

FREE CELPIP SPEAKING TOPICS PDF · 2026 FORMAT

CELPIP Speaking Topics with Answers

40 speaking topics across all 8 CELPIP task types, each with a full model answer.

40 topics	8 task types	Model answers	Prep and record times
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The CELPIP Speaking Test gives you a short preparation window and then records you. The tasks that catch people out are not the hard ones, they are the ones whose shape is unfamiliar. Every task type is in here, with what it is really testing and a model answer at length.

- All 8 task types, from giving advice to describing a scene
- 40 topics with full model answers
- The preparation and recording time for each task
- What raters are actually listening for

Practise the same questions online, scored instantly.
<https://www.celpipmocks.com>

How to use these topics

Read the model answers once to see the shape of a strong response, then stop reading them. The single most common way candidates waste this kind of material is by memorising it: a rehearsed answer delivered to a prompt it does not quite fit reads worse than an unpolished one that actually answers the question.

Use them instead as a target for structure. Notice that almost every model here takes a clear position in the first two sentences, develops two or three points properly rather than listing six, and spends its last few seconds landing rather than trailing off. That shape transfers to any prompt. The words do not.

Reading is not practising

Record yourself against the real clock. Reading a model answer silently takes about half the time it takes to say it aloud, which is why so many candidates run out of time on the day. The practice modules at celpipmocks.com/practice/ run the same prep and record timers as the test.

Task	Type	Prep	Record
1	Giving Advice	30 sec	90 sec
2	Talking about a Personal Experience	30 sec	60 sec
3	Describing a Scene	30 sec	60 sec
4	Making Predictions	30 sec	60 sec
5	Comparing and Persuading	60 sec	60 sec
6	Dealing with a Difficult Situation	60 sec	60 sec
7	Expressing Opinions	30 sec	90 sec
8	Describing an Unusual Situation	30 sec	60 sec

SPEAKING TASK 1

Giving Advice

30 seconds preparation · 90 seconds recording

Task 1 hands you somebody else's problem and asks you to talk them through it. Raters are not checking whether your advice is correct, because there is no correct answer. They are listening for a clear position taken early, two or three reasons that are genuinely developed rather than listed, and a tone that fits the person you are speaking to. Ninety seconds is long enough for three real points, so depth beats a shopping list of eight every time.

Topic 1

Your cousin is thinking about adopting a dog from a rescue shelter. She has never had a pet before, and she has asked you what she should think about first. Give her your advice.

Model answer

Honestly, I think it is a lovely idea, but before you fill in any forms, I would sit down and be really honest about an ordinary week. A dog is not a weekend hobby, it is a ten to fifteen year commitment, and the part people underestimate is not the love, it is the logistics. So map out a normal Tuesday. Who lets him out at lunchtime while you are at work? If the answer is nobody, you would probably need a dog walker, and that is roughly forty dollars a week here. Second, think about money. Between food, the first vet visits and the emergency fund you should really have, you are likely looking at a couple of thousand dollars in year one. Third, and this is the one I would push hardest on, please do not pick the saddest face in the room. Rescue dogs usually come with a history, and a dog who seems nervous in a noisy shelter can be completely different in a quiet apartment. So ask the staff the awkward questions. Has he lived with children? Does he settle when he is left alone? They would far rather tell you the truth than watch him come back in a month. And if they offer fostering, take it. It is a low risk way of finding out what you are actually signing up for.

Topic 2

A co-worker wants to go back to school part-time while keeping her full-time job. She has asked you whether it is a good idea and how she should approach it. Give her your advice.

Model answer

That is a big move, and I think you should do it, but I would go in with your eyes open, because the people I have watched succeed at this all did the same three things. First, they were honest about the arithmetic. Two courses a term sounds modest until you add the reading, and most programs here assume something like nine hours a week per course. If you cannot point to those hours on your calendar right now, you probably will not find them later. Second, they told their manager early instead of hiding it. I know that feels risky, but it is usually the opposite. Once mine knew, she kept me off the Thursday deadlines, and a lot of employers will quietly cover part of the tuition if you simply ask. The worst case is a no, and then you are no worse off than you are today. Third, they started smaller than their ego wanted. One course in the first term, not three. You would far rather finish in December wanting more than burn out by October and drop everything. And if you can, pick something that touches your current job, so the assignments feed the work instead of competing with it. That is the difference between two exhausting years and two years that actually pay you back.

