

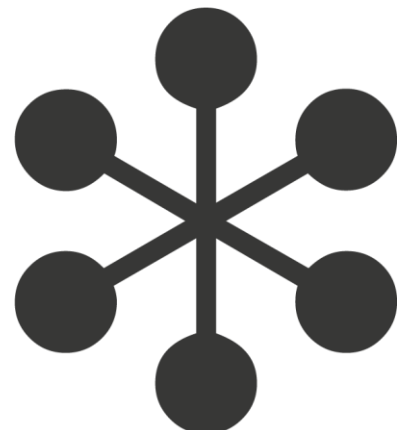
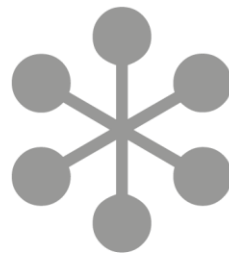
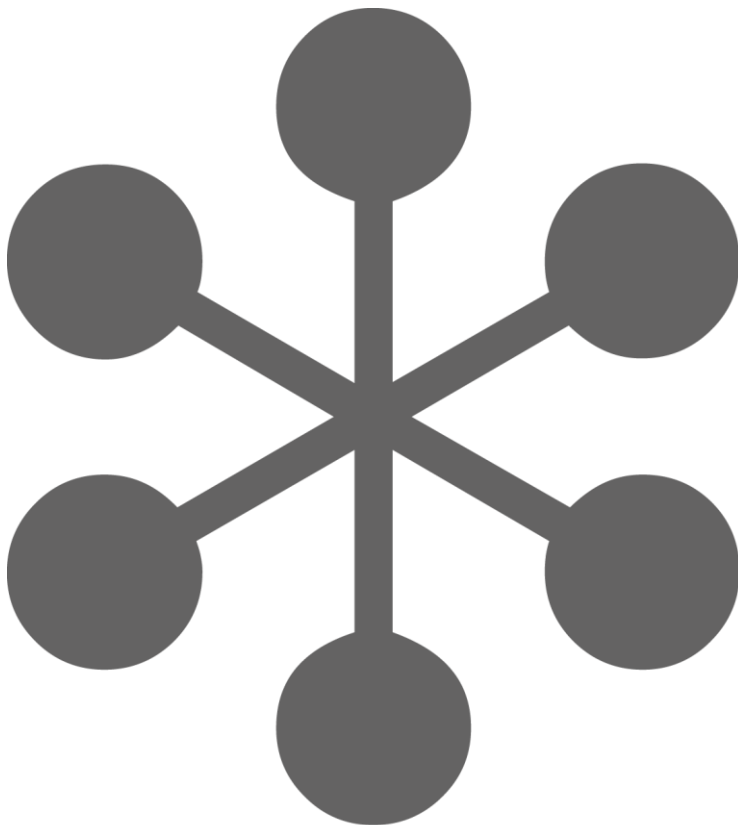


CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH
Language Assessment
Part of the University of Cambridge

Cambridge English

Informal assessment in the English language classroom

6Y10



Handout: Types of assessment

Match the type of assessment on the left with the purposes on the right. There is more than one purpose for some types.

Types of assessment

Placement tests

Summative tests

Diagnostic tests

Formative tests

Portfolio assessment

Progress tests

Purposes

to work out what learners already know

to inform future teaching and learning

to give a statement about a learner's ability

to check what learners have learned over a period of time

to decide what needs teaching

to work out how well learners are learning

to decide which class to put a new learner in

to give a final grade or level

to provide evidence of progress over a course

Handout: My learners and assessment

Think about your teaching and your learners. Do you agree (✓) or disagree (x) with the following statements about assessment?

	✓	x
If I ask my learners to give each other feedback, they are too critical.		
My learners don't make any effort for informal class tests.		
If I ask my learners to check something together, they tend to start chatting instead.		
My learners only want to know what mark or grade they have got for each piece of work.		
Learners think assessment is just the test at the end of a course.		
The only work that learners should show others should be perfect.		
If I tell my learners that I am going to give them a test, they get very nervous.		
My learners are used to doing short tests on a regular basis.		
My learners are good at checking their work carefully before they hand it in.		
Revision activities take too long to prepare, so I don't do many.		

Handout: Checking understanding

What concept-checking questions could you ask learners in order to check if they have understood the meaning of the following words, phrases and sentences?

1) The sun was shining when I woke up.

2) She's hot because she's been running for half an hour.

3) a grapefruit

4) She put off going to the dentist.

5) These shoes are in the sale.

6) You should call Mark as soon as possible.

