

Spoken text and the development of productive speaking skills for B1 learners

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DESCRIPTION

In this pathway we will consider how spoken texts are assessed at B1 level and the types of tasks students are expected to do. We will consider how the teacher can help students to prepare spoken texts effectively through development of strategies and well-planned teaching practices.

Specific reference will be made to:

- expectations at B1 level;
- text types and assessment;
- helping learners to communicate effectively;
- strategies needed to produce and practice speaking texts;
- adequate preparation provision to empower students;
- relevant student and teacher evaluation.

This pathway will assist teachers by making them think more about the importance of preparation, rehearsal and performance stages of lessons and how these elements can be incorporated successfully in a series of lessons.

Student goals

Students will be encouraged to plan carefully, prepare and present a story about a fantastic party.

If possible they will present the story to the class through an avatar.

Teacher goals

Teachers will learn to consider the essential areas of assessment of spoken texts, what texts B1 learners are expected to produce, the key stages needed to prepare students for spoken texts and how to incorporate these in their lesson planning.

They will also be introduced to the importance of providing relevant and useful preparation and practice, employing appropriate strategies.

Teachers will learn about how to reflect on and analyse classroom activities in order to improve as a teacher and offer students an improved experience.

Strategies and tools

In the first part of the module teachers will begin by looking at the CEFR descriptors and assign levels to them. This should help teachers to clearly focus on what is and what is not expected of a B1 learner.

They will then briefly focus on the CEF description and consider what to assess.

Teachers then go on to consider how spoken texts are assessed and the type of spoken text learners are expected to produce at B1 level in both formal and informal situations.

Teachers will compare their ideas with an article and formulate their own assessment criteria through reflection on their own speaking assessments.

In the second part of the module teachers are asked to consider what support students need in order to successfully prepare and deliver spoken texts. Teachers are asked to listen to a student telling an anecdote and consider what help in preparation and strategies learners may need.

Teachers then explore the three key stages for preparing spoken texts: preparation, rehearsal and performance, look at examples that support this and will teach a lesson incorporating the stages.

Teachers then evaluate classroom management and goal achievement with reference to the effectiveness of the lesson and reflect on what they might do differently next time.

The value of integrating ICT

Students are prepared to deal with the material through contextualisation and vocabulary support.

Teachers can include examples and materials used to exemplify preparation to further strengthen preparation if necessary.

Avatar software such as voki is an excellent resource for teachers. Recording students speaking provides the opportunity for both students and teachers to monitor their progress which is, in itself, a motivational factor in any learning experience.

It also supports shyer or more reticent learners as they are talking through an avatar and do not feel on the spot. The presentation stage creates a realistic reason for completing the task and, with guidance and support beforehand; students can approach such a task more confidently.

By encouraging the students to upload their recordings to a class wiki there is plenty of scope to exploit the texts at a later stage, for assessment purposes, pronunciation, discourse or language work.

ACTIVITY

Step 1

Why

Speaking is considered the most challenging skill for learners of English but is probably the most necessary. It is where receptive knowledge becomes active and where learners are assessed in both formal and informal situations. It is where learning takes place. Passive knowledge becomes active. There are many reasons why students have difficulty with speaking as a skill and it is the teacher's role to structure the lessons in order to provide students with the best possible opportunity to practise this skill productively. In this pathway advice is given to prepare students to perform better during speaking activities. This will be done through careful lesson staging and by providing a clear framework in which to develop ideas and support.

Why do students find speaking so difficult?

Learning to speak in English for many learners is a challenge. Transferring receptive understanding and making it productive takes time and requires adequate exposure to language and texts.

Have students had enough time to prepare?

It has long been said that the journey is more important than the destination, the doing is often more important than the outcome. When we set about planning lessons that prepare learners to deliver a spoken text or a task that involves assessment of speaking, the time you allocate to the preparation stages should always be greater than the time you plan to spend delivering. The preparation stage is when real learning takes place. Rushing students through this stage and not giving them time to practice can have a de-motivating and negative backwash. Use this time to assess learners needs fully and consider where you can give them support.

Are they motivated or interested in the tasks and topics?

