

HONG KONG EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY  
HONG KONG DIPLOMA OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER 4  
GUIDELINES FOR CANDIDATES**

Please note AMENDMENT: From 2015 onwards, Candidates' surnames will NOT be printed on the adhesive labels. Candidates may refer to other members in their group by addressing them as Candidate A, B, C or D.

**Introduction**

The speaking examination consists of two parts: Part A, Group Interaction; and Part B, Individual Response.

In Part A, a group of candidates are required to discuss an assigned topic based on given prompts. These prompts may be in prose form or may be presented graphically in tables, graphs, pictures and so on. For this part, you will be interacting with your peers and will be completely responsible for the progress of the discussion. Therefore, you will need to use a very wide range of communication skills. In Part B, you need to answer the examiner's question(s) individually, without being given time to prepare or make notes.

In order to help your performance, you should use every opportunity that arises to practise and improve your speaking skills both in and out of school. The school-based assessment (SBA) component focuses on the assessment of speaking skills as well and the SBA-related learning activities will also help you to develop the skills you need for the speaking examination.

**Arriving at the centre**

You should report to the centre to which you have been assigned at the time specified on your admission form. Make sure you are not late. You may be one of the first to be examined, so you must be at the centre on time. If you find that you have arrived quite early, wait until about 15 minutes before your assigned reporting time to report to the waiting room. Arriving too early creates confusion and crowded conditions in the waiting room which makes it difficult to start the examination on time. If you have arrived more than 15 minutes late, the Waiting Room Supervisor will try to re-schedule you to take the examination at a later reporting time, but if that is not possible, you will be given a Certification Letter of Attendance which means that you will have to take the examination on another day.

Before entering the waiting room, you should turn off your mobile phone/pager or any electronic devices and put them in your bag. Use of mobile phones/electronic devices is strictly prohibited.

**Reporting to the waiting room**

In the waiting room, the waiting room supervisor will check your admission form and your Hong Kong ID card. This will take some time and you must be patient and keep quiet. After your attendance has been taken, you will be given an adhesive label in one of four colours – red, blue, green or yellow. You should place the label on your chest so that the examiners and other candidates can see it clearly. You will also be given two score sheets with your candidate number on them. You should check the information on the score sheets carefully. You should give these two score sheets to the two examiners when you go into the examination room.

Three to four groups of candidates will be scheduled to take the examination in each reporting time. Your exam time may begin shortly after you have arrived or you may have to wait up to an hour, depending on when your exam time is scheduled. You may read books/newspapers but you must stay in your seat. No food is allowed in the waiting room, but you may drink water. Requests to use the toilet should be made within the first 30 minutes of your reporting time.

**Reporting to the preparation room**

Shortly before your examination begins, you will be directed to a separate preparation room and given 10 minutes to prepare. Other candidates in your group will be preparing near you. You must not talk to the other candidates – this would be distracting to them and might give an unfair advantage to you or to other candidates. You are also not allowed to consult unauthorised materials, such as dictionaries, reference books or notes, in the preparation room.

**Preparation time: (10 minutes)**

Before the preparation time begins, you will find a question paper and a notecard on your desk. The question paper will be taped to the desk and with the following printed on the back: 'Do not turn over this question paper until you are told to do so'. You must wait for the preparation room supervisor to tell you to turn over the question paper; otherwise you will receive a mark penalty. You may use the notecard for making notes which you will be allowed to take with you into the exam room.

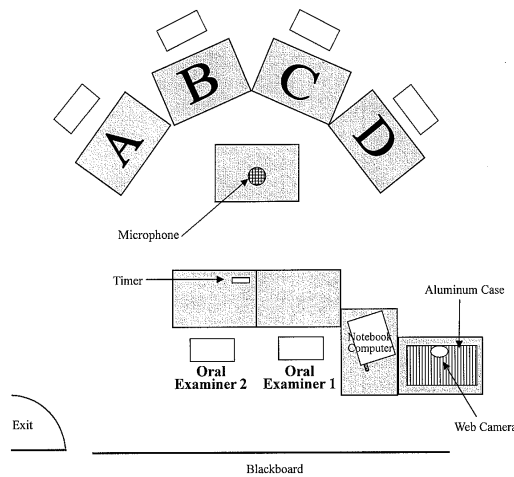
You will have ten minutes for preparation. Please make sure that you read carefully all the instructions, even if you are already familiar with the procedures for the examination. These instructions may be slightly different from any instructions you have read before, so to be absolutely safe, you should read them in full during the preparation time.