Handout: Checking understanding (suggested questions)

- 1) The sun was shining when I woke up.
 - When did the sun start shining – when I woke up, before I woke up, or after I woke up? (before I woke up)
 - Did the sun stop shining the moment I woke up? (no)
 - Which action is longer – the sun shining, or me waking up? (the sun shining)

- 2) She's hot because she's been running for half an hour.
 - Is she hot now? (yes)
 - When did she start running? (half an hour ago)
 - Is she still running? (maybe)
 - How has running made her feel? (hot)

- 3) a grapefruit
 - Can you eat this? (yes)
 - What colour is it? (usually yellow)
 - How does it taste? (bitter, not sweet)
 - Is it larger or smaller than an orange? (larger)

- 4) She put off going to the dentist.
 - Does she need to go to the dentist? (yes)
 - Does she want to go to the dentist? (probably not)
 - Did she go to the dentist? (no)
 - When will she go? (at a later date)

- 5) These shoes are in the sale.
 - Are the shoes the normal price? (no)
 - Are they cheaper or more expensive? (cheaper)

- 6) You should call Mark as soon as possible.
 - Is this about the past, or the future? (the future)
 - Is it an opinion, or a request? (an opinion)
 - Do I think you need to call Mark now, or much later? (now)

Handout: Your presentation

Your name: Whose presentation did you watch? Topic of their presentation:		Please write a comment here. Remember to comment on what is good. If you want to comment on something that is not so good, try to explain why, and how it could be better. Your comments should always be helpful!
Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was it interesting? • Was there enough (or too much) information? • Did the presentation make sense? 	
Speaking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the pronunciation clear? • Was it loud enough? • Was it too slow or too fast? 	
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was there an introduction and a conclusion? • Were the sentences linked together, or were they all short and separate? 	
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment on vocabulary, grammar. • Was there a good range, or were the same words used several times? 	

Handout: My writing task

Your English teacher has asked you to write a story.

Your story must begin with this sentence.

Jo looked at the map and decided to go left.

Write your **story** in the space below.

Write your story here:

Jo looked at the map and decided to go left. He realised he was alone in the desert. He couldn't imagine what would happen to him. A pair of poisonous snakes were in front of him, and he decided to escape, but the two creatures were always opposite him. Suddenly he saw a person walking on the sand, which shouted to Jo, who was very frightened. Jo ran as fast as he could and he reached the man. They stopped walking after two minutes because they saw a car, but the snakes reached Jo, they bit him and ... Jo woke up. It was only a dream.

Now think about your answer:

Think about the story you have written. Does it answer the question you were given? Is it interesting?

Think about how you have organised the story. Have you used very short sentences, or have you joined them together? Does it end in a good way?

Think about the grammar and vocabulary you used. Is there a good range? Could you improve it? Are there any mistakes you noticed? Can you correct them?

Are you happy with your story now? Any other comments?

Handout: Classroom activities

Classroom activity: What was that holiday word?

Timing up to 30 minutes

Materials approximately 6–8 small pieces of card/paper per learner (for example, cut up A4 sheets into 16 pieces); an empty container (e.g. the lid of a photocopying paper box)

Rationale This activity is a useful way of revising vocabulary, for example, at the end of a unit on a particular topic. It focuses on the topic of holidays, but can easily be adapted for any other topic, or as a general vocabulary revision activity. It enables the teacher to informally assess whether learners can remember language that has been taught, and decide what they need to revise or be taught again. It is also a form of self-assessment, as learners are encouraged to go through their coursebook and notes to see what they have learned, and what they can or can't remember. It is a good filler activity, i.e. if you finish another activity earlier than planned and need to fill time before the end of class.

Procedure

1. Ask learners what topic they have just finished studying – elicit holidays.
2. Divide the whiteboard into four squares, and write 'people', 'places', 'objects' and 'actions' in each square.
3. In the 'people' square, write the word 'tourist' at the top. Ask learners, in pairs, to say what a tourist is. Elicit ideas, which might be a simple synonym (e.g. 'traveller' or 'person on holiday'); a longer definition (e.g. 'It's a person who is on holiday'); or a sentence describing what they do without using the word (e.g. 'They go to Rome to visit the famous monuments'). Write a few correct examples on the board below 'tourist'.
4. Now write 'check-in desk' in the 'places' square. Repeat the stage above, writing a few correct definitions/examples underneath (e.g. 'the place in the airport where you receive your boarding card').
5. Now write 'souvenir' in the 'objects' square; elicit definitions, and write a few correct ones on the board (e.g. 'you buy it to remember your holiday').
6. Now write 'take off' in the 'actions' square; elicit definitions, and write a few correct ones on the board (e.g. 'leave the ground and start to fly').

