

2014

To: International Teaching Assistants
From: Billy McGowan, ESL
Subject: Considerations **Before** Taking the SPEAK Test™

The SPEAK Test is a 12-problem, completely oral exam of your verbal (ie, spoken) English. The Test takes about 20 minutes but each student is given a half-hour appointment to complete the paperwork, review and finally take the Test. The questions are fairly general, not major- or science- or technology specific. All instructions come at the beginning of the Test; there are also a couple of sample questions to begin with. All problems in the recording are also written in the Test booklet with the time limit (in parentheses) at the end of each problem. Some questions allow the test taker to study the problem before beginning to answer the question. Any review or time granted to organize one's thoughts are very brief.

The Test has several "anchor" questions throughout each form of the test. For example, almost every Test begins with the problem of directing a visitor from point A to point B, using a very simple map of the area. More points are given for the answer that includes **landmarks** named on the way to point B on the map; other kinds of questions derive from this scenario, depending on the form of the test you receive. For example, jobs available, traffic problems, etc. can all come from a scenario using the map. The best answers includes pros and/or cons and reasons for the position you take. Examples include the following:

- suggesting places to seek employment
- opinions about a proposed project that the city government is planning
- living in an apartment versus in living in a private home
- etc

Another "anchor" problem involves pictures. There is a series of 6 pictures; your task is to tell the story that the pictures present. There is nothing difficult or unusual about these pictures. A follow-up problem might be to put yourself in the picture as one of the characters and tell what you'd do if you had the problem described in the series including

- breaking a leg
- getting something to help complete a task
- dealing with a crisis
- etc.

All forms of the test have some kind of two-dimensional graph which you have to interpret. These are simple graphs and easy to decipher. A follow-up question might be to talk about the implications of what the graph means for the future.

Finally, there is always a problem where a program has been changed and these changes have to be announced to a group (of tourists, trekkers, etc.) Your responsibility is to announce the tasks clearly, giving as much information about the program as possible, and sounding as natural as possible.

Among the 12 problems, some questions might include a recommendation of something (specifically requested), world problems, and other scenarios from contemporary life. You do not need any particular knowledge about particular subjects (except on a couple of forms when you might be asked about your major).

In answering the questions, you are expected to control pronunciations, grammar and fluency. Try to speak naturally; it is important to relax – as difficult as this can be while taking a test. Speak about a subject as much as you are able to: the more you talk clearly about the subject, the better your score will be.

You are given feedback in the form of the Score Sheet with comments and numerical awards for each problem. You will be allowed to read the Score Sheet before you leave the testing room and will know whether you passed the SPEAK Test or not.

Please come to the International House on time for your appointment so that you have time to fill out a form and read the instructions (which are also on the audio tape) before starting the tape.

All new international teaching assistants, regardless of whether they graduated from another US university or WPI, are expected to take the SPEAK Test. Come to the International House and make an appointment to take this before beginning your Teaching Assistantship. Regardless of whether you pass the Test or not, you will still be a Teaching Assistant. The recommendation is that if you fail the Test (earn less than a minimum of 54) you should enroll in the 1-credit *English for International Teaching Assistants* course.

Graduate students from the School of Business also take this test.

Good luck.