The Preliminary (PET): Speaking

The Preliminary (PET) Speaking test has an emphasis on discussion in Parts 2 and 4. It is therefore extremely valuable to have class discussion not only in terms of developing speaking skills but also in terms of creating a positive class atmosphere. Whole-class discussions will encourage less able or shy students to talk in class, with the result that they will become more confident, able and less stressed when it comes to the exam. It is always difficult trying to incite weaker students to contribute, gentle encouragement such as “Now we haven’t heard anything from you, Jean; what do you think?” will help. This may initially elicit only a few words, but gradually the student’s confidence will grow.

Students must also listen to opposing points of view to their own and respond to them politely. They should be taught that a disagreement is not the same as arguing and that respect, politeness and mutual understanding are the key. Help them to build phrase banks of agreeing/disagreeing language such as ‘Sorry, I disagree because…’; ‘You may be right, but…’, etc.

If you have appropriate equipment, record a discussion and then play it back to the students. Pause the discussion at relevant points to focus on key grammatical, lexical or functional issues that the students are having problems with, or are using successfully.

Vary discussions from whole class to pairs. Mix the pairs up from time to time.

The Preliminary (PET) exam is about communication and it is important that students realize that it is not about getting them to speak with an English accent. However, it is important to focus on key phonetic and pronunciation areas that can impede communication. For example, the /p/b sound for Arabic speakers; ship/sheep, etc.

Working on intonation patterns will help improve communication and will also benefit listening skills.