The instructions will be for Part A only. You should read the group interaction topic carefully. You may make notes on the notecard provided using either a pencil or a pen (which you should bring yourself). You will be told to stop writing and to turn over the question paper at the end of the 10-minute preparation time.

**Reporting to the examination room**

When it is time for your group to be examined, the preparation room supervisor will direct you into the examination room. You may take your notecard with you for reference during your examination but do not take the copy of the question paper away from the preparation room.

Upon entering the examination room, hand your score sheets to each examiner and sit according to the seating plan.



The examination proceedings will be video-recorded and candidates will be required to sit in a semi-circle facing the examiners. Each candidate's chair will be specially positioned so that all candidates are within view of the camera. Do not move the chair from the designated positions. You should also speak loudly enough for examiners and other group members to hear. Otherwise, the audio input may not be recorded properly.

After you are seated, an examiner will read out your candidate number. Then the examiner will start the group interaction by instructing you to turn over the question paper, which will again be taped to the top of your desk, with the words 'Do not turn over this question paper until you are told to do so'.

**Part A Group Interaction (duration: 8 minutes per group of four candidates)**

You will have 8 minutes for your group interaction (or 6 minutes if there are only 3 candidates in a group). A timer will be displayed in a prominent position where all candidates can see it. During the group interaction, you are not allowed to take notes but may refer to your notecard and to the question paper. One minute before the end of the interaction, an examiner will display a sign, 'One minute left', to indicate that you have one minute remaining. After that minute, the examiner will say that time is up and you should stop your group interaction. When your group interaction is over, you should remain seated and proceed to Part B Individual Response.

## **Part B Individual Response (one minute per candidate)**

In this part, an examiner will ask each candidate at least one question related to the group interaction topic. There is no preparation time. Candidates need to listen to and understand the questions asked and respond appropriately. Each candidate will be asked different questions so the whole group must remain seated quietly and not distract the candidate who is interacting with the examiner. The examiner may ask one or more questions depending on the candidate's response within the time allowed and will only start the timer after asking the first question. Candidates can refer to their notecards if necessary but they are not allowed to take notes. After the candidates have completed Part B, the notecards will be collected by the examiners and the group will be dismissed.

## **Advice to Candidates**

### *What to do during the examination*

- **Speak up:** if the examiners or other candidates cannot hear you, you will not receive good marks, regardless of how fluent or accurate your English is or how well-organized your thoughts are.
- **Be confident:** show the examiners what you know and how well you can express yourself in English.
- **Listen to your fellow candidates:** you should pay particular attention to the other candidates during the group interaction, as you are expected to respond to and interact with them, and not just to express your own isolated ideas. If your ideas are irrelevant to the ongoing interaction, you will not receive good marks.
- **Speak naturally:** use of features of speech like hesitations and short pauses is quite normal in spoken English. However, you should avoid overuse of hesitations, very long pauses or silences. You should be careful not to make too frequent use of particular phrases which are largely without meaning, such as 'you know', 'et cetera', 'I guess', or 'O.K.', which can be very distracting and irritating to listeners (and to the examiners!).
- **Ask for repetition or clarification:** if you do not understand something that a group member has said or a question that the examiner has asked, you may politely ask for a repetition or an explanation. Asking for repetition or clarification will not be regarded as a weakness, but rather as a normal strategy in oral communication. If you can ask appropriately, this will be taken as evidence of your ability to communicate successfully in English.

### *Part A Group Interaction*

Your group may be required to make suggestions, give advice, make and explain a choice, argue for and/or against a position, or discuss the pros and cons of a proposal. Whatever task you are given in Part A, the actual completion of the task will not be assessed, so the examiners will not evaluate whether or not your group reaches a final decision. However, your group interaction must be relevant to the task in your instructions. If you think the interaction is going in the wrong direction, you should interrupt and bring the matter to the attention of the others in your group. What the examiners are interested in is the quality of the group interaction that takes place, and the contribution that each of the candidates makes to the group interaction.

You should try to take part in the group interaction as fully as possible. Generally, the more you participate, the better your mark should be. Do not think that by saying less, you can avoid mistakes and therefore receive a higher mark. On the other hand, do not totally dominate the group interaction. The examiners will mark you down if it is clear you are monopolising the interaction. You must give the other candidates a chance to participate. If the others in your group are quiet and shy, you may need to help or encourage them. That is not being dominating – it is natural participation in a discussion and the examiners will look upon that favourably. You should contribute in as many ways as possible. Do not just ask your group members questions. Although asking questions is a part of discussion, you must also demonstrate that you can make points, respond to questions, and so on.