Topic 3

A friend who moved to Canada six months ago has her first job interview here next week. She is nervous and has asked you what she should do to prepare. Give her your advice.

Model answer

Look, your English is fine and your experience is fine, so let us not spend the week worrying about those. What catches most people out here is the shape of the interview, not the language. Canadian interviewers ask behavioural questions almost every time. They will not ask what you would do, they will ask about a time you actually did it, and then they will sit there quietly and wait for a story. So I would prepare about five stories in advance. One for a conflict, one for a deadline you nearly missed, one for a mistake you made, and so on. Tell each one in the same order: the situation, what you personally did, how it ended, and keep the ending measurable if you can. Second, be careful about how you describe your team. In a lot of places it is polite to say we did everything, but here they need to hear what you did, so say I, and do not apologize for it. Third, bring two real questions to ask them, because the silence at the end is part of the test. And practise saying your own strengths out loud in front of a mirror. It feels arrogant the first ten times and then it stops. You have done much harder things than this.

Topic 4

Your aunt is retiring at the end of next month after thirty years at the same company. She has told you she is worried she will be bored. She has asked for your advice. Give her your advice.

Model answer

First of all, congratulations, and honestly, I think that worry is a good sign, because the people who struggle with retirement tend to be the ones who never saw it coming. So, a few thoughts. The thing you will actually miss probably is not the work itself. It is the structure and the people, and those two things disappear on the very same Friday. So I would replace them on purpose rather than waiting to see how it feels. Put something in the calendar that expects you. A class, a shift at the hospital gift shop, a Tuesday swim with a friend. If nobody notices when you do not turn up, it will not hold you. Second, I would give yourself a slow first month before committing to anything permanent, because everyone will ask you to join their committee in week one, and it is far easier to say yes in March than to get out of something in September. And third, I will say this gently: please do not let the whole thing become the grandchildren. They would love it, and it would fill every hour, and then in three years they are teenagers and they are busy. Keep one thing that is only yours. And come for dinner more often. We would genuinely like that.

Topic 5

Your neighbour has never learned to drive. She has decided that this is the year she is finally going to get her licence, and she has asked you what she should think about before she starts. Give her your advice.

Model answer

Do it, and I would start this month rather than waiting for spring, because the timing matters more than people expect. The written test is the easy part. You can book it whenever, the handbook is free online, and it is a weekend of reading, not a project. What actually eats the time is the road test waitlist, and around here that has been running three or four months. So if you leave it until March, you are testing in July. Book now and you would probably have your date before the roads get bad. Second, and this is where I would spend the money, do the certified course rather than the odd lesson with a friend. It is around eight hundred dollars, which I know sounds steep, except most insurers take a chunk off your premium for it, so a fair bit comes back within a year or two. And third, please do not learn only on quiet streets. Everybody does that, they feel great, and then they freeze at their first highway merge. Get somebody to take you out on the four-lane early on a Sunday. And ignore the voice telling you that you are late to this. Half the drivers out there learned at seventeen from a parent, and picked up every bad habit that parent had. You get to learn it properly the first time.

SPEAKING TASK 2

Talking about a Personal Experience

30 seconds preparation · 60 seconds recording

Task 2 asks for one story out of your own life, and sixty seconds is room for exactly that: one story, told properly, not three summarized. Raters want a clear arc (what the situation was, what happened, how it ended) and then the part most candidates skip, which is why it mattered to you. That closing reflection is where abstract language lives, and it is the difference between a competent retelling and a high band. The story does not have to be true, so choose the version that gives you the most to say.

Topic 1

Talk about a time you had to wait a long time for something you really wanted. Tell your listener what happened and why it mattered to you.

