

Top Tips – FCE Speaking Part Three- Working Together

Tip 1 The examiner will explain the speaking task as he/ she gives the associated visual prompt to the candidates (to share). Students will need to concentrate on listening to the task, and make sure they are not distracted at this stage by the picture.

Tip 2 The question always has at least 2 parts, and students should try to answer both/ all parts. They can discipline themselves (or their partners) by saying 'Perhaps we should move on and talk about...'. A more authoritarian practice activity for class is to give students a two-part task and shout 'NOW' when they are halfway through their time, forcing them to switch.

Tip 3 The worst thing in the exam is silence. If students really have no opinion, they should say 'I really have no opinion'. A nasty but occasionally necessary trick is to start off the speaking by asking their partner 'What do you think?'

Tip 4 In this part of the exam the speaking is between the two (occasionally three) students only. The examiner will often look out the window and pretend not to listen. This is to show students not to address the examiner! The examiner does such a convincing part of not listening to them that the first question of Part Four is often 'What did you decide?'

Tip 5 Students should try to make sure the conversation is split 50/50 between the two students. If someone's partner really won't talk or let them talk, then it is only the uncooperative student that will be penalised. However, such an (unusual) circumstance is the best opportunity to show polite interruption and other turn-taking skills. These skills can be quite fun to practice in the classroom. In addition to the ideas in the Lesson Plan, the Interrupting Game can be quite fun. The idea is that one person tries to complete a story/ anecdote and the other people (politely) interrupts him/ her by asking for additional information or clarification.

Tip 6 The candidates are being marked on their ability to work their way towards a conclusion, even though they do not have to agree. This means argumentative students will need to learn to agree even when they don't really, or 'agree to disagree'. This can be practised by giving students exam questions and getting them to alternately agree with everything each other says, disagree with everything, or (for fun) have one person agreeing with everything and the other disagreeing. This is similar to how turn taking is practised in the Lesson Plan.

Tip 7 The language students often lack for this part of the exam is that of 'polite disagreement'. This is also a matter of cultural awareness. It is very common in English to start disagreeing with language of agreement- 'Yes but..', 'I see your point but..', 'I'd agree up to a point but..'