7. Tell learners that they are going to think about the words and phrases that they have learned in the topic of holidays. Hand out approximately eight small cards/pieces of paper to each learner. Ask them to spend a few minutes looking through their coursebook, notes or vocabulary records, and to write one word or phrase on each card that they feel they need to learn again, or can't quite remember the meaning of. Tell them to make sure their handwriting is very clear.
8. As they are writing on their cards, walk around the class and monitor – if you notice any spelling mistakes, for example, ask the learner to check and correct it. Collect the cards as they are ready, and put them all together in an empty box or container. Mix them up a bit as you are adding them.
9. Now divide the learners into groups, with about four or five learners in each group. Ask each group what they would like to be called, i.e. a team name. Write each team name on the board, with space below each name for you to record marks.
10. Explain what the learners are going to do. Each team in turn will nominate one person who is going to define words from the box; their group has to identify what the word is. They get one point for each correct word. Each group has 1 minute exactly, then it is the next group's turn.
11. Start with the first team. Ask for a volunteer, and ask this person to stand up in front of their group. Ask someone in the second team to do the timing – they should say 'start', then after 60 seconds exactly, say 'stop'. Ask someone else from the second team to record the marks – ask them to stand at the board and write '1' for each correct definition.
12. Stand next to the volunteer with the box of words (make sure they can't read them or choose which word to take). On hearing 'start', let them take a card. They must not show their team the card, but they should show it to you. They should define the word, and their team should try to identify it. When they get the correct word, put the card on the table, and let them take another one, and so on. At the end of each turn, count up the number of cards on the table, and ask for that number of marks to be written on the board.
13. If the learner defining the words does not know a word on the card, they can put the card back in and choose another one. Likewise, if the learner's team can't identify the correct word or phrase, they can put the card back in and choose another one.
14. When each team has had one (or more) turns, count up the marks and announce the winner.

15. Round up by noting on the board the words which the class had difficulty with.
Elicit definitions, or explain details as necessary, and ask learners to write down these words and learn them for homework. Make a note to revise this language in another lesson, and check then if they have understood it/can remember it.

Classroom activity: Pairwork crosswords (A2/B1 level)

Timing 30 minutes

Materials **worksheet: Crossword (A)** (one copy each for half the class);
worksheet: Crossword (B) (one copy each for the other half);
pictures of 'postman/woman', 'post office'

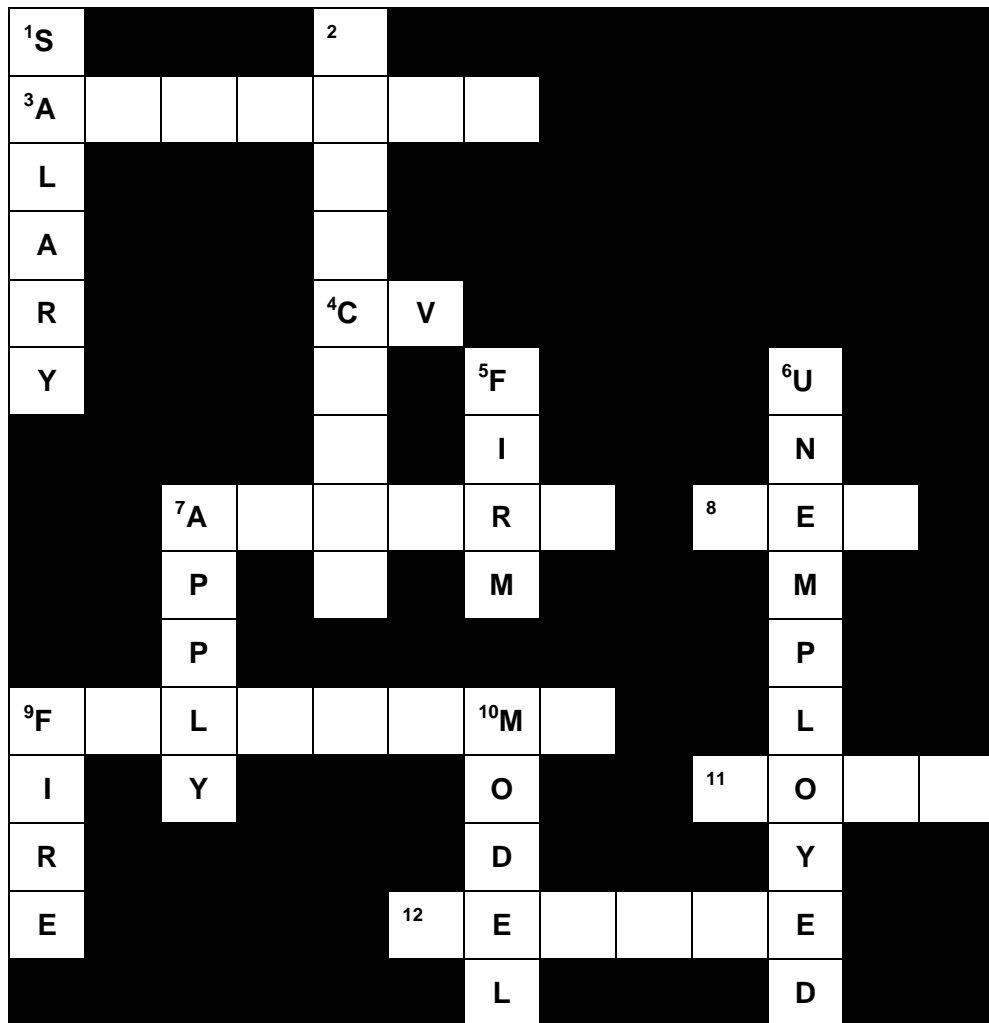
Rationale This activity is useful for revising the lexical set related to work. It is also good practice for creating and understanding definitions. Learners can pre-prepare their definitions if necessary, then work in pairs to complete the crosswords. The teacher can monitor how well learners can remember vocabulary, and decide whether they need to recap or whether the learners can cope with moving on. The activity can easily be adapted to focus on other lexical sets, or for general vocabulary revision.

