



ENGLISH WITH KEV!



IELTS Speaking Strategies

A short guide....

By
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Hello and welcome, in this booklet you will find strategies that you can use for the three sections of the IELTS speaking test.

These are reprints of articles and blog posts I have previously posted on my old websites and have compiled here for your reference.

I hope you find them useful, I will be printing other pamphlets and e-books in the future, be sure to look out for them.

Good luck with the test.

Kevin. A. Dean

Take the initiative, how to extend your answers for speaking!...

My tip for today comes from a recent lesson I had for the speaking section, in particular, the introductory questions in part 1. As you know, the common advice most of the course books and teachers give is to avoid short, closed answers. These questions are the ones which ask you some personal details, where do you come from, what is your apartment like, do you have any brothers or sisters etc,

So the idea is to give fuller, more complex answers, not, "yes", "no", "I come from China", etc. Now this is something that a lot of candidates have trouble with, especially if they haven't had any preparation course where the teacher encourages them to speak and gives them guided practice about how to answer. As I tell all my students, this is not an interrogation, the examiner doesn't really want to know where you live nor about your family. The questions have a purpose, to get you in the mood for speaking, to warm you up as it were. So, as with all the questions, you should view this as an opportunity, not a test, to demonstrate to the examiner just how good your English is.

What I recommend to my students is this simple formula, answer, explanation, example. Answer the question, expand on your answer, say a little more, then give an example of what you mean. So, if the question is, do you have any brothers or sisters? I might say: "Yes, I have a brother, a younger brother actually, his name is Martin and he lives in England, so I don't see him very often these days. We used to be quite close at one time, but as I mentioned, we don't see each other much as I live in another part of the country". I answer the question, then say a little bit more and expand my answer.

You can try this too, you need three sentences or maybe four, if you get stuck, consider this, the question words: who, what, how, why, when, etc....who are you talking about?, what do they do, what is their relation to you?, how do you know them, or how long, why do you like them, you get the idea.

Also, try to use more descriptive adjectives and adverbs, more emotive language, "it was really great", it was fantastic", not it is/was "interesting". Try to put some enthusiasm into your answers as the interviewer will respond accordingly, don't forget that a message is conveyed not only by what we say but how we say it. The pronunciation features which give you a quarter of your speaking mark, this means speeding up when something is not important and slowing down and using a nice, bright rising tone when something is interesting.

Take the initiative, how to extend your answers for speaking!..

Anyway, to give another example, the questions my student was answering were about animals. What's your favourite animal and why? However, she answered with a very general "My favourite animal is the dog, I have a dog,etc.

What she could have said was, "yes, actually, my favourite animal is the dog. I have a dog, his name is ,,,, he is a, I love him very much, he is such a mischievous dog, he is always getting into trouble, I remember a time when he.....etc.

You see my point? Instead of only giving the bare minimum to the examiner you can take the initiative and show him/her how good your English is. They will not penalise you for this, on the contrary. So, don't be shy, speak up and blow them away.....

From the general to the specific, strategies for IELTS speaking test part 1

Ok, following on from my last post about more general strategies, I now want to move on to something a bit more specific and tell you some hints for the different sections of the speaking test, beginning with part 1.

First, warm-up. Now you wouldn't start exercising or lifting weights at the gym without warming up first, would you? So why should speaking English be any different? What I mean is that it can sometimes be difficult to "switch" between your language and English without any practice, this is in part why the part 1 speaking questions are personal ones. Most people find it easy to speak about themselves and their lives, so the examiners ask these questions to "get you in the mood" for speaking and to warm you up for parts 2 and 3 which are more difficult. So to get a jump start in this process, try to speak English the day before the exam, if possible on the day of the exam, and even better, right before going in. Call someone, talk to the other candidates, whatever, it will get you going and get you off to a good start, no hesitation, you will be fluent right from the word go!

Second, if you are still nervous in section 1 and you don't quite catch what the examiner said, don't worry. You are allowed to ask for clarification, you won't be penalized in any way. You can be polite. "I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that, could you repeat it please?" or something similar. Maybe if you ask the examiner to explain every question, you might annoy them, but if used sparingly, this is a legitimate tactic. In fact, you would definitely lose marks if you misheard and answered the wrong question, so if in doubt, speak up!

Third, give direct answers to the examiner's questions. Try this formula, Answer, Explanation, Example. Let's consider this question, "Do you like parks? You answer the question, "Yes", you explain, "actually, I go jogging in my local park every morning", you give an example, "it's just at the end of my street so it's really handy for me, also it's very green and woody, you know lots of trees, so it is just like being in the countryside actually". This is pretty good because, as I have seen many times, lots of students tend to give very short answers which don't really give the examiner much to assess. So, try this tactic, it will work, I guarantee.

