Assessment of Speaking Kit (ASK)

A resource for teachers in junior high school

I like to speak English

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Introduction

This Assessment of Speaking Kit (ASK) is the result of a joint initiative by the National Authority of Measurement and Evaluation in Education (RAMA), and the English Inspectorate. It has been designed in accordance with the National English Curriculum and is to be used for assessing and teaching the relevant benchmarks in the Domains of Social Interaction and Presentation at the intermediate level.

The main aims of the kit are to provide you with a means to

- collect evidence regarding the achievement of the benchmarks
- identify students' strengths and weaknesses in oral production and design appropriate instruction
- provide meaningful feedback on students' performance and progress to students and other interested parties
- integrate and enhance speaking in accordance with the benchmarks related to the oral aspects of the Domains of Social Interaction and Presentation
- enhance and encourage students' willingness and ability to speak English

The central component of the kit is the varied selection of performance tasks and checklists for assessing speaking. These can easily be integrated into your regular teaching and, with careful planning, can provide you with comprehensive information about your students' speaking ability. Although the core of this kit is assessment, information about the teaching of speaking is also included, together with suggestions for instructional activities.

The kit is divided into five units, each one addressing a relevant benchmark in the Domains of Social Interaction and Presentation at the intermediate level. Each unit includes performance-based tasks and checklists, as well as instructional activities that are aligned with the performance-based tasks. All the assessment tasks and instructional activities are accompanied by detailed guidelines for effective implementation.

All the materials contained in this kit may be used as they are, may be adapted to suit your classroom context, or may serve as models for developing your own tasks and materials.

It is hoped you find this kit useful for assessing students' speaking and beneficial in promoting it.
Background

Think about a regular day or week and ask yourself what kind of talk you engaged in. You were undoubtedly involved in conversations and social interactions; you may have purchased a ticket for a movie or ordered a meal at a restaurant; you may have demonstrated how something works or given directions; and you were almost certainly engaged in classroom discussions. These kinds of 'talk' highlight the fact that, in general, speaking is fundamental to human communication. In today's global economy, not only is speaking important, but speaking English is particularly crucial as English is recognized as the world's international language (Richards, 2008).

There is no doubt that for language learners, speaking is one of the most vital components of language proficiency. Moreover, for these learners, mastery of oral language is critical as it provides the foundation for the development of other language skills (Richards, 2008). Finally, mastering spoken English is important for these learners since they "often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how much they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency" (Richards, 2008; 19).

Even though speaking is vital for language proficiency, it is not easy to define. The Oxford Dictionary defines speaking as "the action of conveying information or expressing one's feelings in speech" (Oxford Dictionaries Online). Thus, speaking involves a given purpose and a means (speech). A similar definition is provided by Merriam-Webster Dictionary, whereby speaking involves "uttering words or articulating sounds with ordinary voice; expressing thoughts, opinions, or feelings orally" (Merriam-Webster Online). Here, too, speaking involves a given purpose (expressing thoughts, opinions, or feelings) and a means (orally), but also relates to aspects of voice. Various scholars have proposed a variety of definitions. Butler, Eignor, Jones, McNamara, and Suomi (2000) define speaking as the "use of oral language to interact directly and immediately with others". This definition introduces the ideas of interactivity and immediacy. Finally Lado (1961), quoted in Fulcher (2000), has suggested that "speaking ability is described as the ability to express oneself in life situations, or the ability to report acts or situations in precise words, or the ability to converse, or to express a sequence of ideas fluently" (p. 488). While this definition also specifies purpose, it includes the aspects of vocabulary choice and fluency. In this kit, speaking is viewed as the ability or skill to orally express thoughts, opinions, and feelings, convey information, and interact and converse with others fluently and using appropriate language.

In general, spoken discourse is composed of idea units; may be planned (e.g., a lecture) or unplanned (e.g., a conversation); employs fixed phrases, fillers, and hesitation markers; contains slips and errors reflecting online real-time processing; often involves reciprocity (i.e., interactions are jointly constructed); shows variation (e.g., between formal and casual speech); and reflects speaker roles, speaking purpose, and context (Luoma, 2004).