Procedure

1. Before the class, make enough copies of **worksheet: Crossword (A)** for half the learners in your class, and the same of **worksheet: Crossword (B)**.
2. In class, show a picture of a postman/woman and/or write 'postman' and 'postwoman' on the board. Ask learners what this person does. Elicit language such as 'he/she delivers letters' or 'he/she brings the post to your house'.
3. Write on the board 'A postman/woman is a person ...'. Ask learners what word comes next – elicit 'who' – and then elicit a full sentence definition of a postman/woman.
4. Show picture or write on the board 'post office'. Ask learners if this is a person (no, it's a place). Ask learners if they can use the word 'who' to describe a place (no, they'll use 'where'). Elicit a full sentence definition, e.g. 'a post office is a place where you can buy stamps and send letters'.
5. Refer to the picture of the postman/woman and elicit the word 'uniform'. Write it on the board and elicit a definition, as above, e.g. 'a uniform is the type of clothes which a postman/woman wears to work'.
6. Tell learners that they have given you three types of definitions: one for people, one for places, and one for objects. Write the following on the board:
 - It's a place where ...
 - It's a person who ...
 - It's a thing which ...

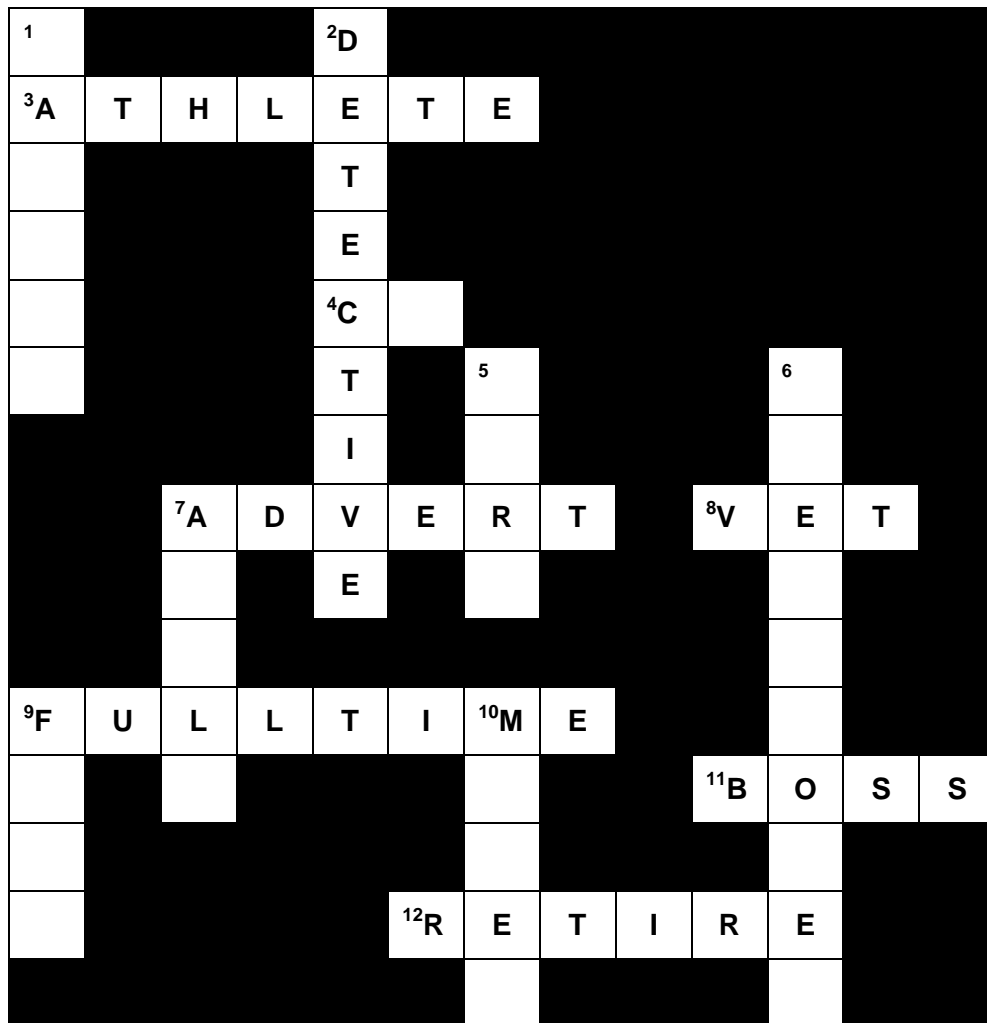
7. Tell learners that they are going to practise giving and understanding definitions, to complete a crossword.
8. Divide the class into two large groups: A and B. Within each large group, ask learners to work in pairs or groups of three. Hand out **worksheet: Crossword (A)** to the As, and **worksheet: Crossword (B)** to the Bs.
9. Tell the class that the As have half the answers on their crossword, and the Bs have the other half. Together, they have a complete crossword. First, they need to look at the words they have got, and check they can remember them. Ask the class to prepare definitions for each of their words, either orally or in writing. Monitor closely, and give any help, as necessary.
10. When they are ready, tell them that they are going to work in pairs to complete the crossword. Tell them not to show each other their crosswords, but to take turns to ask and answer questions. Elicit what question they should ask: e.g. 'What is number 3 across?'; 'What's number 6 down?'
11. Pair As and Bs, and let them complete the crossword together. Monitor closely and note any difficulties that learners have.
12. When learners have finished, they can compare their completed crosswords to check if their answers and their spelling is correct.

