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**Speaking Test for Beginning ESL Students**

**Context**

Most students are from various parts of Asia, and are enrolled in a communicative ESL program in Hawaii. They are seeking to improve general speaking proficiency and are therefore not focused in one type of English (i.e., business or academic English) in particular. Students are at a beginning speaking level. For most students, at the beginning of the program they will be living for the first time in an English-speaking country. The only exposure to English they will have had prior to their experience in the program will have been from classroom instruction in their home country, so their reading and writing skills are expected to be slightly higher than their speaking ability.

**Intended use**

This test will be used as an achievement test about a quarter of the way through the semester. Students will learn to use three grammar elements taught in the first few textbook chapters, and will need to be able to comfortable with speaking several minutes in English to be able to successfully complete this achievement test. The lesson plans in the program teach grammar as well as provide students opportunities to practice conversing outside of a textbook context. At this point in time, students will be familiar with one another and the teacher, which will help reduce test anxiety; additionally, they will have had a few similar tasks on a smaller scale as classroom activities. Depending on how much emphasis the teacher would like to put on speaking tests as well as dependent upon other student learning objectives or the institution’s goals, this test could be weighted more or less heavily than the default of 5% of student’s grades.

**Purpose**

This test seeks to assess student fulfillment of one student learning outcomes for the program, that is: “Given a topic of personal interest, with limited assistance students will be able to give a short discourse that includes three new grammar constructions.” Students in the program are seeking to improve their general English speaking skills. Successful completion of this test will indicate students have improved their English speaking to a degree at which they can speak on a topic for a short time and include new constructive grammar elements; it is similar to actual situations outside the classroom where one may be asked to describe or support their opinions. Because prior to this program the students have been submersed in an English-speaking country, this test will give them the opportunity to practice the needed skill of fairly spontaneous speech.

**Procedure**

Task: Give a 2-minute oral presentation about your favorite place in Hawai’i. Please describe it. Why is it your favorite? You may bring in photographs or use picture slides (Powerpoint) to show the class.

Please include these three new grammar elements (found in textbook chapters 1-2):

1. Potential form (“can/could/will be able to” + verb)
2. Conditional (“If x, y”) or (“When x, y”)
3. Conjunctions (“so” “because” etc)

You will be graded on

1. Time (two minutes minimum)
2. Including each grammar element at least once
3. Content (described a place and gave reasons it is your favorite place)

This task will fulfill the student learning objective “given a topic of personal interest” because the topic is general enough (“favorite place in Hawaii”) to allow students to select a personally appealing, more specific place within a broader umbrella of choices.

This task will also fulfill the second part of the student learning objective; that is, it is a “short presentation.” Students are beginning speaking level and will certainly be able to construct simple sentences, but the task is a fairly authentic speaking opportunity, so students can of course speak beyond the required level. “Limited assistance” can be ascertained by using pictures in the Powerpoint as speaking prompts.

To make this task easier, the teacher can permit students to use notecards when speaking (however, this is discouraged because students may write out what they will say instead of speaking fairly impromptu). This task could also be made easier by allowing students to include texts/sentences in the slides. To increase difficulty, students might be required to include more difficult grammar constructions, to speak longer (5-6 minutes), or to talk about a class-selected topic.

The test task prompt will be given to students a week before the test to provide enough time to choose their topic and make sure they are familiar with the grammar elements. The students may present sitting down/casually in order to keep the setting as it would more likely occur in a natural, authentic context.

**Scoring**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Grammar | Included all 3 constructions | Included 2 constructions | Included 1 construction | No required constructions used |
| Length | 2 minutes or longer | 1 minute or longer | Under 1 minute | under 30 seconds |
| Content | Developed topic to a satisfactory level, describing both why place is their favorite and what it is like | Described place and why it is their favorite, could have included a little more information | Introduced topic but spent most of the presentation talking about something else | Chosen topic irrelevant (not in Hawaii, or not about a place) |
| Total: /9 |  |  |  |  |

This rubric should ensure inter-rater reliability as the same teacher will be scoring each student. Students can be creative with their producing of speech and will all vary from one another, but the key elements provided in the rubric should be present in a high-scoring test.

What is “speaking”? There can be a variety of factors tied into this construct, such as grammar, intonation, enunciation, vocabulary, style, and so forth, but for this program “speaking” emphasizes an individual’s communication of meaning through spoken word. To remain consistent with the SLO/communicative English objectives of the program, students will be analytically scored on length, new grammar material and content. Communication using new grammar is emphasized over technical accuracy because the goals of the program are to foster general English speaking proficiency in a communicative style. To score students heavily on technicalities such as grammar or accuracy would not be consistent with the goal of English for communicative purposes. So although grammar elements are required, accuracy of form is not a category strictly included. Students will be given points if they communicated thoughts about the topic they selected. Points are also given if students include the grammar elements they are learning because one aspect of speaking is necessarily grammar; without grammar, one cannot speak.

Students will not be scored on body language or items such as gesture/eye contact. This is good communication does not require good presenting skills or body language; though the latter are more likely to be exhibited by successful communicators, they are not necessarily requisite. Also, just as natives speak in a variety of styles, so, too the ELL is not expected to conform to any single style of communicating.