

Guidelines that can help teachers design speaking tasks for classroom use and the new Hungarian intermediate level school-leaving examinations in English

1. Guidelines for designing interview questions

- Always ask global questions, because they provide more scope for the candidate.
- Do not ask for specific information.
- Use Wh-questions instead of Yes/No questions.
- Never ask questions the answer to which requires specific background knowledge.
- Avoid misleading, confusing, embarrassing and distressing questions.
- Do not ask display questions (questions to which we know the answer already).

Consider the following questions that aim to elicit personal information about the candidate at A2 or B1:

Sample Set 1	Sample Set 2
1.1 Where are you from? Tell me about your town/village.	2.1 Where do you live?
1.2 How do you spend your free time?	2.2 Do you have friends?
1.3 What do you like most about television?	2.3 Do you like watching TV?
1.4 Tell me about your family.	2.4 Do you have any brothers or sisters?
1.5 What kind of films do you like? Why?	2.5 What is your favourite film?

If we compare the two lists, we find that the questions in Set 2 are much less appropriate than in Set 1. In Set 2, the candidate is given much less scope for contributions as the questions are either *yes/no questions* or they ask for specific information. The question ‘Where do you live?’ can be fully answered by mentioning the name of the town/village where the candidate lives. The candidate may not necessarily realise that s/he could also describe the place in some detail. If the candidate uses good test-taking strategies, s/he may provide an extended response to all the questions in Set 2 although none of the question prompts require him/her explicitly to do so. In Set 1, however the candidate is explicitly asked to mention more than just a place name, the title of a film or to give a short *yes* or *no* answer. Questions 1.1-1.4 are global questions, they invite the candidate to speak about a specific topic but at the same time they do not restrict his/her response as much as questions 2.1-2.5. When the candidate is asked what s/he likes most about television, the range of possible answers is virtually unlimited. Similarly, candidates may respond to question 1.2 in a number of different ways: some will just list activities they like doing in their spare time while others may also mention who they spend their free time with, what their favourite place is like, etc. Although there are two questions asking for specific information in Set 1, it must be pointed out that in both cases there are follow-up questions that are intended to extend the scope of answer for the candidate. In question 1.5, for example, the candidate is asked to justify his/her choice. This is a very useful interviewing strategy in general.

2. Guidelines for designing role-play tasks

Prompts

- Select prompts/input text and design the task so that it generates the appropriate amount of varied language at the required level.
- Use prompts that are clear, black and white or colour, photocopiable (in size max. A4) and appropriate for the target age.
- Limit input text so that candidates can process it in 30 seconds.
- The language level of verbal prompts should be below the tested level.
- Do not use distressing, offensive, violent or taboo topics. Treat sensitive topics with care.
- Do not use surreal, abstract, puzzling or symbolic pictures at lower levels.

Situations, roles, interaction

- Create situations that are life-like, suitable for the target age-group and in which it is realistic for them to speak in English.
- Candidates should not be required to take unfamiliar roles.
- Use different questions and tasks of different complexity if using the same prompt for more than one level.
- The task should not require students to use their imagination or creativity as these are not to be tested.
- Role-plays should involve real interaction and have an outcome.
- Create an information-gap or opinion-gap in role-play tasks.
- In the individual format, when the student has to speak to the interlocutor, make sure the interlocutor does not have to speak more than the student.
- Restrict the use of yes/no and alternative questions.
- Always try out the task yourself to see whether you can speak for the required length of time.

Rubrics

- Use standardised instructions.
- Instructions must be given in English.
- Instructions should be simple.

3.1 Guidelines for designing individual long turn tasks

	Dos	DON'Ts
Picture prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use pictures that are clear and photocopiable (maximum A/4 size, black and white or colour). ✓ Vary the source of pictures (photographs, drawings, cartoons, etc.). ✓ Select pictures which show general, everyday, life-like situations which candidates can easily recognise and relate to. ✓ Select pictures which show people in action. ✓ Select pictures which can be easily related to each other, but with significant differences to elicit a wide range of vocabulary and structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do not use sensitive, distressing, offensive, violent or taboo topics. ➤ Do not select bizarre, surreal, abstract or symbolic pictures, especially for lower level tests. ➤ Do not select over-crowded pictures. ➤ Do not select pictures which do not contain enough stimuli for language output. ➤ Do not use pictures which are very similar. ➤ If possible, avoid using pictures which do not contain people and actions.
Interlocutor's questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Some question prompts should be provided for any set of pictures. ✓ The questions should be independent of one another. ✓ The questions should always be general enough to relate to both pictures in the task. ✓ The questions should be worded and focused in such a way that candidates can really produce long turns in response to them. ✓ Each task should have some questions which relate the pictures to the candidate's own experiences and/or opinions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do not ask questions which do not relate to the pictures at all. ➤ Do not ask questions which relate to only one of the pictures. ➤ The questions should not elicit physical description of either of the two pictures. ➤ Do not ask artificial, impersonal questions. ➤ Avoid questions which aim to elicit candidates' opinion about a topic in general as this can easily lead to candidates reciting memorised texts.

3.2. Tips for selecting pictures in relation to different themes

In the individual long-turn task (Task 3) the candidate is required to compare and contrast two visual prompts (pictures, photos, drawings). When contrasting pictures the task designer may focus on:

- ❖ similarities and differences
- ❖ typical and unusual situations
- ❖ sequences in a narrative
- ❖ advantages and disadvantages
- ❖ variations of a theme

When designing tasks there are nine main topic areas that the pictures should relate to. They are the following:

1. Personal information and family
2. Man and Society
3. Our Environment
4. School
5. Work
6. Life styles
7. Free time and entertainment
8. Travelling
9. Science and technology

In the nine main topic areas the pictures may focus on the following contrasts.

<i>1. Personal Information and Family</i>	a small family	more than two generations living together
	an only child	three or more sisters/brothers
	mother doing the housework	sharing the housework
	children spending their time alone	children spending their time with parents
<i>2. Man and Society</i>	doing activities with friends	doing activities alone
	doing activities with adults	doing activities with peers
	people dressed for a special occasion	people wearing casual clothes
	people with two very different life styles	
	shopping in different places	
	a man/woman in a typical role	a man/woman in an unusual role
	DIY	using services
	celebrating in typical circumstances	celebrating in unusual circumstances
<i>3. Our Environment</i>	different housing conditions	
	different neighborhoods	
	city scene	country scene

	keeping different pets	
	living with pets	living without pets
	untidy environment	tidy environment
	different activities in different weather conditions	
4. <i>School</i>	traditional classroom	alternative classroom arrangement
	pictures showing different lessons	
	learning from textbooks	learning with computers
	a lesson	Another type school event
5. <i>Work</i>	two different summer jobs	
	two different full-time jobs	
	an outdoor job	an indoor job
6. <i>Lifestyle</i>	two different eating facilities	
	different dishes	
	a healthy and active person	a sick person in bed
	doing something dangerous	the consequence of doing something dangerous: accident
	a busy person working	a person relaxing
7. <i>Free time and entertainment</i>	outdoor sport	indoor sport
	individual sport	team sport
	physical exercise	mental sport
	doing sport	playing a board game
	going on an excursion to two different places	
	two different cultural events	
8. <i>Travelling</i>	different holiday destinations	
	different accommodations	
	different means of transportation	
	different holiday activities	
	travelling alone	travelling with others
	travelling light	taking heavy luggage
	public transport	cycling/walking
	travelling at different times of the day	
9. <i>Science, technology</i>	technology in the past	technology in the present
	an old kitchen	a modern kitchen
	different uses of the computer	