Worksheet: Crossword (A)



Prepare your definitions here:

Worksheet: Crossword (B)



Prepare your definitions here:

Vocabulary revision games

There are many vocabulary revision games that you can use in the classroom. Learners enjoy them, but they are also very useful for you to observe how much learners have learned, and what you need to spend more time revising in future classes. This section describes three games: Board rush, Hot seat and Pelmanism. They are easy to prepare for, and can be adapted in many ways too.

Board rush

1. Prepare a set of words or phrases that you want the class to revise. Write each word or phrase in large letters on separate pieces of paper or card – big enough so that learners at the back of the class can see them.
2. Divide the class into two groups, down the middle of the room. Then draw a line down the middle of the whiteboard.
3. Ask one learner from each group to volunteer to start, and ask them to stand in front of their group, a few paces away from the board. Place a board marker between each learner and the board.
4. Position yourself between the groups and the volunteers, so that the volunteers can't see the cards as you hold them up.
5. Tell the class that you will show them one card at a time, and they have to define their word to the learner in front, who has to guess the word, then race to the board to write it. The first learner to write the word correctly gets a point for their team.
6. Change the learner racing to the board every few words.
7. For larger classes, an alternative could be to divide the learners into groups of five or six, and rather than asking the volunteers to race to the board, give each of them some A4 paper and a pen. They should sit with their backs to their groups, for example, at the back of the classroom, so they can't see the cards as you hold them up. They should write the word on a piece of paper and hold them up for you to see – the first one to hold up a correctly spelled word gets a point for their team.

Hot seat

This is a variation of the game above, without the movement.

1. Place two empty chairs in front of the class, with the backs facing the white board.

2. Divide the class into two groups, down the middle of the room. Ask one learner from each group to volunteer to start, and ask them to sit in the 'hot seat' at the front of the class.
3. Tell the class that you are going to write a word or phrase on the whiteboard, and the groups have to define the word so that the learner in the hot seat guesses it correctly. The first learner to say the word correctly gets a point for their team.
4. Change the learner in the hot seat every few words.

Pelmanism: a matching game

1. Prepare a set of words and their definitions that you want to revise: about 10–12 words is about right. Copy one set per four or five learners. Cut up each set, so that each word and each definition is on a separate piece of paper. The words should be on short pieces of paper, and the definitions on longer pieces of paper. Alternatively, you could use different coloured paper instead.
2. Give one set to each group of learners, and ask them to spread the pieces of paper out, face down.
3. Explain how the game works. One learner starts, by turning over one definition (long card) and one word (short card), making sure that everyone can see them. If they match, the learner keeps them, and has another go. If they don't match, they place them face down again in the same position. The next learner then turns over two more cards, and so on, until all cards have been paired up. The teacher should monitor the groups carefully, and if they notice any matches which are incorrect, turn them over again. The winner is the learner who has the greatest number of correct matches at the end of the game.

Classroom activity: Talking about your hobby

Timing	about 50 minutes
Materials	picture of 'your' hobby for the warmer; worksheets: My talk; Your talk (there are two versions: A for higher levels, and B for lower levels)
Rationale	This is a speaking activity where learners give a mini-presentation to the class or to a smaller group on a familiar topic, e.g. their hobby. After each one, the learner who gave the talk should complete a self-assessment worksheet (My talk), and the rest of the group should complete the peer assessment worksheet (Your talk). There are two versions of the handouts, and they can be easily adapted to suit any task, for any level. The aim is for learners to become more independent, more aware of their skills, strengths and weaknesses, and also to take the pressure off the teacher.