The topic and the task are fundamental here but we need to be realistic. Students may have a lot to say about the internet or reality programmes but need to cover a variety and range of topics to be prepared for a multitude of possible testing situations.

Introducing a topic in an engaging way and ensuring students are well prepared for a topic will increase motivation and interest. It will help them to approach the task confidently.

Tasks need to be varied and interesting and learners need to be able to approach them confidently. Insist on students working together and encourage speaking in English at all times.

Praise will help to build confidence and ensure a positive learning atmosphere; some learners can find points systems (another form of praise) motivating.

How does the way we assess students affect the way we teach them?

At some point in their lives our students will be judged on how confidently and accurately they can speak in English. Some of them will have to stand up and make a speech while others will need to defend their ideas in public. How can we prepare them for challenges like these? Does what we do in the classroom really prepare them for this?

For example, we often use images to engage learners in a topic. Taking time in class to ask learners to describe a picture to their partner is a highly relevant activity. It helps learner to generate ideas and revise language. It gives them speaking practice and could be a task they are asked to undertake in a more formal test situation. The more practice we give them the more opportunities they have to learn, develop fluency and confidence.

Group discussions where students are given a limited amount of time to reach an agreement (or disagree) may also help to bridge formal testing with classroom practice.

What criteria do we use?

Some students are highly accurate but have difficulty with fluency, others are very fluent and communicative but highly inaccurate. The task we give them may determine our criteria or may form part of our overall assessment of the students speaking. What to assess can be a challenge for many teachers so determining a criteria and ensuring our assessment meets required standards, in this case B1, needs careful consideration.

What is expected of a B1 learner?

At times teachers' expectations of B1 learners can be too high, particularly when it comes to accuracy. Too much classroom time may be dedicated to language work or writing leaving little time to develop

communicative competence and fluency. We will look at the definition of a B1 learner in more detail in the next part of this module.

Teachers need to have a clear idea of what is expected and learners need clear examples of what they need to do. Self-assessment through can do statements help both students and teachers have a better understanding of what they need to do.

What can we do to help our students feel more confident when they approach spoken tasks?

We need to ensure students are confident with the task before they are assessed or asked to present. Too much emphasis on the final product and not enough time and encouragement on the process can lead to students feeling worried or stressed. Curriculums are lengthy and time can be limited. We need to really make time to listen to students at all times so we can identify and build in activities to support learners when we see they are having difficulty or need to revise, for example, a language item or develop an area of lexis.

Why is preparation and practice so important?

As mentioned previously preparation is integral for students confidence and delivery. Giving students time to prepare and practice in a comfortable learning environment ensures they can reflect on the task and measure their progress. Learning from mistakes and building repair strategies means they become more effective and reflective learners and can measure their own progress.

How and what

What is a B1 level student?

This pathway asks you to think about some of the concepts we need to consider when preparing students to speak, prepare spoken texts and perform in formal assessment situations where they may be asked to deliver an oral presentation.

Before we do this it may be opportune to consider what is actually required of a B1 learner.

Look at the following statements and decide which ones apply to a B1 level student. There is one example.

1. This student is able to communicate in most familiar situations. (B1)
2. This student needs help from the person he/she is talking with in order to prevent communication from breaking down.
3. This student's pronunciation is easily understood, though he/she may have some L1 features when he/she speaks.
4. This student's pronunciation is generally intelligible, but some of the L1 features may put a strain on the listener.
5. This student is able to handle communication in most situations.
6. This student rarely produces inaccuracies and inappropriate language.
7. This student can construct longer utterances but can't use complex language except in well-rehearsed utterances.

Have a look at the answers, did anything surprise you?

1. This student is able to communicate in most familiar situations. (B1)
2. This student needs help from the person he/she is talking in order to prevent communication from breaking down. (A2)
3. This student's pronunciation is easily understood, though he/she may have some L1 features when he/she speaks. (B2)
4. This student's pronunciation is generally intelligible, but some of the L1 features may put a strain on the listener. (B1)
5. This student is able to handle communication in most situations. (C1)
6. This student rarely produces inaccuracies and inappropriate language. (C2)
7. This student can construct longer utterances but can't use complex language except in well-rehearsed utterances. (B1)

Sometimes the expectations of our students are higher than is generally needed. We may spend time worrying about grammatical errors and that our students pronounce words with some L1 features without asking ourselves if the message is well organised. It is important to recognise that at B1 level (even with some strain) L1 features are acceptable.

