one counter on the START square and one counter on any question word. The players take turns to roll one dice and move both counters clockwise. The player must make a question using the question word they land on about the topic they land on. They direct their question at any other player. That player must answer. Then the next player rolls the dice and moves their counters, and so on. The winner is the player who arrives back at START first.

4. Blockbuster topics

Blockbusters is a game based on an old TV show, where players compete to cross the board before their opponent. In the example on page 183 of the Appendix, there are lots of different topics – ones that are likely to come up in the speaking exam. Students work in pairs and start from opposite sides. They use a counter to move across the board one space at a time. When they land on a topic, they have to make up an exam-type question (related to the topic) to ask their partner. Their partner must answer. Having completed the topic, they cross it out and no one is allowed onto the same square again.

As students work their way across the board to the other side, their choice of square to move onto will depend on whether they feel they can talk about a topic. They may also try to prevent their partner from having the opportunity to land on a particular square. The winner is the person who gets across the board to the other side first – but of course the main aim is that students get lots of speaking practice with likely exam topics.

5. Strategies to use when you don't know a word

Sometimes in an exam a student might be asked to describe a picture but not know the word for something in it. Or – under pressure – they might search for a word that they know but have forgotten. In this situation, they need to demonstrate that they can still continue talking and that they have strategies for dealing with the situation. Before the lesson, prepare cards with the names of different household objects written on them. You can either make your own list with words like tin-opener, washing machine, mobile phone, etc. or you can use the photocopiable examples on page 184 of the Appendix. Put students in pairs (Student A and Student B). Student A picks a word and tries to define it for Student B. They mustn't use the word written on the card or make any gestures or other movements. They will need phrases like *it's a kind of ...*, *it's a sort of ...*, *it's something you use for ...*. When Student B guesses the word, it is their turn to pick another word and try to define it. Note that you could also use pictures instead of words.

6. Just a minute

In some exams, there is a stage where the student must speak, uninterrupted, for around a minute. This is often referred to as the 'long turn'. A fun preparation activity for this stage is to play a version of a game called 'Just a minute'. Students work in groups of three or four, with one person acting as the time-keeper with a watch. Write a variety of typical speaking exam topics on the board (for example, the ones from the Blockbuster game in tip 4) and ask each group to choose a topic. One student starts speaking on the topic, and must continue for one minute. However, anyone in the group can stop the speaker (1) if they repeat a word or a phrase, (2) if they pause for too long, or (3) if they go off-topic. If the speaker is challenged in one of these ways, the timer must be paused. If the challenge is deemed correct and fair, the person who challenged takes up the topic. The clock starts again and the game continues like this. The person who is still speaking when the minute is up wins a point, and the group starts again with a new topic. It's an excellent fluency activity; it puts students under pressure (as in an exam) and also pushes them to use a wider range of vocabulary.

7. Story dice

Story dice are six-faced cubes with images on them. You can buy sets of story dice (there are normally five or six in a set). There are also various free apps (search for 'story dice') that allow you to play with virtual dice on a tablet or phone. Students work in groups and take turns to throw all the dice. The first player looks at the six pictures that have landed face-up and tries to tell a story that makes use of all the images shown. If they succeed, they win a point. Play passes to the next player. It's a useful way to change the pace of a lesson, and provides fluency practice with pictures.

8. Discussion phrases

You need to make copies of the discussion phrases (see page 185 of the Appendix) and cut them up into sets. Make one set of cards per group of four to five students. Give each group their set. One member of the group deals out the phrases to each player so that they each have roughly the same number of phrases. Write one of the discussion topics from Unit 44 on the board, which the groups will discuss.

The group discussion starts with one player saying a phrase in a correct sentence and putting the phrase down in the middle of the table. Then the next player on the left responds using another phrase and puts that one down in the middle. The discussion continues in a clockwise direction. As players start to use up their phrases they might find it more difficult to use a particular phrase. If they fail to use a phrase correctly they miss a go. The winner is the player who uses up all their phrases first. Then you write another discussion topic on the board and the activity starts again.

One variation is to allow any player to go with a phrase (rather than moving round the group in order). This version is faster, louder and more competitive – anyone can play and speak as long as they use a different phrase each time.