Procedure

1. Start with a warmer activity. Tell learners that you used to have a hobby, and that you want them to guess what it was. It should be something fairly unusual, for example, stamp collecting. They can only ask you yes/no questions. Invite learners to ask you questions, and answer yes or no, as appropriate. If they ask a question which requires information, rather than yes or no, simply say 'Yes or no'. If they ask a question which isn't quite clear or grammatically correct, encourage the learner to reformulate the question until it is accurate, then answer it. When the class guess the hobby, show them a picture of it if you can.
2. Now write 'hobbies' in the centre of the board, and ask learners to brainstorm types of hobbies. Create a mind map with their ideas, noting down hobbies in groups (e.g. collecting things, making things, sports). Allow a minute or two for this.
3. Now put learners in groups of three or four, and ask each learner to think of a hobby that they have, used to have, or would like to have in the future. In turn, the rest of the group has to work out what this hobby is, by asking yes/no questions. Monitor groups as they are doing this, listening to the questions, correcting/eliciting correct question forms where necessary.
4. Now ask learners to think about what information they'd like to know about each other's hobbies. Write some question words on the board: Why; Where; When; What; How much; How long; etc. Give an example for 'When': When did you start this hobby? In pairs, ask learners to think of one or two questions for each

question word, that they could ask someone to find out more about their hobby.

After 2 minutes, elicit some examples and write them on the board.

5. Now tell learners that they are each going to give a talk on a hobby that they have (or used to have), in small groups. Explain that each learner will talk for up to 2 minutes each.
6. Ask learners to think about what makes a good talk. Elicit ideas, such as it should be interesting; it should be clear; you shouldn't read from a script; you should look at the people you're talking to.
7. Tell learners that they have 10 minutes to prepare. They can make notes, but they should not try to write out the talk in whole sentences. Allow them to use dictionaries, or check words with you, or use their coursebooks for ideas. Monitor, and help learners as necessary.
8. Put learners into groups of approximately five, with as much space between the groups as possible. Explain that each learner in the group will give their talk, then after that, they will think about what they did, using the **worksheet: My talk** to help them. The other learners in the group will look at the **worksheet: Your talk** and note down some feedback too.
N.B. There are two versions of the worksheets to allow for students at higher levels (worksheets A) and lower levels (worksheets B), and these can be adapted for your own situation.
9. Allow each group to give their talks in turn, and monitor as they do so. Encourage them to spend 2–3 minutes on the worksheets after each talk, quietly reflecting rather than talking.
10. After all the talks are finished, learners can give each other their feedback, and reflect on the activity together. Ask the groups to take it in turns to say what they thought about their own talk, and to get some feedback from the other learners in their group.

Worksheet: My talk (A)

My name:

Topic of my talk:

	Yes	Maybe	No
I made notes before my talk to help me.			
I talked for about 2 minutes without stopping.			
I tried to make the talk interesting.			
I explained clearly all about my hobby.			
I spoke clearly with good pronunciation.			
I tried to speak at a good speed.			
I started with a clear introduction.			
I finished with a clear ending.			
I tried to organise my ideas well.			
I used a range of different language in my talk.			
I tried to make very few mistakes in my language.			

Worksheet: Your talk (A)

Your name: Whose talk did you watch? Topic of their talk:		Please write a comment here. Remember to comment on what is good. If you want to comment on something that is not so good, try to explain why, and how it could be better. Your comments should always be helpful!
Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was it interesting? • Was there enough (or too much) information? • Did the talk make sense? 	
Speaking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the pronunciation clear? • Was it loud enough? • Was it too slow or too fast? 	
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was there an introduction and a conclusion? • Were the sentences linked together, or were they all short and separate? 	
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment on vocabulary, grammar. • Was there a good range, or were the same words used several times? 	

Worksheet: My talk (B)

My name:

Topic of my talk:

	Yes	Maybe	No
My talk was long enough.			
I said three things about my hobby.			
My English was clear.			
I didn't speak too fast/slowly.			
I had a beginning, middle and end.			
I didn't make too many mistakes.			

I was pleased with my talk because

.....

.....

.....

It could be better if

.....

.....

.....

Worksheet: Your talk (B)

My name:

The speaker's name:

Topic of the talk:

	Yes	Maybe	No
The talk was long enough.			
The speaker looked at us while talking.			
The talk was easy to understand.			
It had a beginning, middle and end.			
I enjoyed listening to it.			

I liked in your talk, because

..... was very interesting/funny/a good idea.

You could say more about

The talk could be better if you

.....

Classroom activity: Interviews

Timing about 45 minutes

Materials **worksheets: Match the phrases; Observer checklist**

Rationale All of the Cambridge English Speaking tests include a short interview section. This is Part 1 in *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Preliminary for Schools*, and the final part (Part 4 or 5) in *Cambridge English: Young Learners*. Therefore, an activity that lends itself to peer assessment is practising for Speaking tests, with one learner acting as a candidate, one as an examiner, and one as an observer. This frees up the teacher to monitor closely, and keep a record of individual strengths and weaknesses for future reference. The preparation stage of the activity also allows the teacher to informally assess learners' abilities to produce a range of question forms.