Look carefully at the common scale for Speaking and highlight key words used to describe what a B1 learner can do.

LEVEL	THRESHOLD
B1	PRELIMINARY ENGLISH TEST: Limited but effective command of the spoken language <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Able to handle communication in most familiar situations.• Able to construct longer utterances but is not able to use complex language except in well-rehearsed utterances.• Has problems searching for language resources to express ideas and concepts resulting in pauses and hesitation.• Pronunciation is generally intelligible, but L1 features may put a strain on the listener.• Has some ability to compensate for communication difficulties using repair strategies but may require prompting and assistance by an interlocutor.

[[cambridge_esol_common_scale_for_speaking.pdf](#)]

When we look closely at this description of what is expected of B1 learner, these key words help us to shape and prepare our lessons and help us identify areas of support for learners. They are:

- Is unable to use complex language unless it is well-rehearsed.
- Can talk about familiar situations.
- Can search for language and use repair strategies.

In simple words a B1 learner has 'limited but effective command of the spoken language'. As teachers we need to ensure we help them to communicate effectively and support their learning.

Text types and assessment

At B1 level students are expected to speak in a variety of situations. Depending on the assessment requirements of your school they may be asked to do one or more of the following activities.

- Talk about themselves.
- Describe a picture or a photograph.
- Discuss questions related to a theme.
- Do an information gap activity with a partner.
- Tell a story or a personal anecdote.
- Deliver an oral presentation.

Assessment of your students may take place in class or with an external examination board. The assessment criteria should follow similar standards in order to bridge classroom activities with more formal assessment. Further ideas on assessing speaking can be explored here: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/evaluating-speaking-part-2>.

Helping learners

Students need to be able to speak with confidence as it is the skill by which they are most frequently judged. 'It is the vehicle *par excellence* of social solidarity, of social ranking, of professional advancement and of business' (Bygate, 1987).

Students are motivated to speak for a variety of reasons and there is quite conclusive evidence, in both first and second language learning, that it is one of the most effective ways to learn a language.

In order to communicate effectively learners need communication strategies that will help them exploit opportunities to speak effectively and become autonomous. A good way to do this is to provide learners with a model first. There is an example in the follow up lesson plan. This gives learners a clear idea of where they need to get to.

Preparation, however is necessary to get students to the final production stage.

We can help learners by providing them with clear contexts and activate their knowledge of a topic. If a specific language point is related to the topic we may decide to incorporate teaching or revision of this in the lesson. What is really important is to provide learners with a framework to plan and practice with. This may be some simple prompts left on the board or a more structured planning grid. Some examples can be found in the lesson planning materials that follow.

As teachers we need to consider the following stages carefully.

Preparation for the task

Students need to engage and activate their knowledge of the task they are to encounter. Begin by brainstorming the theme, vocabulary and ideas needed for the task. Depending on the activity you are preparing the students for, you may need to revise or present new vocabulary, focus on a language point and remind students of language needed for the activity.

Students need to prepare a draft and, depending on the level, guidance can help them to plan and formulate ideas in a logical manner. Giving them a framework or structure to work within helps them to do this well.

They also need to fully explore communication strategies such as:

- What to do when they don't know a word.
- If they are working with a partner they need to be clear about turn-taking, agreeing and disagreeing, making suggestions and showing interest.

Further ideas can be explored here:

<http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/exams/speaking-exams/communication-strategies>.

Rehearsal

Get students to think about tips for doing the task well. Ideas could be generated by brainstorming the do's and don'ts of an activity. Some suggestions for classroom use can be found here:

http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/sites/teens/files/tell_a_story_or_personal_anecdote_tips_1.pdf.

Students then need time to practice. Working in pairs and groups can help to build confidence and enable them to notice errors and learn from their peers. Use this time to listen to students and note down errors. Use class time to focus on this sensitively and remember to focus on the positive aspects too!