Brown and Yule (1983) drew a useful distinction between the interactional functions of speaking, which establish and maintain social relations, and the transactional functions, which focus on the exchange of information. Richards (2008) has expanded on this distinction and added 'talk as performance'. A description of the features of each of these functions and an outline of the skills required by the speaker to accomplish the function are presented in Table 1.
Table 1
Functions of Speaking (based on Richards, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Suggested Skills</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk as Interaction</td>
<td>• Socially oriented&lt;br&gt;• Interactive and interpersonal&lt;br&gt;• Constructed jointly and involving interlocutors negotiating meaning&lt;br&gt;• May be casual or formal&lt;br&gt;• Reflects the role relationships&lt;br&gt;• Uses conversational conventions&lt;br&gt;• Reflects degrees of politeness&lt;br&gt;• Examples include conversations</td>
<td>• Opening and closing conversations&lt;br&gt;• Choosing topics&lt;br&gt;• Turn-taking&lt;br&gt;• Making small talk&lt;br&gt;• Reacting to others&lt;br&gt;• Choosing the appropriate style of speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk as Transaction</td>
<td>• Message oriented&lt;br&gt;• Emphasis on clarity and successful communication of the message&lt;br&gt;• Characterized by frequent questions, repetitions, comprehension checks&lt;br&gt;• Examples include asking for directions, making purchases, ordering food</td>
<td>• Explaining a need or intention&lt;br&gt;• Describing something&lt;br&gt;• Asking questions, requesting clarification&lt;br&gt;• Confirming information&lt;br&gt;• Justifying an opinion&lt;br&gt;• Making suggestions, comparisons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk as Performance</td>
<td>• Focus is on presentations before an audience&lt;br&gt;• Usually a monologic&lt;br&gt;• Predictable organization and sequencing&lt;br&gt;• Language is frequently similar to written language&lt;br&gt;• Examples include classroom presentations, public announcements, and speeches</td>
<td>• Using an appropriate format&lt;br&gt;• Using an appropriate opening and closing&lt;br&gt;• Maintaining audience engagement&lt;br&gt;• Creating an effect on the audience&lt;br&gt;• Using appropriate vocabulary&lt;br&gt;• Using correct pronunciation and grammar</td>
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Speaking is a complex process that involves a range of sub-skills. Speakers must "...simultaneously attend to content, ... syntax, ... vocabulary, ... the sound system and prosody..." (Hinkel, 2006, p. 114). Speakers also must have knowledge of a wide range of the phonological and syntactic features of the language and of oral genres (Butler, 2000). Within oral interaction, "The speaker must monitor what she has just said to determine whether it matches her intention while she is uttering her current phrase and monitoring that, simultaneously planning her next utterance and fitting that into the overall pattern of what she wants to say, and monitoring as well the reception of her performance on a listener" (Douglas, 1997; 3).

In general, speakers must acquire mastery in the knowledge, skills, and strategies required in the production of oral discourse. First, they need to know what is often termed as the mechanics or mechanical elements of language, which include pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. In general, spoken English is characterized by the use of less complex grammar. For example, when someone wishes to express the idea of setting a time or place to meet, it may be said as follows: "Let's meet at three" or "We're gonna meet at the library." There is also a tendency to use more simplified or colloquial vocabulary. Second, speakers need to know the different functions of speaking as presented in Table 1 (interaction, transaction, and performance). This will enable them to know, for instance, when it is essential for the message to be clear or when accuracy is less important. Third, speakers need to master various strategies related to speaking. These include paraphrasing and restructuring of ideas, as well as cooperative and non-linguistic strategies. Finally, speakers must develop pragmatic and sociolinguistic skills which include being aware of specific social and cultural rules and norms that will enable them to understand how to take into account who is speaking to whom, in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason.
**Performance-Based Tasks**

Performance-based tasks serve as the method of assessing speaking in this kit. Performance-based tasks "require students to engage in some sort of behavior which stimulates, with as much fidelity as possible, goal-oriented target language use outside the language test situation" (Brown, Hudson, Norris, & Bonk, 2002, p. 10, after Long & Norris, 2001).

