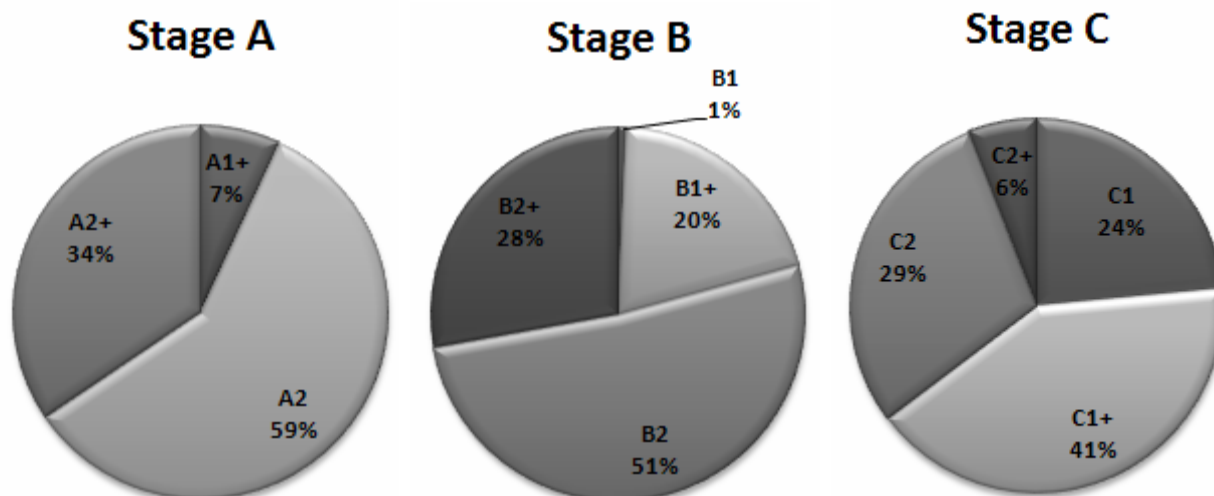


# 8981 Spoken English Test for Business

## General Observations

This examination tests, in a range of business related situations, the oral skills required by business people who need to use English at work. The test covers six levels, which correspond to the six levels of the Common European Framework (A1 to C2). Candidates appear to have been entered for the correct levels and overall performance has been highly creditable, showing a marked improvement in Stages A and B on last year.



## Areas of good performance

Parts 1 and 4 are generally well done at all levels. Part 1 contains generally predictable questions about the candidates' work or business studies and therefore well-prepared candidates do not encounter any problems. Candidates are asked to prepare a presentation for Part 4, and so again, well-prepared candidates are able to talk fluently about their area of interest. In Part 2 the better candidates enter fully into the role they have been asked to play and use appropriate social or formal language to make the dialogue as natural as possible. This is particularly evident at the higher levels where most candidates have plenty of work experience. In Part 3 the better candidates are able to support their point of view in a reasoned way and listen to alternative suggestions and respond to them with tact and understanding.

## Areas for development

In Part 2, the role play situations should be handled as far as possible as if they were real events and candidates should enter fully into acting out the situation. The same is also true in Part 3, where candidates should not merely read out the stimulus material they have been given but give their opinions on it, come up with suggestions of their own and challenge those of the interlocutor. Weaker candidates stick too rigidly to the material they have been given and ignore the contrasting views expressed by the interlocutor.

Some candidates approach Part 4 in an unnecessarily formal way. Better candidates often bring with them presentation materials, which helps to give them more confidence and makes their talk more interesting. They are also able to break away from the prepared material to answer questions or follow up points made by the interlocutor. Some weaker candidates prepare an appropriate topic but do not think about the audience they are supposed to be addressing. In many cases the talks are highly technical and no attempt is made to explain difficult terms or concepts to a non-specialist, such as the interlocutor. Weak candidates merely learn their talk by rote and are unprepared to answer questions

from the interlocutor or deal with interruptions to their flow.

Some candidates would benefit from further practice in the situations found in Parts 2 and 3, where verbal exchanges with colleagues or business contacts frequently demand business-specific terminology. In Part 2, candidates need to enter fully into their role, following the instructions given, and use appropriate social or formal language to make the task an interactive dialogue; more is required than simply answering (or asking) questions. In Part 3, candidates are required to negotiate with the interlocutor and, whilst many candidates appear to have a sufficient command of language, a lack of negotiating skills sometimes leaves them at a disadvantage. Candidates should be able to support their point of view in a reasoned way and reply to alternative suggestions with tact and understanding, especially at the higher levels.

### **Recommendations**

Students of business would benefit from some work experience in a suitable environment before taking the examination, especially at the higher levels. Alternatively, they should try to practise taking part in business situations with colleagues and/or native English speakers. They should also practise expressing their own opinions and responding to those of others. Reading contemporary business journals in English could also aid their understanding of commerce and increase their range of contemporary business vocabulary and idioms, as well as make them aware of the latest topics.

### **Tips**

- Make sure you know the English for your job title and can give details of what your work involves.
- Read contemporary business journals in English to familiarise yourself with modern, business-specific vocabulary.
- Practise negotiating skills before the examination – make sure you can take full part in a dialogue, giving opinions freely and fluently, and backing these with reasoned arguments, whilst also commenting on the interlocutor's contrasting views.
- Choose the topic for your presentation carefully. Make sure that it allows you to show a good range of business terminology. Also choose a subject the interlocutor (and examiner) will be able to understand, so that he/she can ask you some meaningful questions about it. If you use technical terms, take time to explain them, in order that a non-specialist in your field can understand your presentation.
- If you so wish, you may bring with you, and use, presentation materials in Part 4. Remember that the examiner listening to your presentation on tape will not be able to see these, but they may well give you more confidence and also make the presentation appear more natural.
- Make sure you are prepared to answer follow-up questions from the interlocutor on your presentation.

### **Additional comments**

Interlocutors need to be professionally competent, in business as well as spoken English, in order to draw out the best in candidates. They should avoid dominating conversations, however, in order to allow candidates to speak as much as possible and thus demonstrate their abilities. Interlocutors also need to study and prepare for the roles they will be expected to play with the candidates. Interlocutors (and candidates) need to enter into the situations as realistically as possible, in order to enable candidates to demonstrate their skills to the best of their abilities. Candidates should ensure that they speak into the microphone, and both candidates and interlocutors need to speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard on the taped recording. The room in which the examination is held should be free of extraneous noise and good quality recording equipment should be used.