

IELTS: SPEAKING

In order to achieve a good mark in the speaking test, candidates must speak naturally, clearly and at a reasonable pace in a smooth manner. Sometimes, there is a tendency to speak quickly because of stress. Show that if students speak at a moderate pace, they will have more time to think about what they are going to say next.

Students can avoid long silences and frequent pauses by using fillers such as 'Mmm...', 'Perhaps...', 'Actually...'. Showing them where and how to use these appropriately will eliminate long speaking pauses. Write a dialogue where fillers could be put into gaps and then get students to read the piece so they can see how they can be useful, especially when they are feeling nervous.

Students may come from cultures where criticizing others and their opinions is seen as impolite or disrespectful. They need to be reminded that the examiner will welcome any initiative that they take, so they shouldn't feel that they cannot lead the conversation in a particular direction, if it seems appropriate. However, it must be stressed that they should not try to memorize a prepared talk, as the examiner will recognise this strategy and will almost certainly change the topic. Put students in pairs and get them to talk on a given topic for a timed period.

Task: For the individual long turn, candidates are given one minute to prepare a short talk. All too often candidates just write down a few words or even nothing at all. Have students practice making spider plans, jotting down their ideas and numbering them in the order in which they will use them, adding vocabulary and discourse markers. Encourage students to believe that if they feel nervous, the notes will help them if their mind goes blank. Get a student to look at another student's plan and see if they can use it to answer the task.

Task: Knowledge of how discourse markers are used is an important criteria in the marking of all four skills. Write bingo cards containing sentences with a gap which needs to be filled by a discourse marker. Distribute the cards and see who can shout **BINGO** first with the correct answers. This encourages students to recognise where and how to use the markers, and will help them to use them in their speaking as well. By stressing the word, it can also act as a filler, e.g. '*I have always enjoyed playing all sport **A L T H O U G H**.... due to time constraints I tend to play X rather than Y these days*'.