Fourth, try to be as natural as possible. I know this is difficult, anyone who can do this in a second or third language has my respect, but it is something that you must do if you want to get band 7 and above. It is common for people when speaking a second language to be somewhat monotonous, they get the tone all wrong and it can often sound flat and not very good, as I know all too well from trying to speak other languages. So you need to sound as natural and native-like as possible, and one way to do this is to listen to films, tv, podcasts, etc, and try to imitate the rhythm, tone, and pacing of native English speakers. Again not so easy, but this is what you need to score high. I am not talking about having a "British" accent or whatever, just about sounding unforced and natural.

This is not just about pronunciation, it's also about the words that you use. I often have to correct my students who speak in too formal a language, which is inappropriate for the context of part 1. "Undoubtedly, moreover, additionally, nevertheless", etc, you can use more formal words in section 3 where it is more academic and abstract but they are not entirely appropriate for part 1 where it is more an informal chat about you.

That is all for today, I will write more tomorrow about sections 2 and 3, so once again, any questions, drop me a line and I will try to answer you as soon as I can.

Strategies for speaking, the topic card!....

Continuing on from the last couple of posts I want to move on to the topic card for part 2 of the speaking test. As you may remember, I mentioned a strategy that you might adopt for the first part, which was to always give an answer followed by an explanation and to try to give an example, thereby extending your speaking time. In the same vein, I would suggest a formula for part 2 which is designed to help you extend your speaking for two minutes and also to allow you to show the examiner a wide range of tense and structure.

First, I want to make some more general points. **Make notes**, this is always a good idea as you can refer to them during your talk and if you get stuck, they may help you to get unstuck if you see what I mean. However, don't try to write out your whole speech, you don't have time, all you need is to make five points with some keywords and bits of vocabulary.

Next, make sure you understand what the card is asking you to talk about. This is very important if you misunderstand and start talking about the wrong things you will lose marks. For instance, consider this topic.

Describe what you think would be the perfect holiday.

You should say:

where it would be

what activities you would do

how long it would last

and explain why this holiday would be perfect for you

What do you think it is asking you to talk about? Well, one of my students told me all about her summer holiday, which was nice but as you see the keyword here is "Would", which makes this an imaginary holiday, not an "actual" holiday. Marks would therefore be lost as a result.

So, what can you do? The five points I mentioned are Introduction, Past, Description, Opinion, and Future. If you arrange your notes and talk around these things you will ably demonstrate to the examiner a wide range of grammar and structure. Now I know the card has some points on it for you to cover, however, these are only suggestions, and the criteria do not specifically state that you must address these points in order. As long as you mention them in whatever order, even if fleetingly, that will be fine. As I have written before, this is not truth nor a content test.

Strategies for speaking, the topic card!....

You might say something like this.

Introduction: "Ok, I want to talk about my dream holiday, you might call it my fantasy in fact. My ideal holiday would be two weeks in the Seychelles, off the coast of India."

Past: "You know, I have always wanted to go on some exotic foreign vacation, for as long as I can remember I dreamt of laying on a beach somewhere tropical, but I was never able to afford anything. When I was a kid my parents used to take us to the seaside in England which is not exactly tropical"

Description: "So to tell you some details, well, I have seen some fantastic looking photos on several travel blogs about the Seychelles, it looks like paradise! The golden sands, the palm trees, the crystal clear water, the whole thing looks amazing! Maybe it's a cliché but the whole idea of a tropical island where I can swim and lay around drinking coconut milk seems like a fairy tale, especially for someone who lives in England".

Opinion: "Anyway, I am sure that I would love this lazy life, doing nothing all day, working on my tan for two weeks, all my friends back home would be jealous when I went back and they could see how golden I was"

Future: "So, as I mentioned before, If I could ever afford it, then I would definitely go there, this is a holiday I would love to go on as it has long been my dream. So, who knows, maybe I will win the lotto next week and I can buy a ticket, if only"

Do you see? This is just something from the top of my head that I made up very quickly, but it would do the job. Notice the range of tenses I use and the different structures that connect my ideas. You can be more explicit if you want, and introduce your ideas, stage by stage, "First I want to mention", "Turning to the activities I would do", etc, but it is not strictly necessary as long as you cover all the tenses and connect your ideas. And that's it. Relatively simple and it should give you enough to talk about for two minutes, don't worry about saying too much, the examiner will interrupt you after two minutes and stop you, so just keep talking.

Idea Mapping for the Topic Card

This is the concept of Idea mapping, laid out in more detail, as seen in the previous post..you can use the phrases below or the ones on the previous pages, no matter, it is just to provide you with a little structure..

Introduction:

I'd like to talk about (X).....the reason I chose this topic is because....

Past:

Anyway/So...

- 1.used to + infinitive
- 2.would + infinitive
- 3.simple past
- 4.past continuous
- 5.past perfect

Description:

So, let me tell you more about ...in detail,,,well...

Opinion:

So, if you ask me/in my view/I would say....(opinion)

Future:

So, regarding the future...If (conditional sentence) + future form (I will)....

When making notes in your 1 minute preparation time, just put some keywords down to guide you while you talk....and you will have the card to refer to also.