Model answer

The one that comes to mind is my permanent residence application. I filed it in the spring of 2019, and then, basically, nothing. For nineteen months there was just a portal that said in progress, and I refreshed it far more often than I would like to admit. The hard part was not the waiting itself, it was that I could not plan anything around it. I turned down a job in Halifax because I had no idea whether I would still be in the country. And then one Thursday morning it simply appeared. No phone call, no ceremony, just a line of text on a screen. I sat in my car in the parking lot and cried, which honestly surprised me. It mattered because it taught me something uncomfortable about myself. I am fine with hard things. I am terrible with uncertain ones.

Topic 2

Talk about a time you made a mistake and had to put it right. Describe what happened and why you still remember it.

Model answer

So, a couple of years ago I was running payroll at a small landscaping company, about thirty staff, and I keyed one man's hours into the wrong row. Marc got paid for eleven hours that week instead of forty-one. He phoned me on the Friday, very politely, which somehow made it worse, because he had rent due on the Monday. My first instinct, honestly, was to blame the software. Instead I told my manager within about ten minutes, we cut him a manual cheque that afternoon, and I drove it out to his house myself. What has stayed with me is not really the mistake. It is how short the window was. If I had spent an hour protecting myself, he would have spent the whole weekend panicking. So now I put my hand up early, and it costs me almost nothing.

Topic 3

Talk about a time you had to speak in front of a group of people. Tell your listener what happened and how you felt about it.

Model answer

I had to give the toast at my brother's wedding, about a hundred and forty people, and I am really not a natural at that. I wrote it out word for word, which everybody tells you not to do, and then I practised it in the car for two weeks until my kids could recite it back to me. On the night my hands were shaking so badly that I could not read my own handwriting, so I gave up on the paper and just told the story about him and the canoe. And it went better than the version I had rehearsed. People laughed in places I had not planned for. What it taught me is that preparing is not really about the words. It is about knowing the material well enough that you can afford to lose your notes.

Topic 4

Talk about a time you returned to a place after many years away. Describe what happened and why it stayed with you.

Model answer

Last summer I took my daughter up to the town where I grew up, in northern Ontario, for the first time in about twenty-two years. I had built it up in my head as this enormous place, and then we drove through the entire thing in roughly four minutes. The school looked tiny. The hill I used to sled down is, I am fairly sure, a gentle slope. But the corner store was still there, and the woman behind the counter recognized my last name, which I honestly did not expect. What got me was watching my daughter be bored by all of it. To her it was a small town with one traffic light. It stayed with me because I realized I had not been visiting a place at all. I had been visiting a version of myself, and you cannot take anybody else there.

Topic 5

Talk about a time you were proud of someone else. It could be your child, someone you trained at work, or a friend who did something difficult. Tell your listener what happened and why it mattered to you.

Model answer

I still think about a boy called Devon, on the under-thirteen soccer team I help coach. Last spring we finally made the final, and about ten minutes before kickoff he came over and told me he thought Amir should start instead of him, because Amir had been at every practice all season and he had not. He was twelve. He gave up the biggest game of his year, unprompted, in about nine words, and then he sat on the bench and cheered. We lost, by the way. Badly. It stayed with me because I coach those kids to win things, and that was probably the only genuinely impressive thing anybody did all season, and it had nothing to do with soccer. I am not sure I would have done it at twelve. Honestly, I am not sure I would do it now.

SPEAKING TASK 3

Describing a Scene

30 seconds preparation · 60 seconds recording

In the real test, Task 3 puts an illustration on the screen and asks you to describe it to a listener who cannot see it, so every one of these five questions gives you a real picture to work from. The rater is not checking whether you spotted every detail: the CLB 5 candidate and the CLB 12 candidate are looking at exactly the same picture, and what separates them is the machinery they bring to it. Orient your listener in one sentence, walk the picture in a fixed order, and say what people are doing to each other rather than what is sitting in the room.

Topic 1

Describe some things that are happening in the picture below as well as you can. The person with whom you are speaking cannot see the picture.

Model answer

Okay, so this is a laundromat on a rainy Saturday, and every machine is running. Starting on the left, at the little counter, the attendant in a maroon apron is tipping a cup of coins into a young guy's open hand, and he is already turning toward the dryers before she has finished. In the middle, at the folding table, a woman in a yellow cardigan and a teenager in headphones are holding opposite corners of a wet bedsheet and pulling it straight between them, and right beside them a student is kneeling on a duffel bag trying to press the lid shut. My favourite bit is over on the right. A little girl in rubber boots has her face pressed against a dryer door watching it spin, and her grandmother is standing over her with a basket on her hip, beckoning at the door. The girl is not moving.

