

STRATEGIES FOR PART 1 OF THE SPEAKING TEST

In Part 1 (which lasts roughly 3 to 4 minutes) the examiner asks you a series of questions about your life and/or your current situation. These questions may be on a single topic (e.g. your leisure interests) or on a variety of topics (e.g. your leisure interests, your friends and your living accommodation.)

Here is an example of three typical Part 1 questions, and three answers from a candidate who would get a low to medium score (around Band 5):

Examiner: Let's talk about your home country. What is the climate like?

Candidate: It's hot most of the time. Sometimes there is rain.

Thank you. What are the main industries?

Making cars and buses. And there are many factories which make plastic things.

I see. And what are the main festivals?

What does 'festival' mean?

It means a special time when communities and families celebrate something.

Oh, ok. Well, our big festival is in summer.

I see.

Please note that the answers from this candidate do not contain any

grammatical mistakes. Also, it is not a problem that the candidate asked for an explanation of the word *'festival.'* The reason that the mark would be quite low is because the information that the candidate provided was too basic, and the candidate did not expand on his initial comment.

How to answer the Part 1 questions using a 2-step process

Now here is an example of the same questions from the same examiner to a different candidate. This candidate would receive a Band 9 score for this part of the test.

Examiner: Let's talk about your home country. What is the climate like?

Candidate: It's generally hot and humid, although it rains heavily in October. This has a big influence on our way of life and our industries, because work tends to stop in the rainy season.

Thank you. What are the main industries?

The main industry is the production of cars and buses, which are mostly exported. Plastic items, especially toys, are important exports as well. In fact, we tend to export most of the products that we manufacture.

I see. And what are the main festivals?

Sorry, can you explain what the word 'festival' means?

It means a special time when communities and families celebrate something.

Thanks. Well, our principal festivals are religious, because most people in my country follow the same religion. We have a three day festival in summer, when people exchange gifts. We also have a national independence day in January. On

both festivals, families celebrate together and the shops close for several days. So we need to plan these events carefully, as you can imagine.

In this second example, the candidate was using more advanced vocabulary (*e.g. humid, tend to, exchange.*) This is one reason why the mark would be higher. However, the main reason the Band score is high is because the candidate used a 2-step process to answer the questions.

Let's explain what this means. The candidate said:

It's generally hot and humid, although it rains heavily in October. This has a big influence on our way of life and our industries because work tends to stop in the rainy season.

Here the candidate describes the climate and then gives a second, more general piece of information about the climate, telling us about its *influence*.

The main industry is the production of cars and buses, which are mostly exported. Plastic items, especially toys, are important exports as well. In fact, we tend to export most of the products that we manufacture. Here, the candidate does something similar: he answers the question and then gives a second, more general piece of information, showing that he has thought about the nature of his country's industries.

He does the same thing in the answer to the third question about festivals, with a first piece of information (**our principal festivals are religious . . .**) supported by a further comment (**So we need to plan these events carefully . . .**) showing that he understands the situation.

This is what we call the 2-step process for Part 1. This means that you give an initial piece of information, and then a further, more general piece of information showing that you understand the situation or that you have considered the situation. The answers are roughly 3 sentences in length. You don't need to give more than 3 sentences for a Part 1 answer.

Practising the Part 1 Speaking, and example Band 9 answers

Here are some more examples of Part 1 questions for you to practise. Try to answer the following questions, using the same two-step process. Give an initial answer with one piece of information, and then give another piece of information that shows that you understand the situation you are describing. In the next section of this book, there is a key with two example answers for each of these questions. The first example answer given is a band 5 or 6 answer, and the second one is a Band 9 answer.

But try these examples before you look at the key!

Please tell me about your home town. What do people do in the evenings?

Let's talk about your plans for the future. What kind of career do you want to follow?

Tell me about your family. What do they do?

Tell me about your country's food and dishes.

Where are you living at present?