Procedure

1. Tell learners that they are going to find out a bit about speaking tests.
2. Give each learner the **worksheet: Match the phrases**, and ask them to match the two halves of each speaking activity. (As an alternative, you could cut up the table so the activity is more kinaesthetic.)
3. Learners can check their answers in pairs before you check as a class. See **key to step 3**, below.
4. Tell learners that different speaking tests include different activities (you may wish to talk about the ones that appear in the test they are taking, if appropriate), but one activity that every test includes is a short 'interview' section, with questions and answers.
5. Write the following options on the whiteboard or show a slide with these options on the IWB:
 - questions about science
 - questions about their own language
 - questions about daily life
 - questions about grammar
 - questions about familiar topics.
6. Ask learners what sort of questions they think the interview section will include – ask them to decide, in pairs, which of these options they think it will include (you can tell them that two are correct if you like). Elicit that the interview includes questions about daily life and familiar topics.

7. Ask learners what sort of topics are 'familiar'. Give an example, e.g. family, and write it on the board. Elicit other ideas, and produce a mind map on the board. Ideas include: free time, hobbies, school, friends, holidays, clothes, etc.
8. Now write 'questions' on the board, and ask learners to think of what the first word of a question could be. Give an example, e.g. 'What'. Ask pairs to see if they can think of ten more question starters. Allow a minute or so, then elicit ideas and write them on the board, e.g. When; Where; Which; Why; Who; How; Do; Did; Can; Are; Is.
9. Now ask learners to choose two topic areas, and to write three questions for each that they could ask another learner. Ask them to try to use a different question word for each, and also to try to use some different tenses (present, past and future). Monitor closely, pointing out any grammatical problems, and helping where necessary. When learners are ready, put them into pairs, and ask them to look at each other's questions. Encourage them to correct or improve each other's questions, if necessary. Also ask them to add two more questions to each topic (they can share questions if they have the same topics). Then change the pairs so learners are working with another person, and repeat the previous step, so each learner has up to seven questions for each topic.
10. Now write a question on the board, e.g. 'What do you like doing in your free time?' Ask for some example answers, e.g. 'meeting my friends', 'reading', 'cooking' and write them on the board.
11. Ask learners if they think these are good answers to give in a speaking test. Elicit that they are fine, but they don't really show how good at English you are. Point out that it's good to try to say a bit more than just a word or two, if possible. **N.B.** This is especially relevant if your learners are at higher levels (*Cambridge English: Flyers, Key and Preliminary*).
12. Ask learners what they could add to these responses – elicit they could say why they like it, where they do it, when, who with, and so on. Give an example: 'I like reading, especially science fiction. I usually read in the evenings after dinner.' Ask two or three learners the same question and elicit their answers, encouraging slightly longer responses, where necessary.
13. Now explain that learners are going to practise interviewing each other, using the questions they have written. They will work in groups of three: one person will be the interviewer, one person the candidate, and one will observe. They will then change, so each person gets to experience each role.

14. Reorganise the class so that they are in groups of three, and assign a letter (A, B and C) to each person in the group. Tell As that they will be the interviewer (the examiner). Ask them what they need (their list of questions). Tell them they should ask three or four different questions, speak clearly, and listen to the answers. Tell Bs that they will be the candidate. Ask them what they need (nothing). Tell them to listen to the questions, and to try to give answers that are longer than a few words, where possible. Tell Cs that they will be observers. They need to listen, and to complete a form for the candidate. Give out copies of the **worksheet: Observer checklist**, and explain that they only need to tick (or cross), and can write comments if they want to.
15. Tell groups that they have about 3–4 minutes. Monitor closely, noting any issues that arise, but try not to interrupt. Then ask the observers to give some feedback, starting with a positive comment. Allow about 2 minutes for this.
16. Rearrange the groups so that B is the interviewer, C the candidate and A the observer, and repeat the stages above.
17. Rearrange the groups once again so that C is the interviewer, A the candidate and B the observer, and repeat the stages above.
18. Round up by commenting on some good language, some interesting questions, and if necessary, any particular areas of difficulty. Tell learners that you will follow up these difficulties in another lesson.

Key (step 3)

- 1) F: Tell a story
- 2) A: Compare two pictures
- 3) D: Describe a picture
- 4) G: Answer some questions
- 5) B: Ask for information
- 6) E: Have a discussion
- 7) I: Make some decisions
- 8) C: Choose the best option
- 9) J: Point to some objects
- 10) H: Say what is different

Worksheet: Match the phrases

Find ten activities which all take place in speaking tests by matching up the two columns.

