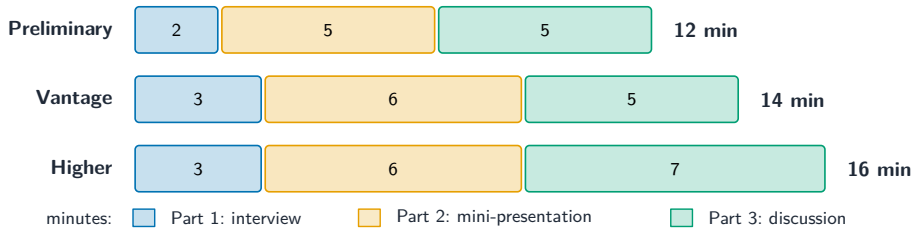
Speaking: interview, mini-presentation and discussion

BEC Business English

What this topic covers

The BEC Speaking test is a short, friendly business conversation with three parts. You take it **in a pair**, with two examiners. This topic shows what happens in each part, how the examiners give marks, and simple patterns that make your answers longer, clearer and more natural.



Three parts at every level: talk about yourself, give a short talk, discuss together

	Preliminary	Vantage	Higher
Whole test	12 minutes	14 minutes	16 minutes
Part 1: interview	about 2 minutes	about 3 minutes	about 3 minutes
Part 2: mini-presentation	about 5 minutes	about 6 minutes	about 6 minutes
Part 3: discussion	about 5 minutes	about 5 minutes	about 7 minutes

- One examiner, the **interlocutor**, asks the questions and gives you the tasks. The other, the **assessor**, only listens and marks.
- If the numbers are odd, the last three candidates take the test as a group of three.

Part 1: the interview

The interlocutor asks each of you about yourself (your name, your work or studies, where you live), then about business topics: your opinions and preferences.

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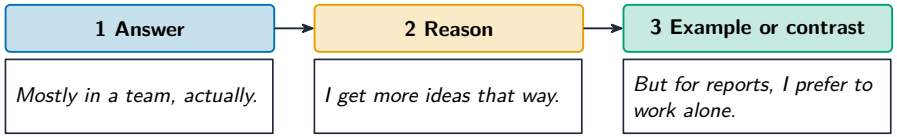
Do you prefer working alone or in a team?



Answer, reason, example: two or three sentences, about 15–20 seconds

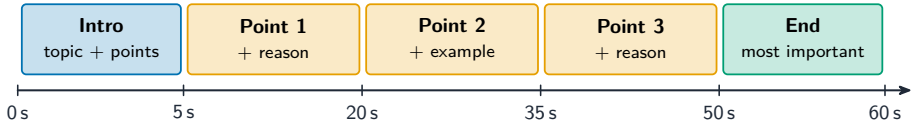
- △ *"Yes."* and silence gives the examiner nothing to mark.
- △ A one-minute speech is also wrong: your partner needs time too.
- Useful starts: *I'd say…*, *It depends on…*, *To be honest, I prefer…*, *For example, last month…*

Part 2: the mini-presentation

This is the **long turn**: about one minute of talk on a business topic, alone.

	Preliminary	Vantage	Higher
Choice	one topic from **two**	one topic from **three**	one topic from **three**
Preparation	1 minute	1 minute	1 minute
Your talk	about 1 minute	about 1 minute	about 1 minute
Afterwards	your partner says which point they think is most important	your partner asks you a question	your partner asks you a question

Each **prompt card** has a title, such as *What is important when choosing a supplier?*, and two or three points.

