

International Certificate (PTE General)

The Role of the Interlocutor

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The role of the interlocutor

This guide will cover the interlocutor's responsibilities in the order in which they arise.

The principal function of the interlocutor is to ensure that the test takers have the opportunity to perform the various communicative tasks required by the test to the best of their ability and without undue stress, so that the assessor has a representative sample of their production on which to base a judgment.

The responsibility entails:

- Managing the interaction according to the instructions set out in the speaking test paper and according to certain general principles outlined here
- Giving the test takers adequate opportunities to speak
- Keeping to the time limits

The interlocutor must also ensure that the interaction is recorded properly. This includes testing the equipment prior to any tests. Interlocutors must ensure that they record the introduction which should include:

Centre Number
Interlocutor Name & Number
Date
Candidate Name & Number

As of May 2021, Interlocutors must also ensure that they follow proper protocol for the Warm-up Section and record it as well. Please see details for the warm up section below:

Good morning/afternoon My name is _____; Can you tell me your name please?

Before we begin the test, would you like to do a warm-up with some non-test questions? Give the candidate the option to participate or to begin the test questions right away.

Warmup exercise:

- Ask some simple questions to establish rapport, such as: How is your day going? What do you think of the weather today? Share something about yourself and ask them to tell you about themselves - where they work/go to school/how long they have been studying English.
- **Do not ask about any topics within the paper.**
- Smile and be encouraging.
- Keep the warm-up time under one minute so you do not get off schedule.

Clearly bring the warm-up to a close and state, **'Thank you. Now we will begin the test.'**

Be prepared

Read through the test paper and the instructions before you start. Note that there are two alternative sections 11 and 12: A and

B. Students with odd test taker numbers must do 11A and 12A, students with even test taker numbers must do 11B and 12B.

Make sure you know the time limits for each section of the test

These tests are designed to capture key skills within a short amount of time. Ensure the allotted time is used fully - if necessary continue to prompt the test taker until the time is up. They cannot receive maximum marks if they have spoken for less than the allotted time. Just as importantly, ensure the test taker does not overrun as anything over the stated time will not be marked.

Remind yourself of the marking criteria of the test

In Section 10, for example, the assessor has to evaluate the test taker's ability to engage and interact in a discussion; so it is important that you give them the opportunity to do this.

Rehearse mentally what you will say in the Discussion and Role Play

General dos and don'ts:

DO use language and delivery appropriate to the level of the test (not necessarily the level of the test taker!). Broadly speaking:

- At levels A1 and A2 speak slowly and clearly in short sentences emphasising key words
- At levels B1 and B2 speak clearly at natural speed, as appropriate when speaking to a stranger who may not speak your language fluently
- At levels C1 and C2 speak in a completely natural way making no concessions to the fact that the test taker is not a native speaker

DO let the test taker do the talking as much as possible. The less you intervene the more test taker talking time there will be.

DO maintain a relaxed posture so that test taker doesn't feel rushed.

DO acknowledge the test taker's contributions by nods and affirmative gestures, but avoid giving reinforcing messages that the test taker might interpret as evaluating their performance: "Right", "OK" and "Thank you" are permissible; not "good!" or "excellent!".

DO, when you ask a question, give the test taker time to reply.

DON'T cut them off or finish their sentences.

DON'T correct the test taker's mistakes (you are not teaching!).

DON'T suggest answers, provide vocabulary or expand on the test taker's responses. The more test taker talking time the better.

DON'T interrupt. However there are five exceptions to this general rule:

- In the discussion (Section 10), where you may need to interrupt in order to make your point and to move the discussion on
- For the additional prompt for the picture(s) (Section 11) if applicable (Levels 2 - 5)
- In the role play (Section 12) if the situation requires
- If at any time the test taker deviates from the topic (in some cases this may be the test taker's way of introducing a favourite topic or a prepared speech)
- If the test taker has run out of time for that section and it is necessary to move on to the next section

What to do if the TT doesn't understand a prompt

If the test taker asks for repetition in an appropriate way ("Pardon?", "Could you repeat that, please?"), repeat once verbatim. Otherwise, or if they still don't understand, reformulate once in a manner appropriate for the next lowest level (e.g. in a B1 test reformulate the prompt in a way suitable for an A2 test taker). If they still don't understand move straight on to the next prompt or (if already on the last prompt in a section) the next section.

Points relating to the sections of the test

Section 10: Discussion

The interaction in this section should resemble a real exchange of views rather than a sequence of questions and answers. After the first question ("What do you think?") the objective is not to elicit the test taker's opinions but to argue against them, and to give the test taker the opportunity to defend his or her position. Keep up your side as you would in a real discussion by challenging the points put forward by the test taker and by expressing your opinion politely but assertively.

If the test taker hedges at the beginning ("it depends..."), adopt one position strongly yourself.

Allow the discussion to take its course. Use the prompts selectively to sustain the discussion if a particular line of argument peters out.

If the test taker goes on too long, or wanders off the topic, interrupt politely. You should aim to produce at least three exchanges during the time given.

Section 11: Describe Picture

The aim of this section is to assess the ability of the test taker to speak continuously in response to a visual stimulus. At levels A1 and A2 use the prescribed follow-up prompts to sustain the interaction.

At levels B1 to C2 the interlocutor script always contains two prompts: one asking the test taker to respond to the picture (B1) or pictures (B2-C2) in a relatively straightforward way (e.g. to describe what they see), and the other to expand on their reaction in some way (e.g. to express and justify a preference, or at levels C1 and C2 to consider the appropriateness of one of the pictures for some imagined purpose).

The test taker should be allowed up to half of the allotted time to respond to the first prompt before you move on to the second.

Section 12: Role Play

This consists of a two-way conversation in a given situation. The aim is to assess the test taker's ability to perform language functions that may be required in situations other than an interview.

After reading the instructions and saying "I start/You start", go into role. There is no need to overact, but make a distinct shift of tone of voice and register (if appropriate) to signal that you are no longer the examiner. At the end of the role play switch back to examiner mode, thank the test taker and signal the end of the test.

At levels A1 and A2 the test taker has simple instructions for carrying out a sequence of conversational moves. You should keep to the script as far as possible and guide the test taker if necessary.

At levels B1 to C2 the test taker is given an objective to pursue and a degree of freedom as to how to achieve it. Use the suggested prompt selectively to sustain the interaction by co-operating or challenging the test taker, as appropriate.

At the end of the interaction

- Thank the test taker and tell them that this is the end of the test
- Stop the recording

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