9. Find someone who

Lots of speaking exams require students to give their opinion on a topic and their reasons for holding this opinion. Create four sheets like the one below or make a copy of the table on page 186 of the Appendix. The statements should reflect those that are found in the exam you are teaching. For example, the statements below are all paraphrases of questions that you might find in part 3 of IELTS. Give each student a sheet. They must walk around the classroom and find someone who agrees with each statement and write down their name. They should then ask a follow-up question to find out why the person has this opinion. They make a note of the reason.

Student A

Find someone who thinks in 30 years' time ...

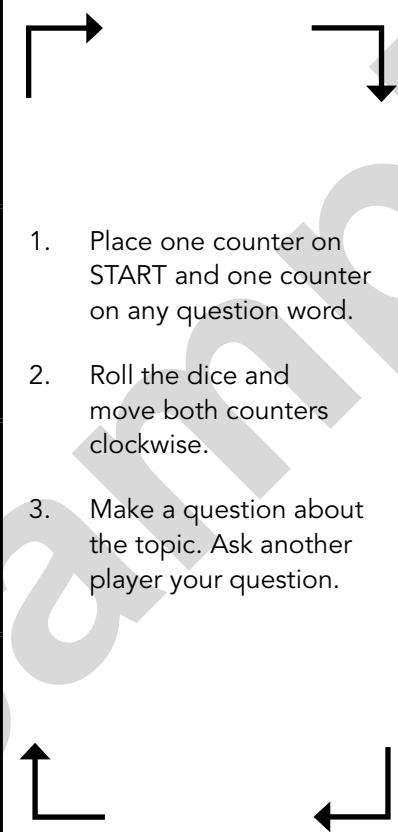
	Name	Reason
1 ... the internet will have replaced high street shops.		
2 ... most jobs will be done by robots.		
3 ... people will live longer.		
4 ... we will live on other planets.		
5 ... cars won't need drivers.		
6 ... the roles of men and women will have become similar.		