- Introduction.....
- Past.....
- Description.....
- Opinion.....
- Future.....

To carry on from my recent posts about specific strategies for the speaking section, it is time today to look at the third section. Now I know some people think this is the hardest part and in some respects that is true, as the questions progressively become more difficult. As you know, the examiner will ask questions related to the topic you just spoke about on the card but what is different however is that you are expected to talk at a higher level of abstraction, more generally in other words.

Some people think this is difficult, especially if they have no previous knowledge of the subject. This should not be a problem for you, as I have mentioned before this is not a truth test, the actual "content" of your answer does not matter as such. Of course you need to address the topic, but there is not a "right" answer for you to give the examiner. What you need to do is pay attention to the "type" of question you are asked and respond with appropriate language to it. I will demonstrate what I mean in a minute.

So, as before, you need to give a fuller answer, not a yes or no answer, remember the examiner can only assess you on what you say, so make sure that you say plenty! Stick to the topic and stay relevant.

Let's consider some examples...

Examiner: Do you take photographs?

Candidate 1: Yes, I do

Candidate 2: Yes, I like photography. I especially enjoy taking photographs using my digital camera. there's so much I can do with those photos on my computer.

Candidate 3: Yes, I like photography. I also like drawing and painting. I started painting when I was 12 years old.

In these examples, Candidate 1 has given a short answer that would get a good mark, as it is not enough for the examiner to assess. Candidate 3 has given a longer answer, but most of it is irrelevant, so again, not a good score. The best answer, of course, is by Candidate 2, which is full and relevant, top marks!

What you can do then, is not to rehearse the topics in the sense of memorizing answers which is a bad idea. What you should do is to practice the functional language you need to answer the questions. For example, if they ask: "Do you think radio or TV is better for presenting the news?" This is a comparison question, so you need to use comparative structures, better, worse, harder, faster, more than, less than, etc. I hope you get the idea, so if you carry on reading below you will find some more ideas and examples of functional language to address the questions.

The common types of questions are

- Giving your opinion and evaluating..what do you think about something?
- Future..what do you think will happen?
- Cause and effect...what is the cause of something and what effect has it had?
- Hypothetical...what if, in other words.
- Compare and contrast...how something is similar and/or different to something else.
- Past...same as above, but in the past compared to now.

Here are some phrases and expressions you might use in giving your answers, I will write some examples another time, I want to just give you the general idea today.

Presenting your point of view

- I think
- Personally
- I believe
- in my view

Less certain

- I reckon
- I guess
- I suppose

More certain

- I'm convinced
- I'm positive that
- Definitely, I think
- I'm sure that

You agree

- That's so true
- No doubt in my mind
- I (completely, totally) agree with you (100 percent, absolutely).

You disagree

- I disagree
- I have to say, I completely disagree
- I don't believe so
- Not really
- Not exactly

To express the future

- It's probable that
- I can foresee
- I predict
- It's likely that

Cause and effect

- because (don't overuse, this is too simple)
- so
- as a result
- as a consequence
- therefore (bit formal, can be used though)

Hypothetical

- This is where you could use the Second Conditional (If + past participle, would + verb). "If I won the Lotto, I would buy my own apartment".

Past

- We can use several structures here
- Past simple, "I saw..."
- Used to, "I used to do something...."
- Past continuous, "I was watching...."
- Present perfect, "I have seen..."
- Present perfect continuous, "I have been playing, reading, watching, etc..."

Ok, so that should give you some ideas of what to say and how to say it. In my next post/s I will be writing about how to construct a framework of connectors to join your sentences together, and as always, if you have any comments or questions or ideas for another post, then feel free to get in touch.

Ways to answer speculative questions

I forecast/it has been forecasted...that...the general forecast is for.....

I predict/ my prediction is....it has been predicted...a common prediction.... with which many commentators agree/ made by many commentators

I anticipate/ it has been anticipated

I could speculate...there has been some speculation....

can/could/may/might/will/would

it is possible/ there is a possibility that...

it is foreseeable/ in the foreseeable future....in the immediate future....it has been foreseen for a long time now that....

It is likely that....they may be forced into closure

it is probable that...it is probably true that.....

it is fair to say...in all probability thewill....

It is a reasonable assumption

It is fair to say, and this has been predicted by many commentators, that due to the pandemic, many airline jobs will be lost. It is also a reasonable assumption to make, and this has also been forecast by many people in aviation, that the airline industry, will face severe financial consequences in the future.

About the author

I have been working as a teacher since 2009 and have lived in Turkey, China, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and now Slovakia.

I specialize in IELTS/PTE/OET/TOEFL and other exams but I can also help with general English, conversation, grammar, and vocabulary development.

My background is in History and Politics, and I hold BA and MA/MRes degrees in both those subjects as well as in Applied Linguistics. I also hold several teaching certificates for TEFL, etc.

I also have a YouTube channel with many videos which you might find useful, link below
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTblrPMw6rjdBEHeVrcrn1w>