1) Tell

2) Compare

3) Describe

4) Answer

5) Ask for

6) Have

7) Make

8) Choose

9) Point to

10) Say

A. two pictures

B. information

C. the best option

D. a picture

E. a discussion

F. a story

G. some questions

H. what is different

I. some decisions

J. some objects

Worksheet: Observer checklist

Name of candidate:

Name of interviewer:

Name of observer:

Topic of questions:

The candidate ...	✓ or x	Any comments?
... could answer the questions		
... answered quickly		
... spoke clearly		
... gave some longer answers		
... looked at the interviewer while talking		
... smiled!		

Classroom activity: Writing a story

Timing about 50 minutes

Materials **worksheet: Jo's story**

Rationale This is a B1-level writing activity, for learners who are preparing to take *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*. It encourages learners to become more independent learners by evaluating their own work before handing it in for marking.

Procedure

1. Tell learners that they are going to tell a story. First, they have to put some events in the correct order. Give out copies of the **worksheet: Jo's story**, and ask learners to write 1–10 next to the events (1 = first, 10 = last). Allow 2 minutes, then let learners check their answers in pairs, before eliciting the correct order (see **key to step 1**, below). Learners may have other acceptable orders – if they can justify their order, that's fine.
2. Read the story to the class (just reading out the sentences in the correct order), and then ask them if they think it is a good story. Ask a few learners to justify their answers. Ask them what they think about the sentences in the story – is it good that they are all short, and that the story is simply a sequence of events? Elicit how to make it into a more interesting story to read: e.g. by adding details and adjectives, varying the sentences, linking them.
3. Ask learners to work in pairs to try to make the story more interesting. Allow a few minutes, then elicit some examples.
4. Point out that when they are writing a story, learners should think about things like how they link the events, how much detail to add, different verb tenses or sentence structures, etc. Ask them if they can think of any other important things to think about (elicit, e.g. spelling, using different vocabulary, making it interesting for the reader, answering the question).
5. Tell learners they are going to look at an example of a story that was written by another learner. Ask them to look at the sample question and story on the **worksheet**, and ask them to read the story. Then, they should think about the questions below. Tell them that the story is quite good, but could be even better with a few minor changes. Allow several minutes for them to think about improvements individually and then let learners discuss their ideas in pairs, and try to improve the story further. Elicit some examples and get some group feedback on each other's ideas.

6. Now write a new sentence on the board: I felt nervous when the phone rang.
7. Ask for some ideas – why were you feeling nervous? Were you waiting for someone to call, or for some information? What happened next? Brainstorm a few ideas, creating a mind map on the board, noting ideas and interesting language that the learners come up with. Add your own if necessary (e.g. waiting to hear if you had got a job; if you had passed an exam; if something has been found; if someone is ill).
8. Now tell learners that they are going to write their own story which starts with this sentence, using any of the ideas on the board (or their own). Allow 10–15 minutes, monitoring without intervening. As learners finish, ask them to look again at the questions on the **worksheet**. Tell them to write comments below their story, using a different coloured pen, and encourage them to make a few changes or improvements, where necessary. When they have finished, take in their work to mark. Make sure you comment on how the learners have improved their work, as well as on the final draft itself.

Key (step 1)

- 1) Jo looked at the map.
- 2) He was lost.
- 3) He decided to turn left.
- 4) He saw a house at the end of the road.
- 5) He knocked on the door.
- 6) A man opened it.
- 7) He noticed that he had a fierce dog.
- 8) The dog growled at him.
- 9) He woke up.
- 10) It had all been a dream!

Worksheet: Jo's story

- A. Write 1–10 next to each event (1 = the first; 10 = the last) to put the story in the correct order. The first one has been done for you.

He was lost.	.....
It had all been a dream!	.....
A man opened it.	.....
He saw a house at the end of the road.	.....
The dog growled at him.	.....
He decided to turn left.	.....
He knocked on the door.	.....
Jo looked at the map.	.....1.....
He woke up.	.....
He noticed that he had a fierce dog.	.....

- B. Now look at this *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* exam question and the story that another student has written:

Your English teacher has asked you to write a story.

Your story must begin with this sentence.

Jo looked at the map and decided to go left.

Write your **story** in the space below.

Write your story here:

Jo looked at the map and decided to go left. He realised he was alone in the desert. He couldn't imagine what would happen to him. A pair of poisonous snakes were in front of him, and he decided to escape, but the two creatures were always opposite him. Suddenly he saw a person walking on the sand, which shouted to Jo, who was very frightened. Jo ran as fast as he could and he reached the man. They stopped walking after two minutes because they saw a car, but the snakes reached Jo, they bit him and ... Jo woke up. It was only a dream.

C. Now think about the story and answer these questions:

Does it answer the question?

Is it interesting?

Does it end in a good way?

Think about how the story is organised.

- Are the sentences very short, or are they joined together?
- Think about the grammar and vocabulary.
- Is there a good range? Could you improve it?
- Are there any mistakes? Can you correct them?
- Are you happy with it now?

Any other comments?