

Dynamic Speaking Test: The test construct

Who is the test for?

The primary goal of the Dynamic Speaking Test (DST) is to provide a holistic view of a test taker's speaking ability in English. It is designed for situations where a quick and accurate assessment with minimal preparation is required. For example, in an educational context, teachers might use it to help place students into the right class or to monitor their progress across the academic year. In a professional context, employers might use it to check prospective employees' level of spoken English.

DST aims to evaluate a test taker's general speaking ability. It is not restricted to specific situations but focuses on the ability to handle a variety of spoken communications across different registers and styles in an English-speaking environment. These can cover study, work or everyday life in English-speaking countries and also in international settings where it is necessary to communicate effectively with fellow students, colleagues and business partners.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

DST utilises a task-based, communicative approach, and evaluates test takers' speaking abilities against the CEFR. To achieve the purpose described above, the test includes assessments of different language registers, domains, language levels and topics, all drawn from the CEFR. It requires candidates to engage in communicative speaking tasks such as offering suggestions to a friend, dealing with a customer complaint, or giving opinions about contrasting ideas. The topics reflect general interests, as well as educational and workplace scenarios. The test caters to all CEFR levels, accommodating beginner, intermediate and advanced speakers.

Test design

a Overall design

In designing the test, our objective was to assess how far candidates could function effectively in a range of English-speaking environments. Guidance from the CEFR was used to design tasks which would assess oral competence in a holistic way.

- *Register*: Ability to switch between formal and informal language
- *Domain*: Ability to use spoken English in various domains (e.g. public, personal, educational, professional)
- *Language level*: Test taker performance across the range of CEFR proficiency levels (A1 to C2)
- *Topic*: Ability to deal with a range of topics
- *Integrated performance*: Inclusion of a task that requires the integration of speaking and reading skills

Tasks and the CEFR

b Task by task

Task 1	
Objective (based on CEFR descriptors)	Assess the ability to give a simple description of people, daily routines, likes / dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.
CEFR Level	A1 – A2
Domain	Personal
Register	Informal

Task 2	
Objective (based on CEFR descriptors)	Assess the ability to speak with some confidence on familiar routine and non-routine matters related to the personal and professional domains. Also assess the ability to use textual clues to make conclusions about someone's character or lifestyle.
CEFR Level	A2 – B1
Domain	Personal / Professional
Register	Informal

Task 3	
Objective (based on CEFR descriptors)	Assess the ability to report factual information and to communicate advice on a matter related to the professional domain. Also assess the ability to mediate information between written and spoken channels.
CEFR Level	B1 – B2
Domain	Professional
Register	Formal

Task 4	
Objective (based on CEFR descriptors)	Assess the candidate's ability to explain why they don't approve of someone's plans and give reasons to justify this opinion. Also assess the ability to suggest an alternative solution.
CEFR Level	B1 – B2
Domain	Personal / Professional
Register	Informal / Formal

Task 5	
Objective (based on CEFR descriptors)	Assess the ability to summarise statements made by two sides and to develop an argument systematically, using relevant supporting detail.
CEFR Level	B2 – C1
Domain	Educational / Professional
Register	Formal

Task 6	
Objective (based on CEFR descriptors)	Assess the ability to outline a personal interpretation of a creative work and to comment on ways in which the work engages the audience. Also assess the ability to present a complex topic confidently and articulately.
CEFR Level	C1 – C2
Domain	Personal
Register	Formal / Informal

C Assessment criteria

DST uses AI to evaluate test takers' performance based on their input against five key criteria:

- *Pronunciation*: Clarity of speech and proper intonation; making the speech intelligible
- *Fluency*: Maintenance of a natural speech flow without excessive pauses
- *Grammar*: Production of grammatically correct sentences
- *Vocabulary*: Use of an appropriate and broad range of vocabulary
- *Task Achievement*: Ability to handle various types of communicative tasks appropriately

The score is determined by the test taker's input and the AI system's evaluation of that input against the assessment criteria. The system does not infer anything beyond what is explicitly spoken. Nor is it influenced by factors such as the test taker's accent, gender or other personal characteristics. This enables the test to be free of subjective assumptions or biases.

Test results

The test result is given as a CEFR level: from **A1 to C2**.

As a single CEFR level covers a wide band of linguistic competence, we have added a numeric score (the Relative Numeric on a scale of 0–120) which is useful as a relative indicator within a CEFR level result. The purpose of the Relative Numeric is to help an institution differentiate test takers in a situation where a large number are placed in the same CEFR level.

There are two other possible results:



Unclassified. This indicates that the candidate has not attempted enough questions for their level to be assessed.



Also described as Below A1. There is no evidence that the test taker has any English ability.

