

# Examples of speaking Tests for University Students

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**Abstract**—University professors and instructors teaching Oral English communication classes are often faced with the dilemma of how to fairly judge the improvement of their students. Written tests are often not sufficient for gauging the speaking level of students. My presentation will compare and contrast the midterm speaking tests of five English native speaking instructors with diverse backgrounds and similar levels of education. As this is a required university exercise, each teacher has had to create their own methods of grading students speaking ability for a university mid-term exam.

The important factors for examining a student's ability is not just the exercise itself but how does the instructor fairly grade the test and time management. I will talk about the following factors in giving the speaking tests: methods based on the levels of the students, the length of each student's test, the numbers of students present during each test, and the instructor's grading rubric. How are the instructors similar and different? I hope this will give current and future of instructors of English an understanding of what is relevant, important, and necessary in Oral English-speaking examinations.

**Keywords**— speaking test, midterm, Oral English, university.

## I. INTRODUCTION

I'm not sure which we enjoy more as educators, our educational past and taking exams or the present and giving exams. When your focus is Oral Communication of English or another language, it's always difficult to judge how effective an exam measures a student's speaking ability. It's also not always possible, due to time constraints, to give a speaking exam due to the size of the class and number of students. It's easy to hand out a textbook exam or create a written exam, grade the number of correct answers, and give the students a grade.

The other option is to give a speaking exam which also can create many dilemmas. It's often difficult to determine an effective way to give a speaking exam. What's the best way to judge a student's speaking ability? What's the best criteria for grading a speaking exam? The problem is instructors have different interpretations and opinions on how to administer and how to grade. Another problem lies with the nature of a speaking test. The student is not in a natural speaking situation but in the process of taking a test, so their mindset and attitude is different [1].

My presentation will look at a Japanese university in Osaka. Its instructor's speaking-based mid-term exams. All instructors are based in from different areas and have varied

levels of education. The Department of International Studies under the English department has required all instructors since 2018 to give a speaking focused midterm exam. This applies to the mid-term only and not the final exam. Instructors are free to choose their own style and method for the exam and exam grading.

The following are ideas and techniques for giving English speaking exams. I'll look at five examples and allow the reader or listener to determine which is the most effective for their needs and situation.

## II. UNIVERSITY AND PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The university was established in 1971 and its two campuses are located between Osaka and Nara in the Kinki area of Japan. It currently has approximately 3300 students. According to the Ranking Web of Universities [2] its rating is 447 out of approximately 1000 Japanese Universities. Thus, the university is ranked in the middle of Japanese Universities. The university program is relatively new and called International Studies. It was started in 2016 and has students from all over Asia including: China, Korea, and Vietnam. Students are required to study both Japanese and English and are able to participate in an overseas study program allowing them to study in the spring or summer for approximately a month. The students can choose a North American or Asian country. Their choice is based on the cost and desired place to study. Students can choose from Asian or North American countries such as Malaysia, The Philippines, The United States, Canada, or New Zealand. Classes are separated into first-year students with classes referred to as Intensive English Classes and second-year students whose classes are referred to as Advanced English Classes. Unlike most Japanese University classes, classes are held twice weekly. The classes are reasonably sized of under twenty students with each class averaging around eighteen students. This class size is beneficial as the instructors can finish a speaking type exam in one or two classes. The program is also focused on student's having an TOEIC score of around 600 by their third year of university but the biggest emphasis of the classes is to improve the student's speaking ability.

## III. INSTRUCTORS

The instructors are diverse both in their origin but have somewhat similar educational background and areas of study. Three instructors are from different areas of the United States: The East coast, The Midwest, and The West Coast. Two instructors are from England. The instructor's undergraduate degrees are either related to English, Japanese Language, or Linguistics. All instructors have a Masters in T.E.O.S.L. or

Linguistics. One instructor is in the process on finishing his P.H.D.. One has recently started working on his PHD dissertation. One finished his course work but recently stopped working on his dissertation. The final two instructors have a Masters in TEOSL and Linguistics. All five instructors have been teaching English more than five years. Three instructors have been teaching more than ten years.

