

Peer and Self-evaluation in Spoken Tests: Tools and Methods

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Background

I developed and used this method of peer- and self-evaluation for speaking classes in Japanese universities. I have used it in topic-based classes and adapted it to suit a number of textbooks. The benefits of this system of evaluation include:

- Students become aware of the importance of a range of communication features, such as eye contact, body language and gestures.
- It provides practice in a test format they may encounter in commercial exams, such as the STEP test and IELTS.
- It allows students to review recently acquired language.
- Students can discuss how they need to improve without feeling threatened.

Students use the handout below to assess their own progress in speaking tests. The top section is where they mark their score on the test. At the end of the course, the dots indicating the scores for each test can be plotted on a graph, revealing how the student's spoken performance has developed. The middle describes how to score the test. I ask students to leave the bottom section blank until the end of the year, when they can write their own assessment of their performance in the course overall. Alternatively, they can use this section to give feedback on the course.

The test format and assessment handout can be adapted to suit different contexts. Below, I outline how I have implemented the test in my classes.

Instructions for the Test

Students work in groups of three; an Interviewer, Interviewee and Marker. The Interviewee is the one taking the test. She or he has to answer three questions related to the three topics studied in previous classes. (In most classes, I prepare the question cards myself. However, I have recently had students prepare the test questions as homework). For example, if Class 1 was on the topic 'Mobile Phones', Class 2 covered 'Driving', and Class 3 considered 'Surrogate Mothers', one of the three test question cards for Class 4 might look like this:

Test 1

1. Do you own a mobile phone?
2. Is driving dangerous in your country?
3. Should surrogate mothers be allowed to make a profit?

Each student's interview test lasts ten minutes. The Interviewer reads the questions, the Interviewee answers them, and the Marker observes. The following instructions, written on the board for the first test, explain their roles in the test:

- **Interviewee:** It is your test. The Interviewer will ask you questions – try to speak as much as possible. The Interviewer will help you.
- **Interviewer:** Ask the questions on the card. Ask follow-up questions. Speak slowly and clearly. Help the Interviewee to speak for the whole ten minutes.
- **Marker:** Listen to and observe the Interviewee. At the end of the test, give feedback on the strong points and weak points of the Interviewee's performance. Together with the Interviewee, decide on a numerical grade for today's test.

The teacher acts as timekeeper during the test, walking around and being available to help out with any problems they may have. When the time is up, the Marker gives feedback on the Interviewee's performance (in L1 or L2). Then the Interviewee and Marker refer to the assessment sheet, and together decide a score for that day's performance. They mark the score with a dot in the appropriate column. The students then rotate roles, and the teacher gives out a new set of questions. This happens one more time, so that each student gets to play all three roles in the test. All together, the test time, feedback and scoring, and the giving out and collecting of cards takes 45-50 minutes in a class of sixty students. The first test takes a little longer as time is needed to explain the system and get students used to the pattern.

Additional Comments:

Usually I give a class test after three 90-minute sessions. However, recently I have had students make their own questions and carry out this kind of test at the end of each lesson. My feeling is that it elicits more spoken language and motivates students more than group discussion.

You might want to note that it is possible to replace the 'comments' section at the bottom of the page with the guidelines for each role in the test. This would save having to write the guidelines on the board each time.

Spoken test assessment form

Name: _____
 Number: _____

9										
8										
7										
6										
5										
4										
3										
2										
1										
	test A	test B	test C	test D	test E	test F	test G	test H	test I	test J

9	Near native fluency. Very confident. No hesitation or errors.	8	Excellent. Large vocabulary and wide use of grammatical forms. Holds eye contact.	7	Very good. Very little hesitation. Uses eye contact, compensates for lack of vocabulary. Varied gestures used.
6	Good. Expands on topic. No silences. Clear pronunciation.	5	Fair. Explains with the vocabulary they have, manages to communicate.	4	Limited. Some silences, little or no eye contact. Basic grammar patterns only.
3	Poor. Long silences. Simple grammar mistakes. Struggles when listening.	2	Very poor. Only words, no sentences. Unclear pronunciation.	1	Non-speaker. Says almost nothing. Could be unconscious.

Comments

This assessment form is available at <http://iteslj.org/Lessons/McAulay-PeerEvaluation/spokentestform.gif>.