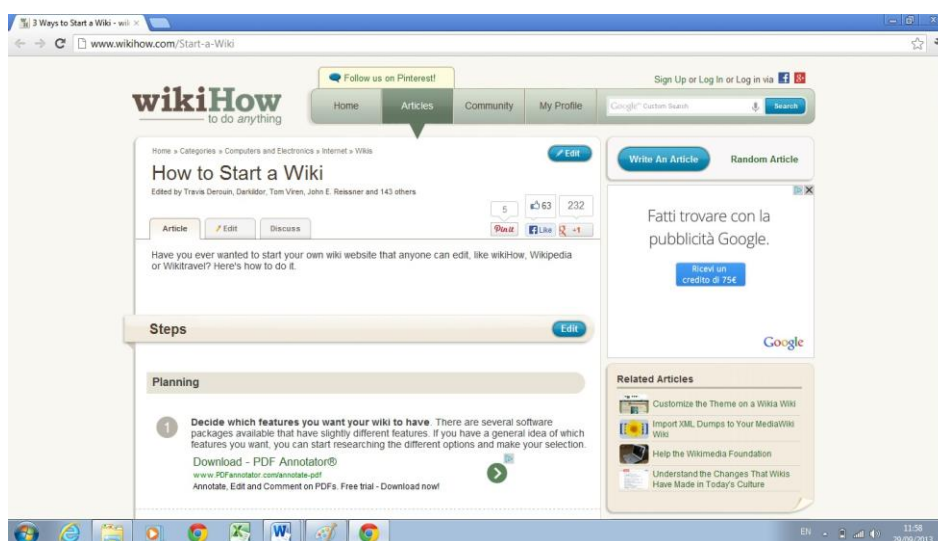
Integration of technology can be extremely useful at this stage. Using a programme like voki (<http://www.voki.com/>) can provide motivating practice for learners in a medium that is relevant to their interests. Time spent preparing and editing can be motivating for students and avoid them feeling put on the spot. Students can re-record and edit their work until they are happy with the final product. This helps to increase autonomy and confidence with the task.



Before you start using this programme I would recommend you look at the getting started tutorials on their website: <http://www.voki.com/learn.php>.

Performance and review

When you are certain the students are ready, move on to the performance stage. How you decide to get students to present their work will depend on the facilities your school can provide. The materials in the lesson plan that follow encourage you to get students to load their presentations to a class wiki. Watch this brief tutorial to explore further what a wiki is and how it could be useful for you: <http://www.teachersfirst.com/content/wiki/>.



An alternative may be the voki classroom.

Should you decide to do either it is recommended you fully explore both tutorials available on the websites:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Start-a-Wiki> or

<https://voki.com/classroom/faq.php>.

By encouraging the students to upload their recordings to a class wiki there is plenty of scope to exploit the texts at a later stage, for assessment purposes, pronunciation, discourse or language work.

Plan your lessons to allow for speaking tasks. Students must be prepared with the necessary language before being asked to complete speaking tasks.

Teach your students how to speak by preparing them with strategies. Motivate by giving students a valid reason for doing the task and create an environment where students can gain confidence in speaking (and listening to each other).

Summary

Building confidence in speaking is essential for student motivation and their future. As teachers, we cannot go into the classroom and ask our students to talk about any given topic unprepared. Understanding how to prepare students for a given task helps us to plan and stage our lessons so that we help our students to deliver successful spoken texts in a variety of situations.

Activities need structure, language input, key phrases and vocabulary. Peer preparation and self-assessment tasks are necessary and an important part of learning so that our students are able to assess their own work. The teacher therefore needs to choose activities that will interest the students and give them the opportunity and motivation to speak.

Through understanding of what a B1 learner is expected to do and having a clear understanding of teaching methodology, we, as teachers, have the tools to create effective and communicative lessons to cater for our students' needs.

Using ICT and the internet enables us to develop learners digital skills needed for life-long learning.

This also gives students the opportunity to become more autonomous; having tools they can use outside the classroom, for example, a class wiki.

Overall, success in delivering spoken texts, comes down to having the structure, language and vocabulary needed for the task, understanding what is expected, relevant practice, evaluation and feedback, both for the teacher and the student.