Topic 2

Describe some things that are happening in the picture below as well as you can. The person with whom you are speaking cannot see the picture.

Model answer

Right, so this is a small neighbourhood bakery first thing on a weekday, and the queue goes almost to the door. The obvious thing is the display case running along the left, packed with iced cinnamon buns, and a server with a grey ponytail is hovering over them with a pair of silver tongs, waiting, while an elderly man in a tweed cap holds two fingers up at her. What she has not noticed is the little boy right next to him, up on a step stool with his paper ticket held way above the counter. Then over at the till on the right, a woman in a cycling helmet keeps tapping her phone on the card reader and frowning at it, and the cashier is leaning across pointing at the screen, and behind her a guy in a grey suit is craning round the queue to check his watch.

Topic 3

Describe some things that are happening in the picture below as well as you can. The person with whom you are speaking cannot see the picture.

Model answer

So this is the pickup zone outside an elementary school at three o'clock, and it is barely under control. The whole thing pivots on the crosswalk in the middle. A crossing guard in a high visibility vest has her stop paddle held out flat and her palm up at a silver minivan, and you can see the driver braking and lifting a hand off the wheel. Meanwhile a mum in a yellow raincoat is towing a small boy across in front of them, and he is dragging his scooter by one handlebar. Over at the gate on the left, a teacher is crouched down doing up a little kid's coat, and the kid is holding a dripping wet painting out at her, so she is leaning back away from it. And on the right, a soccer ball has rolled into the bike lane and a cyclist is swerving round it.

Topic 4

Describe some things that are happening in the picture below as well as you can. The person with whom you are speaking cannot see the picture.

Model answer

Alright, so this is a bike repair shop on a spring Saturday, and it is completely packed, bikes and people both. Right in the middle, up on a repair stand, a mechanic in a black apron is spinning a wheel with one hand and holding up a bent spoke in the other, showing it to a man in a plaid shirt who is already digging the wallet out of his back pocket. Down on the floor beside them, a teenage apprentice is levering a tire off the rim, and a boy of about ten is crouched next to him with a bucket of water, tipping it further and further over. The best bit is the doorway on the left, though. A grandmother has just let go of a little girl's saddle, and the girl is wobbling out the door while the grandmother's hands are still up in the air.

Topic 5

Describe some things that are happening in the picture below as well as you can. The person with whom you are speaking cannot see the picture.

Model answer

So, what we have here is the pharmacy counter at the back of a drugstore on a weekday evening, and everyone behind it is doing two things at once. At the raised counter, the pharmacist in a white coat is leaning right over the top holding out a paper bag to an elderly man in a wool coat, and he has a hand cupped behind his ear, leaning in, so she is obviously saying it for the second time. Next to her, a technician has a phone jammed against her shoulder, pointing a pen at a screen, while a woman with a baby strapped to her chest holds an empty pill bottle up in the air, waiting to be noticed. And down the aisle on the left, a clerk is kneeling stacking boxes of tissues, and a little girl is quietly pulling one out of the bottom of the pile.

SPEAKING TASK 4

Making Predictions

30 seconds preparation · 60 seconds recording

In the real test, Task 4 keeps the illustration you have just described on the screen and changes the question: what will most probably happen next? Here you get five pictures of your own, so this is extra practice rather than a repeat of Task 3. One warning is worth more than any tip. The commonest way to lose marks on this task is to describe the picture again, and it is easy to do without noticing, because the frame is right there in front of you. Your rater can already see it. The marks are in the sentences that leave it, so almost every verb should be future or conditional, and the best answers rank their guesses by likelihood instead of asserting everything flatly.

Topic 1

In this picture, what do you think will most probably happen next?