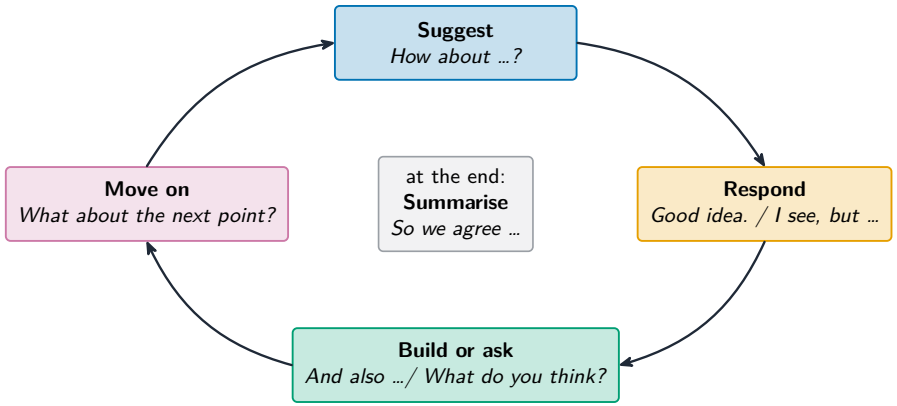


Introduce, three points with reasons, conclude

- In the minute of preparation, write **key words only**, never sentences.
- Use **signposts** so the examiner can follow you: *There are three things to think about. First,… Another point is… Finally,… So, for me, the most important thing is…*
- **Listen to your partner's talk.** You will answer or ask a question about it.

Part 3: the discussion

You and your partner discuss a business situation together, as colleagues. At Preliminary there are pictures or written prompts; at Vantage a topic with points; at Higher a short situation with two discussion points. Then the interlocutor asks a few more questions on the same theme.



Suggest, respond, build or ask, move on, and summarise at the end

Job	Phrases
Suggest	*Why don't we…?* · *How about…?* · *I think we should…*
Agree	*Good idea.* · *That's true, and also…*
Disagree politely	*I see what you mean, but…* · *That's a good point, although…*
Ask	*What do you think?* · *Which would you choose?*
Summarise	*So we agree that…* · *Shall we say… then?*

- Keep turns **short** so the talk goes back and forth.
- Aim to **reach a decision**, or at least to compare the ideas and say which you prefer.

How the examiners mark you

- The **assessor** gives marks for **grammar and vocabulary**, **discourse management** (longer answers that are organised and linked), **pronunciation** and **interactive communication** (taking turns, responding to your partner, keeping the talk going).
- The **interlocutor** gives one overall mark for the whole test.
- At Higher, grammar and vocabulary are marked separately.

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- Every candidate is marked **alone**: a quiet partner does not lower your mark, and a strong partner does not raise it.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Learning answers by heart.** Examiners hear a recited answer at once, and it often doesn't fit the question. Learn **patterns** and phrases, not speeches.
- △ **Waiting to be invited.** In Part 3, nobody tells you when to speak. Ask your partner questions and respond.
- △ **Flat stress.** English stresses the key word: *I'd **pre**fer the **cheap**er one.* Practise reading model answers aloud with the stress.
- △ **Silence when you don't know a word.** Say it another way: *the thing you use to… / a kind of…*

Try it

Cover the answers first.

1. Turn this into a good Part 1 answer: *Q: Do you like working in a team? A: Yes.*
2. Your card: *What is important when organising a business trip?* Points: cost, timing, hotel. Write a one-line introduction.
3. Your partner says: *"I think we should advertise online."* You disagree. What could you say?
4. Which part has one minute of preparation?
5. Your partner talks for three minutes in Part 3 and you say almost nothing. What does the assessor lose information about?
6. Give a signpost for your last point.

Answers. 1 For example: *Yes, mostly. I get more ideas in a team, but for writing reports I prefer to work alone.* 2 For example: *There are three things to think about when organising a business trip: cost, timing and the hotel.* 3 *I see what you mean, but online adverts are expensive for a small shop. How about the local newspaper?* 4 **Part 2**, the mini-presentation. 5 **Your interactive communication** (and your language: there is little to mark). 6 *Finally, …* or *The last point is…*

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. How long is the Vantage Speaking test? – **14 minutes**.
2. What does the assessor do? – **Listens and marks**; the interlocutor asks the questions.
3. How long is your mini-presentation? – **About one minute**, after one minute of preparation.

4. What is the aim of Part 3? – To **discuss** with your partner and **reach a decision** or compare ideas.
5. Does a weak partner lower your mark? – **No.** Each candidate is marked alone.

Vocabulary card meanings

interlocutor: The examiner who asks the questions and gives the tasks in a speaking test. assessor: The examiner who listens and gives marks but does not speak. long turn: A part of a speaking test where one person talks alone for about a minute. prompt card: A card with a topic and points to help you prepare a talk. signpost: A phrase such as first or finally that shows the listener where your talk is going. discourse management: Speaking in longer, organised and linked turns. pronunciation: How you say sounds, words and sentences. interactive communication: Taking turns, responding to your partner and keeping a conversation going.

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