Step 2

Task 1 - Spoken texts in Class (Reflection)

What do you do in class? Are you the type of teacher who avoids speaking activities and prefers to keep the students quiet? Or do you plan your lessons so that your students understand each stage and aim of the lesson. Do your students enjoy speaking in class? And do you enjoy teaching them? These are only a few questions we can ask ourselves to reflect on our teaching. Any answer to these questions should be followed by '**Why?**', by doing this, we can justify what we are doing and the rationale behind it.

Look at the questions below and reflect on your own practice.

Answer the questions

Remember to think about 'Why?'.

Students

- How often do your students have opportunities to speak in class?
- What do they do? E.g. talk in pairs, groups, give presentations, debate.
- What problems do they have with speaking? e.g. pronunciation

Teachers

- What did you do in your last speaking lesson?
- How did you plan your lesson?
- What were your aims?
- Did the students have any problems?
- Do you evaluate your lessons? How?

Task 2 - Classroom activities: A fantastic party (Level B1)

The main focus of this lesson will be on telling a story in the past. The students will record the story using an avatar with the programme [voki](#).

An avatar allows students to practise their presentation before laying down the final version. The advantage of using avatars is that shyer or more reticent learners do not feel put on the spot. Before you go on to the presentation stage make sure you have tasks ready that encourage learners to listen carefully to their partners and classmates, it can help develop communication skills and improve students' ability to listen for specific information.

The lesson is suitable for intermediate students and above, although if simplified could be adapted for use with lower levels.

Timing

90 - 120 minutes (maybe the lesson can be split into three one hour lessons if your classes are large).

Aims

- To teach or revise vocabulary for parties, past tenses and sequencing a story.
- To raise confidence in speaking and raise awareness of intonation and sentence stress.

Procedure

- Students work in pairs and brainstorm party vocabulary [[Party_brainstorming_worksheet.doc](#)]. Teachers should monitor and get students to consider past forms of verbs they come up with. This may need follow up in a subsequent lesson if you notice students are having difficulty.
- Students then look at key language needed to build their story. Write the following items on the board – *rainy day, 30 people, cancelled lunch, my face*. Tell students they are going to listen to a story about a birthday party and to guess what happened. Students work in pairs and then feed back to another pair. Students then listen (to the recording Caroline's surprise party) and check their ideas.

- Students then go on to do the useful expressions worksheet [[Useful_expressions_for_telling_a_story.doc](#)] and check their answers [[Useful_expressions_for_telling_a_story_answers.doc](#)].
- Students then begin a draft of their own story using the planning your story worksheet [[Planning_your_story.docx](#)].
- Remind students that the presentations are spoken presentations not a story read out loud. Ask them to write their stories in note form on the planning grid [[Planning_grid.doc](#)] and practice telling them in pairs and groups.
- The next part of the lesson, students use [voki](#) to record their stories. If they can they could also add an image of the party as back ground to their presentation.

Once finished, each pair uploads the videos to the class wiki for their classmates to watch. Being able to record and store the recordings not only allows the teacher to assess them, but it also serves as a student-generated resource for comprehension and matching questions about each person.

Task 3 - Teacher's Task

In this step you will teach the activities from step 3. Before you teach the lesson, reflect on what you have learnt.

- Make sure you have understood all the stages and what to do.
- Reflect on 'Why?' you have chosen this task.
- Teach the lesson and follow up tasks e.g. editing, uploading onto the wiki etc.

Step 3

Self assessment teachers and students

Once you have finished step 2 complete the evaluation grid attached.

1. Teacher Self-Evaluation: Speaking Lesson

Think about the lesson you taught. Read the statements and tick which box is true for you.			
When planning a speaking lesson...	This is always true for me	This is sometimes true for me	This is not true for me
I have a clear assessment criteria.			
My students know what the assessment criteria is.			
I can see the value of preparation and rehearsal stages.			
I consider the end task carefully and provide support for my learners so that the presentation stage is successful.			
I can take various motivational factors into account in the language learning process.			
I can take the emotional needs of the students into account (sense of achievement, fun, etc).			
I can create a collaborative atmosphere which invites students to participate in speaking tasks confidently.			
I can select speaking tasks which are significant and relevant and which encourage participation at different levels.			