Model answer

Okay, the first thing that's going to happen is that man loses the wand. He's already spraying over his own roof and there's a kid hanging off it behind him, so within a couple of seconds the woman polishing her headlight in the next bay is getting a face full of cold water, and I wouldn't want to be him when she straightens up. The mats are the other one. That gravel is going all over the white car, and the owner has already seen it, so that's a conversation, not an accident. The van will probably start honking, because the driver is tapping her watch and nothing is moving. And the ice cream is going down the door of their own van, obviously. My guess is the attendant sorts out the coin machine last, because everything else is going to get loud first.

Topic 2

In this picture, what do you think will most probably happen next?

Model answer

So the family is the one to watch. They're not making it at a walk, and that attendant is already closing the barrier and checking her watch, so either she sees them and holds it for about ten seconds, or they arrive just as it shuts and spend the next hour on the dock. I'd say she holds it, because people usually do. The chips are gone either way. That seagull has them the moment the boy is pulled through the gate. Meanwhile the green car will get waved on almost immediately, and the cyclist goes right after it, once the marshall turns back around. What I'd really watch is that duffel bag on the bumper. The car ahead is moving, so as soon as the wagon rolls onto the ramp, the bag drops, and somebody behind is going to be leaning on the horn.

Topic 3

In this picture, what do you think will most probably happen next?

Model answer

Right, that sandwich is not going to be eaten by the person holding it. She's reaching for it without looking and the spotted dog is already at the plate, so she'll come back with an empty hand and take a second to work out why. The woman at the gate is losing that lead, I think. You can't hold a dog that size when it's up on its back legs, so most likely she lets go, the dog runs straight at the ball, and the three chasing it all change direction. And the man on the bench is about to be pulled off it, because he's watching his phone with the lead around his wrist and his dog wants that squirrel. The nicest one is probably the biscuit. That beagle is jumping, so the girl either drops it or gives in, and I'd guess she gives in.

Topic 4

In this picture, what do you think will most probably happen next?

Model answer

The courier is the accident here. He's reversing through a glass door with a parcel he can't see around, and the queue starts about a metre behind him, so he's going to walk straight into the student, who is looking at his phone and won't feel it coming. The manager will probably get there first, though. He's already standing and pointing at that third window, so my guess is he opens it, calls two people over, and the queue halves in about thirty seconds. The boy is not getting the candy. His mother has his wrist, and she's the kind who means it, so he'll try once more and then give up. And that poor teller is going to be counting coins for a very long time, because nobody puts a bag of change on a counter on a Friday and gets out quickly.

Topic 5

In this picture, what do you think will most probably happen next?

Model answer

The toddler is the urgent one. He's walking right through the swing and he's watching his rabbit, not the boy coming back at him, so either the grandmother catches the swing in the next second or she grabs him, and honestly she'll probably do both at once. On the slide, the girl is going to go, but not because she wants to. There are three kids behind her and one is already at her shoe, so she gets a push and her father catches her at the bottom. The bucket is a losing battle. One of them lets go, the other falls over backwards, and then they both cry. And that orange is rolling into the sandbox, which nobody has noticed, so my guess is the man finds it fifteen minutes later, covered in sand, and just leaves it there.

SPEAKING TASK 5

Comparing and Persuading

60 seconds preparation · 60 seconds recording

On the real test, Task 5 gives you sixty seconds to choose between two options with no speaking at all, then sixty seconds to prepare and sixty seconds to persuade. The catch is that on the speaking screen the option you turned down disappears, and a new one takes its place: the one the other person wants. So the only comparison that earns marks is your choice against their choice. In this practice course the choice is already made for you, and that is deliberate. With the choice fixed, the model answer can show you exactly how to argue that option, instead of handing you somebody else's case for a computer or a tent you never picked. Raters reward comparing, not praising: concede what is genuinely good about their idea, then measure both options against the same thing and say why yours wins.

Topic 1

You are starting a two year college program in September, and your family is helping pay for a computer. You have chosen the refurbished laptop; your family is suggesting the tablet instead. Persuade them that your choice is the better one by comparing the two.

Model answer

I know how it looks. The tablet is newer, it is lighter, and that pen is genuinely lovely. If I were taking notes in a history class, I would be on your side. But the program is statistics, and the software they mark my assignments in will not install on the tablet. That is not a small thing I can work around. That is me borrowing a lab computer every Sunday for two years. And the pen writes beautifully, sure, but I will be typing lab reports, and the keyboard on that cover is narrower than my hands. Yes, the laptop is used, and yes, four hours of battery means I sit near a plug. I would rather hunt for a plug than hunt for a computer that runs my course. It is also two hundred and sixty dollars less.