10. Class interviews

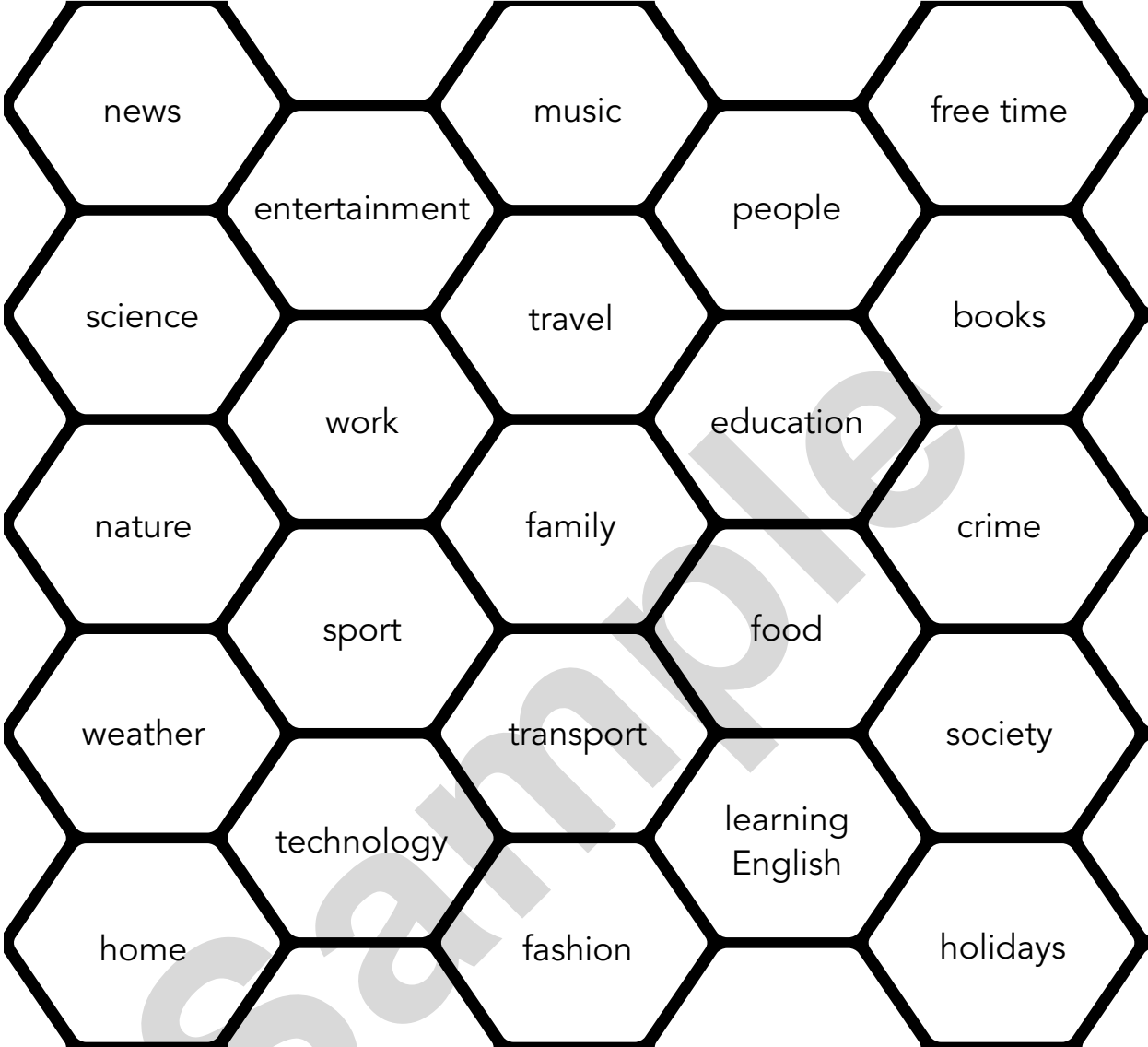
Think of 10 topics that students commonly have to speak about in the exam for which you are preparing students (for example, food, sport, travel, shopping, the future). Write each topic in big letters on individual sheets of A4 paper. Divide the class into two groups: (1) interviewers and (2) candidates. Display the topic cards around the room and ask the interviewers to stand next to a topic they find interesting. Give the interviewers two minutes to think of as many questions as they can related to this topic. While they are doing this, the candidate group should think about possible questions they could be asked on each topic and how they would answer. Ask the candidates to stand facing an interviewer. The pair should then conduct the interview. After four minutes, ask the candidates to go and stand in front of another interviewer. Again, allow them four minutes to ask and answer questions. When the time is up, everyone returns to their seats. Ask the candidates which questions they found hardest to answer and why.

If time allows (or in a later lesson) you can repeat the activity but let students swap their roles of interviewer and candidates.

Unit 43.3: Question generator board game

TRANSPORT	WEATHER	EDUCATION	CITY	TRAVEL	LANGUAGE
PLANS	Which...?	How often ...?	Have...?	Where...?	FESTIVALS
JOB	Does ...?	 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Place one counter on START and one counter on any question word. Roll the dice and move both counters clockwise. Make a question about the topic. Ask another player your question. 		What...?	POSSESSIONS
TECHNOLOGY	Can ...?			When...?	HOLIDAYS
FRIENDS	How ...?			Are...?	COUNTRY
HEALTH	Why ...?	How...?	FOOD		
HOME	What ...?	Why don't ...?	Do ...?	Would ...?	FILMS
START ↑ FINISH ←	BOOKS	NEWS	SPORT	SHOPPING	SOCIAL MEDIA

Unit 43.4: Blockbuster speaking topics



10 ideas for giving feedback on speaking for exams

There are a number of ways to give feedback to students in preparation for the speaking exam. The techniques you already use in any lesson with a speaking focus will apply – on-the-spot correction, repetition for accurate pronunciation or asking the student a question to elicit the correct word or phrase. But once you start to work on the specific speaking tasks for an exam, including general questions and answers, speaking for a long turn, giving a presentation, or discussing and solving a problem, there are different approaches to feedback that can be especially useful.

1. Analyse a speaking exam

In order for students to understand the demands of the speaking exam, it's helpful to show them a video-recording of one. For some of the main exams, such as IELTS, exam boards and publishers produce videos of students taking the exams. As well as being a useful way of showing students what will happen in the exam, the video will give you an opportunity to tell students how well each candidate did in it and to encourage students to comment on what they watched. This is also an excellent way to show students how exams are graded and can also serve as a point of reference when you are giving them feedback in class. Students can also start to think about how they will give feedback that will be useful for their peers in class (see tip 9 below). If the speaking exam for which you are preparing students doesn't have a video-recording, you could make your own using volunteer students. Such a video will be useful for students to watch, but also for your fellow teachers who are involved in exam teaching.