I can evaluate and select varied materials to stimulate oral production (audio-visual, authentic material etc.).			
I can help students to use compensation strategies (paraphrasing, simplification etc.) during a speaking task.			

Also give a self-evaluation grid to your students to assess their spoken ability.

Think about the task, read the 'can dos' and tick the boxes.			
Fluency	I can do this and it's not difficult	I can do this but it's difficult	I can't do this yet.
I can speak for a long period of time with just a little hesitation and correction.			
I can speak for a quite a long period of time, but sometimes I have to pause to think about and correct what I am saying.			
Vocabulary	I can do this and it's not difficult	I can do this but it's difficult	I can't do this yet.
I use a variety of different words when I speak on a topic and I can express myself well with few mistakes.			

I sometimes use the same words when I speak but I can express myself quite well. I make some mistakes.			
Grammar	I can do this and it's not difficult	I can do this but it's difficult	I can't do this yet.
I can use some complex grammar structures well most of the time. I can express myself clearly.			
I can use simple grammatical structures well and I can sometimes use more complex ones. I can express myself clearly most of the time.			
Pronunciation	I can do this and it's not difficult	I can do this but it's difficult	I can't do this yet.
I can produce good pronunciation with few errors.			
I can mostly produce good pronunciation but I sometimes make mistakes.			
Task Completion	I can do this and it's not difficult	I can do this but it's difficult	I can't do this yet.
I can fully complete the task with confidence.			
I can mostly complete the task with some confidence.			

Speaking Strategies	I can do this and it's not difficult	I can do this but it's difficult	I can't do this yet.
When I can't think of the word I want, I can use a simple word meaning something similar.			
I can correct myself when I feel I have made a mistake without interrupting what I am speaking about.			

RESOURCES

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Trowbridge, Sally (2011) *Help at hand. Ideas for the developing teacher*. Teaching English handbook British Council, London 2011.

Ur, P. (1996) *A Course in Language Teaching*. CUP, Cambridge 1996.

Cambridge ESOL Common Scale for Speaking.

Websites

Structured overview of all CEFR scales

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key_reference/Overview_CEFRscales_EN.pdf

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_European_Framework_of_Reference_for_Languages

Evaluating speaking - Part 2

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/evaluating-speaking-part-2>

British Council

learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org

Voki

<http://www.voki.com/>

Wiki

<http://www.wikihow.com/Start-a-Wiki>

SINTESI IN ITALIANO

Costruire la fiducia nel parlare è essenziale per la motivazione degli studenti e il loro futuro. In qualità di insegnanti, non possiamo chiedere ai nostri studenti di trattare qualsiasi argomento in quanto impreparati. Capire come preparare gli studenti per un determinato compito ci aiuta a pianificare le nostre lezioni. In tal modo possiamo aiutare i nostri studenti a comporre testi parlati con successo in una varietà di situazioni.

Le attività hanno bisogno di struttura, linguaggio, frasi chiave e vocabolario. La preparazione, i lavori di gruppo o coppia e il compito di auto-valutazione sono necessari insieme ad una parte importante di apprendimento in modo tale che i nostri studenti siano in grado di valutare il proprio lavoro. L'insegnante deve quindi scegliere le attività che interesseranno gli studenti e dare loro l'opportunità e la motivazione di parlare.

Attraverso la comprensione su cosa si aspetta o meno da uno studente B1 si prevede di fare e di avere una chiara comprensione della metodologia di insegnamento per creare lezioni efficaci e comunicative per soddisfare le esigenze dei nostri studenti.

L'uso delle ICT e di Internet ci permette di sviluppare competenze digitali necessarie per l'apprendimento permanente.

Questo offre anche agli studenti l'opportunità di diventare più autonomi, avere strumenti che possono utilizzare al di fuori della classe, per esempio, una wiki di classe.

Nel complesso, il successo nella realizzazione di testi orali, si riduce ad avere la struttura, il linguaggio e il vocabolario necessario per il compito, capire cosa ci si aspetta, prassi pertinenti, valutazione e feedback, sia per l'insegnante che lo studente.