Performance-based tasks are usually contextualized, providing students with a meaningful context for real language use. They provide students with opportunities to show what they can do with the target language. They are also usually authentic in that the student carries out tasks that have a real communicative purpose and are intended for a real audience. In assessing spoken language, performance-based tasks can flexibly address all students since they allow each student to create personal meaning. Finally, performance-based tasks are well suited to the types of benchmarks appearing in the curriculum, and they are seamlessly integrated into classroom practice.

Each performance-based tasks in the kit provides a prompt that is designed to elicit a speech sample by inviting a response. In other words, the prompt included in each task is intended to encourage students to speak. A prompt might be a sound, a picture, a statement, a text, an object, a particular topic, a question, or a response to what the speaker has said.

The kit includes a varied selection of performance-based tasks based on the following assumptions:

- each task addresses a specific benchmark
- different tasks suit different students
- students work better and are more motivated by real reasons to use language when allowed choice
- students work better when the goals of assessment and the expectations are known
- a range of types of spoken text allow for the collection of a broad array of student performance

The performance-based tasks included in the kit may be used as they are, may be adapted and tailored to a specific educational setting, or may simply serve as models for teachers to develop their own performance-based tasks. When considering the tasks in this kit, or contemplating the design of a performance-based task, the following questions may be helpful:

- What is the general context of the task?
- Does the student have a reason to use the target language?
- Is the task clearly defined?
- Does the topic encourage the speaker to exhibit a range of vocabulary?
- Does the task elicit a meaningful speech sample?
- Does the task suit the linguistic and cognitive level of the students?
Criteria, Student Preparation, and Scoring Procedures

Assessment of student performance is based on a range of criteria that relate to the various aspects of speaking. Each unit in the kit includes suggested criteria deemed most relevant for those tasks appearing in the unit. Furthermore, students should be aware of and understand these assessment criteria. In making the most effective use of criteria the following aspects of assessment are presented here below:

a. definitions of the criteria for the various tasks
b. student preparation
c. assessing performance
d. documenting performance

A. Definitions of Criteria (in alphabetical order):

Communicative ability – Refers to the ability to communicate ideas effectively and convey meaning clearly. It also includes the extent to which the speaker is responsive to language input in an interactive exchange. When assessing communicative ability the assessor should bear the following in mind: register, self-correction, rephrasing, responding appropriately, keeping up the conversation, and turn-taking.

Content – Refers to the extent to which the information, concepts, and explanations are relevant to the topic and comprehensive (i.e., cover several aspects of the topic).

Delivery – Refers to the quality of voice (i.e., attention to volume and speed), rapport with the audience (i.e., attention to eye contact and sensitivity to audience response), use of visual aids (i.e., slides, posters, etc.), and body language (i.e., non-verbal messages that accompany oral language).

Fluency – Refers to the smoothness with which sounds, syllables, words, and phrases are joined together when speaking. When assessing fluency, the assessor should keep in mind the flow and rhythm of speech.

Grammar – Refers to the level of accuracy of previously studied structures. When assessing grammar, the assessor should bear the following in mind: form, word order, verb tense, and subject–verb agreement.

Organization – Refers to the way in which ideas, propositions, and claims are presented in a logical and interesting sequence easily followed by the audience, the extent to which the organizing theme is clear and consistent, and the use of transitions to connect key points.

Pronunciation – Refers to the ability to recognize and produce distinctive, meaningful sounds, which include consonants, vowels, intonation, and stress patterns. Assessing pronunciation involves relating to the intelligibility of speech (i.e., to what extent the speaker is understood by the listener).

Vocabulary – Refers to the extent to which the student uses words, chunks, and phrases accurately, reflecting sufficient variety and appropriateness to the context and interlocutor. When assessing vocabulary, the assessor should bear the following in mind: rich vs. sparse, word choice, and specific terminology.
B. Guidelines for Students

In assessing students' speaking through performance-based tasks, it is essential that they be made aware of the criteria for assessment. Not only is this fair practice, but it also makes them aware of the various aspects of speaking and draws their attention to them. Thus, upon receiving a task, students should also be informed of the assessment criteria for that task. Suggestions have been included in the kit in the form of "student guidelines". Note that these guidelines are presented in both English and in students' L1 (Hebrew/Arabic). However, this does not preclude teachers from reviewing the criteria with the students and providing clear explanations when and where necessary. It should also be kept in mind that the guidelines are only suggestions, and teachers should tailor them to suit their students and instructional context.