You should also avoid using memorised problem-solving or discussion phrases and idioms as you may find you use them inappropriately. Too many candidates have in the past said things like 'Every coin has two sides', without going on to describe either the advantage(s) or disadvantage(s) of the idea being discussed. Similarly, phrases like, 'In a nutshell ...', or 'To conclude ...', are acceptable only if the points you make afterwards do actually summarize or make conclusive points on what has been said earlier. The emphasis in this part of the test is on your interactive skills, and coherent expression of ideas, not how many formulaic expressions you know.

All the members of your group cannot be conversation 'leaders'. That does not matter and, in fact, you need not be the 'leader' to gain a high score. You should remember to offer suggestions and opinions, ask others for ideas and feelings, ask for clarification if you do not understand what someone has said, explain your own points, agree and politely (but, perhaps, firmly) disagree, indicate that you understand the others, guide the conversation, steer it back to the previous point or on to another series of ideas, change the focus of the group interaction, or sum up points.

**Discussion Topics:** the group interaction will be based on given prompts. These prompts may be in prose form or may be presented graphically in tables, graphs, flow charts, pictures and so on. The topics may vary considerably and will not be confined to the types found in the sample papers, but will be within the everyday experience of young people in Hong Kong.

**Group size:** usually you will be grouped with three other candidates. However, because of absentees, it may sometimes be necessary to conduct the examination with groups of three candidates only. In this case, the time for Part A Group Interaction will be 6 minutes instead of 8 minutes. The examiners are trained to deal with 'odd' numbers of candidates and your scores will not be affected in any way by the group size.

### **Part B Individual Response**

Each candidate will respond individually to the examiner's questions(s), which will be based on the group interaction task. You may be required to make and justify a choice, decide on and explain a course of action, argue for or against a position, and so on. You should listen to the question(s) carefully and respond naturally and politely. You can refer to your notecard and make use of the information derived from the group interaction or express new ideas and opinions. Do not give prepared answers or repeat points that have already been made in the group interaction.

If you do not understand the examiner's question, you may ask her to repeat it and she will do so only once. Asking for repetition should not be seen as a weakness, but rather as a normal strategy in oral communication. If you do not know the answer to a question, you may say so and ask the examiner to ask you another question. You should make full use of the one minute to demonstrate your speaking ability.

### **Scoring**

Each candidate will be assessed independently by two examiners. Parts A and B will be assessed together and not separately weighted. Candidates will be assessed on the quantity, quality and organisation of their ideas; the clarity and accuracy of their pronunciation and delivery; the appropriacy and accuracy of their vocabulary and language patterns; and their ability to establish and maintain interaction in both parts of the speaking examination.

There will be four domains of assessment:

- **Pronunciation and delivery**  
Pronunciation comprises phonology and intonation; and delivery refers to the speakers' voice projection and fluency.
- **Communication strategies**  
Communication strategies are made up of three important areas: body language, timing, asking and answering questions.
- **Vocabulary and language patterns; and**  
The three important areas in this pattern include vocabulary, language patterns and self-correction/reformulation.
- **Ideas and organisation**  
This domain includes expressing information and ideas, elaborating on appropriate aspects of the topic and organisation.

A candidate will be awarded a mark from 0 - 7 on each of the four domains. The maximum mark awarded by each of the two examiners is 28, resulting in a total of 56 marks.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *Questions about the speaking examination in general*

1. **Will there always be four candidates in a group for the examination?**

Normally the examination will be done in groups of four. However, because of absentees, groups may occasionally be comprised of three candidates.

2. **Will candidates always be in groups of two boys and two girls?**

Whenever possible, candidates will be allocated to groups with equal numbers of boys and girls. Sometimes, though, it may not be possible to avoid groups of three or even all of the members being of the same sex.

3. **Will candidates from the same school be put in the same group?**

Where possible, candidates from the same school will not be put into the same group for the examination. However, on rare occasions, this may be unavoidable.

4. **Will the HKEAA provide pencils and erasers?**

No. The candidates must provide their own pencils and erasers.

5. **Will there be a timer available which the candidates can see?**

Yes, a digital timer will be prominently displayed.

6. **Should candidates face the camera during the video recording of the exam?**

Candidates should interact as naturally as they would without a camera in the room, i.e. facing other members of their group during the group interaction or the examiner during the individual response.

### *Questions about Part A, Group Interaction*

7. **Will candidates be allowed to make notes during the group interaction?**

No. Candidates may refer to the notes they made during the preparation but will not be allowed to make notes because this could result in their spending much of the discussion time writing rather than taking part in genuine oral interaction.