Topic 2

You and your partner camp about eight weekends every summer, often at walk-in sites, and your ten year old tent has finally given up. You have chosen the dome tent; your partner is suggesting the rooftop tent instead. Persuade your partner that your choice is the better one by comparing the two.

Model answer

Three minutes. I know. And I am not going to pretend that standing in the rain for twenty-five minutes with the poles is fun, because it is not. But think about where we actually camp. Half the sites we love are walk-in. You park, you carry your gear in, and the tent goes on a flat bit of moss beside the water. A tent that is bolted to the roof cannot get there at all. And on the sites where it can, the car is stuck. It is Saturday, we want ice, or the trail head is fifteen kilometres away, and one of us is folding a bedroom off the roof to go and get it. Yes, ours needs drying out. That is one afternoon in the garage. Yours is two thousand four hundred dollars, plus four hundred for the bars, so that we never do that afternoon again.

Topic 3

You and a friend have one week off in September and are booking a trip together. You have chosen the six days in Montreal and Quebec City; your friend is suggesting the guided bus tour of the Rockies instead. Persuade your friend that your choice is the better one by comparing the two.

Model answer

You are right that I have seen Montreal, and you have never seen the Rockies. That is the one real thing you have got on me, and I am not going to argue it. But look at what that tour week actually is. Seven in the morning, on the coach. Forty minutes at the lake, then back on the coach. You will see the Rockies through a window, and on somebody else's schedule, standing where they park. In Quebec City we get up when we get up, and if it is pouring we spend four hours in a museum and eat well, and the day is still good. Your week has one bad forecast and it is ruined, because there is nothing to do up there in the rain but sit on the coach. I would rather know a place than be driven past twelve of them.

Topic 4

Your office of fourteen people is furnishing a new staff room, and you and a co-worker were handed the budget for the fridge. You have chosen the used full size fridge; your co-worker is suggesting the new under counter fridge instead. Persuade your co-worker that your choice is the better one by comparing the two.

Model answer

The quiet one is nicer. I will give you that, and you are right about the wall, because ours will hum and people on calls will hear it. But six lunches. There are fourteen of us. So every day, eight people find it full and put their bag back on the desk, and by August we are having a meeting about whose yogurt is in there. That is not a fridge, it is a queue. Ours takes everybody's lunch and the cake, on the first day, without anybody managing it. Yes, it is twenty years old and one morning it will die. It cost a hundred and fifty dollars. We replace it and we are still four hundred ahead of yours, and in the meantime nobody is negotiating for shelf space. Buy the quiet one for the phone room, honestly. Not for fourteen lunches.

Topic 5

You and another supervisor must arrange French training for nine staff at your Winnipeg distribution company before a Quebec contract starts in the spring; four of the nine work evening shifts and three collect children at five. You have chosen the workplace tutor; the other supervisor is suggesting the college evening course instead. Persuade the other supervisor that your choice is the better one by comparing the two.

Model answer

You are right, and I want to say this properly: yours is half the price and it comes with the certificate, and I do not have one to offer. So let me tell you why I still want the tutor. Nine people, Tuesdays and Thursdays, six to nine, downtown. Four of them are on evening shifts. Three of them collect kids at five. You are not going to get eighty percent attendance out of that group, and eighty percent is the certificate. So we would pay twenty-six hundred for nine certificates and get maybe four. Mine happens at lunch, on the clock, in the room they already sit in. And she teaches them our delivery paperwork, our phone calls. The client is not going to ask for the certificate. They are going to phone on a Tuesday, and somebody has to answer.

SPEAKING TASK 6

Dealing with a Difficult Situation

60 seconds preparation · 60 seconds recording

Task 6 drops you into a genuinely awkward situation and offers two people you could speak to. You pick one, and only one, and then you speak to them, not about them. The sixty seconds of preparation are unusually generous because the choice matters: the whole answer is scored on tone, and the tone you owe a stranger behind a counter is nothing like the tone you owe your own brother. Raters want the problem named plainly, the uncomfortable part not dodged, and a concrete resolution proposed. The two commonest ways to lose marks are answering both options, and answering neither by simply narrating the situation.