C. Grading Performance

Each unit includes suggested criteria for assessing performance in the form of "checklists for grading" and these are aligned with the "student guidelines". Each checklist contains a rating scale (from 1 to 4) for each criterion, and the assessor assesses the extent to which the performance meets that criterion. Teachers may use this checklist to indicate student achievement and/or to keep track of students' progress over time. It may also be used for self and peer-assessment.

The checklists included in each of the five units are very general. Teachers should modify them to suit their particular students and the type of feedback the students will be given. One important modification involves the actual description of each criterion, which should be done in a way that enables students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and gives them an idea of how to improve their performance. Another modification involves altering the weightings of each criterion. For example, when assessing students' ability to ask and answer questions, teachers may wish to focus more on the aspects of fluency and less on accuracy. In assessing presentation, teachers may highlight criteria that relate to accuracy and content.

D. Documenting Performance

After assessing student performance, it is important to document student grades, particularly as this documentation would enable teachers to monitor progress over time. Suggestions for recording performance appear in Appendix 1.(P. 143)
Instructional Activities

"In schools, talk is sometimes valued and sometimes avoided, but – and this is surprising – talk is rarely taught. It is rare to hear teachers discuss their efforts to teach students to talk well. Yet talk, like reading and writing, is a major motor – I could even say the major motor of intellectual development."

(Calkins, 2000, p. 226)

The instructional activities included in this kit are aligned with the assessment tasks. The teacher can choose from the wide range of activities offered, based on their students' needs and their particular educational context. The main aim of these activities is to provide students with opportunities to develop their speaking ability and achieve the relevant benchmarks. The activities in the kit are, of course, not exhaustive; however, they do provide the teacher with a wealth of ideas.

The instructional activities are open-ended and as such provide students with extensive practice in speaking. Following are some general proposals for working with these activities in the classroom prior to assessment. First, in preparing students for carrying out an open-ended speaking activity, the teacher should provide them with both topical information and relevant language forms so they will have what to say and will have the language needed to do so. Second, it is recommended that students be offered choices, and this may be done, for example, by providing a range of topics or having the students suggest topics they would like to talk about. When considering topics, think about the extent to which they will engage the student, and also about the demands they make on students' linguistic competence. Third, students should have a defined period of time in which to speak; in general, this period should be relatively short. Frequent practice of short time periods is preferable to less frequent practice of longer duration. Finally, while students are speaking, their oral practice should be monitored, and the teacher should take note of problems and then give relevant feedback, either individually or in the context of a general review for the class. Feedback could include identification of the students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as suggestions on how to improve their speaking. Teachers may also decide to use peer feedback by training students to critique politely or use certain formulations: I thought it was good, but..., I think you should pay attention to..., etc.

Remember that having students repeat activities, or carry out similar activities to what is required in the assessment tasks, not only enables them to produce more accurate grammar and a wider range of vocabulary, but also produces speaking that is more fluent as compared to original/initial performance (Bygate, 1999; Foster & Skehan, 1996) Opportunities should therefore be provided for repetition and practice.
**Classroom Implementation**

When utilizing this kit for assessing speaking, and in light of the importance of integrating instruction and assessment, it is suggested that the teacher follow a task cycle (Uygan & Bizim, 2009; Willis, 1996) that would include at least four phases: instruction (input phase), practice (rehearsal phase), assessment (performance phase), and analysis (feedback phase). This cycle is presented in the following diagram and explained below.

The instruction phase targets specific aspects of speaking such as discourse functions, pronunciation, intonation, etc. Instruction could include, for example, a discussion of topics that appear in the assessment, highlighting relevant grammar and vocabulary. This stage may benefit the students in many ways, including affording them familiarity with the topic, knowledge of the relevant vocabulary and language structures, etc.