8. **Will candidates be penalised if they just read out what they wrote on their notecards ?**

There is no specific penalty for reading out a written speech from the notecard, but candidates who do so will get low marks for unnatural delivery and poor communication strategies. Candidates should speak in an unrehearsed, natural way, not give written speeches that they have carefully prepared.

9. **What happens if one (or two) candidates dominate the group interaction to the extent that the other candidates do not have a chance to say anything?**

The examiners will ensure that all candidates have a fair chance of being heard. If one or more of the candidates is 'hogging the floor' and dominating the group interaction so much that he/she is intimidating the other candidates, one of the examiners, normally within the first three minutes of the discussion, will intervene and warn the candidate in question that he/she must allow the other candidates to speak or he/she will lose a significant number of marks. If after this warning the candidate continues to dominate the group interaction, the examiner will intervene again and tell him/her that he must let the other candidates speak and that he has been penalised for not doing so.

10. **What happens if a candidate is so shy or retiring that he/she doesn't say anything during the group interaction?**

Normally, the other candidates should encourage a shy or naturally quiet candidate to speak up and take part. In fact, such encouraging behaviour will be very favourably regarded by examiners in their assessments. However, if other candidates do not succeed in getting a shy candidate to participate, in extreme circumstances, the examiner may have to intervene and ask that candidate for his opinions, ideas or suggestions. If a candidate fails to say anything at all during the discussion, he will get zero marks for Part A.

11. **What happens if a candidate speaks so quietly that he cannot be heard during the group interaction?**

If a candidate cannot be heard in the Part A Group Interaction, the examiners cannot be expected to assess him, so a candidate who speaks extremely softly may receive very low marks. In addition, if a candidate talks very quietly, the other candidates will not be able to hear him and this will be unfair and irritating for them. The other candidates should politely ask a quiet candidate to speak up. However, if the other candidates do not succeed in getting a quiet one to raise his/her voice, an examiner will interrupt the group interaction once, and only once, to ask the candidate to speak more loudly. After that it will be the responsibility of the quiet candidate to take corrective action (i.e. to speak up).

12. **What happens if the group only discuss procedural matters (for example, what form a project will take or who will have what responsibility) and does not discuss the content of their task, or if the group strays off the topic of their task?**

Although the candidates will not be judged on their group's task completion, by the end of their group interaction they should at least be actively working towards completion of the task. Therefore, they should discuss both form/procedure *and* content. If a group discusses only form or procedural matters, an examiner will intervene and ask them to discuss content as well. Likewise, if a group strays seriously off the topic that they have been asked to discuss, an examiner will interrupt and ask them to return to the appropriate topic. A good candidate should redirect his/her group if he/she sees the group interaction is straying off the topic or concentrating on solely procedural matters.

*Questions about Part B, Individual Response*

13. **Will candidates in a group be asked the same questions?**

No. The examiners will ask each candidate different questions related to the discussion task in Part A.

14. **Will the candidates be allowed to refer to their notes in this part?**

Yes. Although candidates are expected to give instant responses to the question(s) asked by the examiner, they may refer to their notecards but not write down the question or make notes.

15. **What happens if a candidate's answer is very short?**

Each candidate will have one minute to answer the examiner's question(s). If time permits, the examiner will ask a follow-up question or a different question to give the candidate an opportunity to demonstrate his best speaking ability.

16. **What happens if a candidate's voice is so low or quiet that the examiners cannot hear him?**

Obviously, if a candidate's voice is too weak to be heard, he/she cannot be assessed and so will be awarded a very low mark. If an examiner cannot hear a candidate in Part B, he/she will interrupt him and say 'I'm sorry, I can't hear you. Please speak up.' It will then be the candidate's responsibility to raise his/her voice. The examiner will ask the candidate to speak up no more than once during the individual response.

17. **What happens if a candidate presents a memorised speech?**

Candidates will receive no credit for the response if it is totally irrelevant to the question asked.

18. **Isn't it unfair that candidates are asked different questions and a different number of questions?**

No. The purpose of the individual response is to allow candidates to demonstrate their best and award them appropriate marks for their achievement. A number of questions of different levels of difficulty will be provided for oral examiners to choose from. They can exercise their professional judgement and decide to ask a candidate one or more questions from the list provided within the one minute. The choice will be based on what the candidates said during the discussion, e.g. a follow-up question on an interesting or unclear point. They will also take into consideration the performance of individual candidates in the group interaction.