

Unit 8 Speaking

What is speaking?

Speaking is a **productive skill**, like writing. It involves using speech to express meanings to other people.

Key concepts

Tick the things on this list which people often do when they speak.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1 pronounce words | 10 smile |
| 2 answer questions | 11 ask for and give information |
| 3 use intonation | 12 respond appropriately |
| 4 ask for clarification and/or explanation | 13 persuade |
| 5 correct themselves | 14 start speaking when someone else stops |
| 6 take part in discussions | 15 tell stories |
| 7 change the content and/or style of their speech according to how their listener responds | 16 use fully accurate grammar and vocabulary |
| 8 greet people | 17 use tenses |
| 9 plan what they will say | 18 take part in conversations |

We usually do all these things when we speak except 9 and 16. Speaking does not allow us time to do these except in formal speaking such as making speeches. Here is a list of the categories that the other points are examples of:

- grammar and vocabulary (17)
- **functions** (2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15)
- features of **connected speech** (1, 3)
- **appropriacy** (12)
- body language (10)
- interaction (5, 7, 14, 18).

Interaction is two-way communication that involves using language and body language to keep our listener involved in what we are saying and to check that they understand our meaning. Examples of these **interactive strategies** are: making eye contact, using **facial expressions**, asking check questions (e.g. 'Do you understand?'), clarifying your meaning (e.g. 'I mean ...', 'What I'm trying to say is ...'), confirming understanding (e.g. 'mm', 'right').

We speak with fluency and accuracy. **Fluency** is speaking at a normal speed, without hesitation, repetition or self-correction, and with smooth use of connected speech. **Accuracy** in speaking is the use of correct forms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

When we speak, we use different aspects of speaking depending on the type of speaking we are involved in. If you go to a shop to buy some sweets and ask the shopkeeper 'How much?', then leave after he/she replies, you don't use many of them. If you go to the bank to ask the bank manager to lend you \$500,000, you will probably need to use many more. If you eat a meal with all your relatives, you will also use many in conversation with them. As you can see, speaking is a complex activity.

■ Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

- We can develop learners' speaking skills by focusing regularly on particular aspects of speaking, e.g. fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, body language.
- In many classes learners do **controlled practice** activities (activities in which they can use only language that has just been taught). These are a very limited kind of speaking because they just focus on accuracy in speaking and not on communication, interaction or fluency. Controlled practice activities can provide useful, if limited, preparation for speaking.
- Tasks and less controlled practice activities give more opportunity than controlled activities for learners to practise communication, interaction and fluency.
- Sometimes learners speak more willingly in class when they have a reason for communicating, e.g. to solve a problem or to give other classmates some information they need.
- Because speaking is such a complex skill, learners in the classroom may need a lot of help to prepare for speaking, e.g. practice of necessary vocabulary, time to organise their ideas and what they want to say, practice in pronouncing new words and expressions, practice in carrying out a task, before they speak freely.
- Learners, especially beginners and children, may need time to take in and process all the new language they hear before they produce it in speaking.
- The activities in a speaking lesson often follow this pattern:
 - 1 **Lead-in:** an introduction to the topic of the lesson plus, sometimes, activities focusing on the new language
 - 2 Practice activities or tasks in which learners have opportunities to use the new language
 - 3 Post-task activities: activities in which learners discuss the topic freely and/or ask the teacher questions about the language used.

See Units 15 and 16 for speaking activities, Unit 20 for planning lessons, and Units 28 and 31 for correcting speaking.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY (See page 172 for answers)

The titles of some materials on teaching speaking are numbered 1–10 below. Match the titles with the aspects of speaking (A–E) that they focus on. Some titles focus on more than one aspect.

A accuracy B connected speech C appropriacy D fluency E functions

- 1 Intonation in *wh-* questions (*what, when, where, why, how*)
- 2 Language for asking for polite clarification
- 3 Informal language for greeting
- 4 Language for agreeing and disagreeing
- 5 Using past tenses in stories
- 6 Distinguishing minimal pairs of sounds
- 7 Disagreeing politely
- 8 Using intonation to show doubt
- 9 Taking part in discussions
- 10 Telling stories

REFLECTION

- 1 How did your teachers teach you the speaking skill in English? Did you have enough practice in all aspects of speaking?
- 2 Which aspects of speaking English do you find most easy and difficult now?
- 3 Do you teach speaking in the same way you were taught it? Why?/Why not?

DISCOVERY ACTIVITIES

- 1 Look at a unit in your coursebook. Which aspects(s) of speaking does it focus on most?
- 2 Listen to a short conversation or story on the cassette from your coursebook. Which of the six categories on page 34 does it contain examples of?
- 4 Look at this website to find speaking activities your learners can do:
<http://towerofenglish.com>
- 5 These books have lots of speaking activities. Are there any you can do with your classes?
Elementary Communication Games by Jill Hadfield, Pearson Education Ltd 1992
Simple Speaking Activities by Jill and Charles Hadfield, Oxford University Press 1999