In the practice phase, the students can perform any of the instructional activities included in the kit. Alternatively, the teacher may introduce other activities that are in line with the assessment tasks. During this stage, the students have the opportunity to practice their oral skills and to receive feedback that would then foster self-correction. It is important to provide opportunities for repetition since this helps students become effective in their communication, enhance their fluency, and gain confidence.

In the assessment phase, the students carry out the performance tasks as they appear in this kit. The teacher should attempt to ensure a non-threatening, supportive atmosphere and encourage the students to speak. Students should be given some time to think about the task before the assessment session, the amount of time depending on the task itself and teacher discretion. They should also be encouraged to reflect on their performance immediately after the session.

In the analysis and feedback phase, the teacher analyzes the students' performance on these tasks. The teacher may analyze individual performance or consider the general level of the class. Analyses could be used to determine achievement and/or identify the students' strengths and weaknesses. The results of the analysis serve as a basis on which the teacher provides students with meaningful feedback, thereby leading back to the instruction phase.
The Role of the Teacher

The teacher has many roles within the context of speaking instruction. The teacher is the organizer and as such sets the tasks and activities, and gets the students engaged. The teacher is also the facilitator, providing students with grammar structures and word chunks that they need in order to complete the tasks and activities. The teacher is also expected to be the observer, analyzing any communication breakdowns and determining their causes. And, of course, the teacher has the role of assessor, providing students with meaningful feedback and recording their performance.
**Description of the Kit**

The kit is divided into five units, each one addressing a relevant benchmark in the Domains of Social Interaction and Presentation at the intermediate level. Every unit includes performance tasks and checklists, as well as instructional activities that are aligned with the performance tasks. All the assessment tasks and instructional activities are accompanied by detailed guidelines for effective implementation. For easy navigation through the kit, please refer to the following key:

- Guidelines (general and specific)
- Duration (in minutes)
- Administration (teacher–student; student–student)
- Performance task
- Checklist
- Accompanying materials
- Instructional tasks

**Target Population**

The kit is designed for use in grades seven through nine, but can be used at other grade levels based on teacher discretion.

**Choice of Tasks**

You are autonomous in your choice of tasks and activities in accordance with your educational and instructional goals and context as well as with your target student population. They may be used as they are, or changes may be made to suit the particular instructional setting and assessment purpose. You are also autonomous in decisions regarding the order of administration of the tasks and activities.

**Preparation of Material for Task Administration**

Most of the performance-based tasks appear on cards which are presented to the student. It is recommended you photocopy these cards and laminate them for repeated use.

**General Overview of the Units**

Unit 1 (pp. 27-45) focuses on social interaction and involves students in a paired interaction (either student–student or teacher–student) in which they learn about each other by asking and answering questions on a range of topics. The main aim is to assess the students' ability to ask and answer questions.
Unit 2 (pp. 47-72) also focuses on social interaction and includes two different tasks, one involving an interview (teacher–student), and the other a student role play. The main aim is to assess the student's ability to **express personal wishes and opinions** in a social context.

Unit 3 (pp. 73-99) focuses on social interaction and is based on role plays in which students are presented with a scenario that they subsequently act out. The unit includes three sets of scenarios that cover examples of purposes for interaction suggested in the benchmark that requires students to give **instructions, compliments, and advice**.

Unit 4 (pp. 101-116) focuses on social interaction and involves an extended conversation between the teacher and the student on a given topic. Students should be encouraged to engage in a natural flow of conversation since the main aim of the unit is to assess their ability to **carry on an extended conversation**.

Unit 5 (pp. 117-141) focuses on presentation and is a two-part assessment that covers two separate benchmarks. Part 1 involves the presentation of information collected from different sources. Part 2 involves the design and administration of a means for collecting information, and then reporting on the results of this data collection. Both parts involve an individual monologue that can be presented to different audiences, such as only the teacher, only the class, or the teacher and the class. The main aim of the unit is to assess the student's ability to **collect and integrate information** (from written sources or using a self-designed means of collecting information) and to **present it in the form of an oral presentation**.