#### IV. EXAMPLES OF SPEAKING TEST ACTIVITIES AND GRADING RUBRICS

The following are examples of the different types of mid-term speaking tests administered by the instructors. Each type is explained along with its grading rubric.

##### A. *Student's Interactive Interview*

One example is a two-part student-based interview. Since class is ninety-minutes the goal is to finish the interview in one class period. Students are paired at random. They are given a list of questions related to the text covered over the first half of the semester. In part one, students can choose any of the questions to ask their partner and must ask five questions from each topic. They must ask an additional three related questions on each topic. Each student takes turn being the interviewer and interviewee. Some of the topics for the past fall midterm included introductory questions, questions related to the student's summer vacation or trip, and questions focusing on the past tense.

The second part of the exam are role plays in which the students choose, and model role plays related to the materials covered in class. The pairs are required to do two role plays from four possibilities. Topics from the last exam included, business telephone answering and weekend activities. Students must memorize and adapt their role play to their personal information and responses from their partner.

The grading rubric is based on the student's abilities to maintain interview on an eight to ten-minute period, their ability to ask and answer questions during the interview period. The role plays are graded on student's ability to complete the role-play without looking at the script. The student's ability to adjust their role-depending on their personal information and situation. Students are also graded on their intonation and fluency.

##### B. *Teacher-student Interview*

A second type of interview involves the instructor in a question and answer interview. This is followed by a role-play and role-play question and answer. The students are asked a series of questions by the instructor based on class exercises and material covered during the first half of the semester and a review of information from the last semester. Students are again paired up and asked questions in rotating order. One student is asked a question followed by the second student. In the second group of questions the second student in the group is asked first followed by the first student. The level of the class and student dictated the level of the questions.

The basic student questions included.

- 1) Where do you live?
- 2) What is your part-time job?

##### 3) What sport do you like?

The questions are followed by a role-play and teacher questions about the role-play.

The role-play questions included.

- 1) What is the person's jobs?
- 2) What is the person's motivation?
- 3) Where was the person the night before?

Grading was based on the student's comprehension, answer, pronunciation/intonation during the role-play, and fluency.

##### C. *Topic, skit, or debate*

A third type of activity was a student activity for higher level students based around a free topic, debate, or skit. The instructor gives the students a list of topics the students can choose from or they are free to pick their own topic. Some of the topic options were using a cell phone in class, an interview with a famous person, a news show, a comedy skit, or planning a strip. The students worked in groups of three and could choose their own group members. Grading was based around five points: time, volume, overall quality, pronunciation, and intonation.

##### D. *Student's self-introduction and teacher questions*

A fourth type of activity involves the students giving a three-minute self-introduction in English followed by related questions. This is done by individual students. The student is allowed to talk about a variety of topics including: their family, hometown, hobbies and interests, favorite things, and childhood. They are free to pick any topic but have to memorize their speech and are not allowed to check their paper during the test. The instructor gave a 250-word guidance for the length of the presentation. The instructor then asks the student questions related to their self-introduction. Grading is based on five areas of focus: contents, pronunciation/intonation, fluency, comprehension, and responses. Each area has a five-point scale with from one to five with five being the best.

##### E. *A Short Speech*

The final type of speaking exam is an open-topic speech. These students are in the lowest level class or class for students who have repeatedly failed. Since the students are frequently absent, the teacher allows any type of type of topic in a three-minute speech. The goal is to have the students complete the activity. They are instructed to write from 250 to 350 words in their speech. Grading is based on several areas including body of the speech, conclusion, eye contact, body language, and clarity.

##### F. *Text-based material*

The final option used was based around the questions and answers in the back of each chapter. The instructor interviewed each student using the questions in the back of the semester textbook in three-minute intervals. The student's interviews are also recorded to be checked and reviewed later. Grading is based on fluency, pronunciation, volume, and body language.

#### V. CONCLUSION

These examples are able to give an idea for other instructors to use in speaking based exams. While the types of speaking tests varied, the instructors had similar grading criteria:

fluency, intonation, pronunciation, and others. Instructors are encouraged to try and use the previous mentioned ideas and experiment with their own ideas in giving speaking-based tests and exams. This university is ranked in the middle of Japanese Universities, but the examples are a good basis for more difficult types of speaking exams for any English situation.

#### REFERENCES

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