2. Decide what to give feedback on

Early on in the course, many students will want you to give feedback based on the final grade for a speaking exam. However, in the first few lessons, this probably isn't useful unless it's a very intensive short course. Instead, when working on speaking exam skills, focus on a specific area of the grade criteria (see Unit 45). So if the class is focusing on grammar, only listen for grammar errors and successes. Note down what students say and feed back to them afterwards. Breaking feedback down like this early on makes teaching and learning more manageable.

3. Recording mistakes

When you are listening to students speaking in preparation for an exam, you can make notes on some common errors you hear. At the end of the task, write them on the board and ask the whole class to try and spot the mistakes. To make the process more positive, write down examples of good exam English you hear and add those to the board. Tell students that some sentences are 100% correct – they must decide which ones. If you find it hard remembering to note down language used in all the key areas, design a form listing the main areas that are graded in the exam and use this to categorise your notes. As an example, the table below is from a class preparing for the Cambridge speaking exams.

Discourse	Pronunciation
Grammar and vocabulary	Interactive communication

4. Student reflection

After you have given students a speaking task that reflects the content and format of the exam, ask them to reflect on what they think they did well and what they need to work on next. Having students arrive at their own conclusions is often more effective than if you point things out. Only when they have had time to reflect on their own performance should you add any key issues that they have missed.

5. Using exam criteria as part of the feedback process

Near to the day of exam, bring in a set of exam criteria and show students copies of it. Then, when you give students feedback on their speaking, you can refer them to the relevant parts of the criteria.

6. Custom-made criteria

Sometimes, the grade criteria for exams are written in a way that only examiners and teachers will understand. In this case, it won't be helpful for the students, so try writing a student-friendly version with straightforward criteria like this:

The student:

- ▶ can answer questions about themselves (name, home, job)
- ▶ can answer questions about their hobbies and free time
- ▶ can talk about a general topic for one minute.

Make it clear to students that this isn't the actual list of criteria for the exam, but that it covers the types of things a student needs to be able to do.

7. Recording students

It's good for students to become used to recording their speech and listening back in order to assess themselves. For example, if they are working together on simulating the exam they could video- or audio-record the test, then listen back and assess their own performance. You could listen to the same recording yourself to establish what students need to work on over the next few lessons.

8. Reformulating the response

Reformulation refers to repeating a student's reply using the correct form (instead of the inaccurate one that they used). In other words, the teacher provides a correct and improved version. If overused, this technique can be demotivating, but with certain types of speaking task it's helpful. For example, reformulation works well with individual long turns of one minute because you can focus on individual difficulties (whereas reformulating a two-way conversation is more complex). It also works well in conjunction with recording the student. In this way, both you and the student can listen and analyse exactly what was said and how it could be said more effectively.

9. Peer feedback and evaluation

Nearer to the exam, many teachers set up situations where students do a mock speaking test. This could involve the teacher asking the questions and grading them. In large classes

this won't always be practical, so it's a good idea to get students to take on the roles of examiner and candidate and to work on the speaking test in pairs. The student playing the part of the examiner will need a copy of the examiner's script, or at least a list of questions that an examiner is likely to ask. You could also assign another student the task of grading the students using a set of grade criteria (see tip 3 above). Alternatively, they could observe the interview and make a list of things they think their peers did well and a list of areas to work on.

10. What to correct

The closer you get to the exam, the more likely you are to adjust what you correct. Early on in a course you might work on grammar and vocabulary accuracy in detail because students still have time to learn new areas of English. Nearer the time of the exam, however, you should ignore mistakes that require lengthy explanations or further practice; instead, focus on what students can already do, and coach them to do it better.

"If students are doing a speaking activity, note down some of the errors. You could write them on the board, disguising the content perhaps so that others don't know who made the mistake. Give students five minutes to work in pairs and 'spot the mistake'."

Rachel Appleby, trainer and author, Budapest