Topic 1

You booked and paid for a hotel room for your parents, who have just driven six hours to visit you. At the front desk the hotel has no record of the booking, and every room is full. You have the confirmation email on your phone. There is a room free at a hotel thirty minutes out of town. Your parents are standing in the lobby with their bags. Choose ONE of the following. Speak to the front desk clerk, explain the problem, and say what you would like the hotel to do about it. OR call your father, who is waiting in the lobby, explain the problem, and suggest what they should do.

Model answer

Hi. I know this is not your fault, so let me be quick about what I actually need. I booked a room for the fourteenth to the sixteenth, I paid in full, and I have the confirmation email right here with the reference number on it. Your system does not have it, which is a problem at your end, not mine, and my parents have just driven six hours and they are sixty-eight and seventy. So here is what I would like. Could you call your sister property downtown before you offer me anything out of town? If they have a room, this is over in ten minutes. If they genuinely do not, then I will take the place out of town, but I would want the hotel to cover the difference and the taxi, and I would like your name before we go any further.

Topic 2

Your building's owner hired a contractor to repaint the lobby. The crew has laid drop sheets across the only wheelchair ramp into the building and stacked paint tins on it. Your neighbour Farah, who uses a wheelchair, is outside now and cannot get into her own home; the stairs are the only alternative. The foreman says the paint needs another three hours to dry and his crew will not move anything. Choose ONE of the following. Speak to the foreman, explain the problem, and say what you would like his crew to do. OR call the building's owner, explain the problem, and say what you would like her to do.

Model answer

Excuse me, are you the foreman? I need two minutes. There is a woman outside in a wheelchair. Her name is Farah, she lives in 302, and she cannot get into her own home right now, because the ramp is under your drop sheets and your paint tins. The stairs are not an option for her. I understand the paint needs three hours, and I am not asking you to redo your work. But there is a difference between a ramp that is wet and a ramp with forty kilos of tins sitting on it. Could you move the tins to the far side and lay a board down across the ramp so she can get up? If that genuinely will not work, then I need two of your crew to help me carry her chair up the steps, and I need that now, rather than in three hours.

Topic 3

You lent your car to your brother for the weekend. He has brought it back with a long scratch down the passenger side and says it was already there. It was not. You need the car for work on Monday. The body shop quotes \$1,100 and wants the car for three days, and your insurance deductible is \$1,000. Choose ONE of the following. Speak to your brother, tell him what you have found, and say what you want him to do. OR call your manager, explain that you may have no car next week, and ask what can be arranged.

Model answer

Hey, come out and look at the car with me for a second. No, I am not, I just want you to look at it. That scratch runs the whole length of the passenger door, and it was not there on Friday, because I washed the car on Friday morning and I would have seen it. I am not accusing you of doing it on purpose. Things happen in parking lots. But it is eleven hundred to fix and my deductible is a thousand, so claiming it is pointless. Here is what I want. I do not need the whole eleven hundred from you. Split it, five fifty each, and you drive me to work on Wednesday and Thursday while it is in the shop. That is it. But I do need you to stop telling me it was already there, because that is the part I actually mind.

Topic 4

You are the shift lead at a garden centre. A customer bought a maple tree two weeks ago and it has died. She has the receipt, she is polite, and she followed the planting instructions exactly. The tree cost \$180. The store's returns policy on plants is seven days and it is printed on the receipt she is holding. Your manager is away until Monday and has told you not to authorize any refunds. Choose ONE of the following. Speak to the customer, explain the situation, and tell her what you can do. OR call your manager, explain the situation, and tell her what you think should be done.

Model answer

So I have looked at your photos and I believe you, and I want to say that before anything else, because you did everything right. Here is where I am, honestly. Our policy on plants is seven days, printed on your receipt, and my manager is away until Monday and has told me I cannot authorize a refund. So I am not going to stand here and pretend I can hand you a hundred and eighty dollars today. What I can do is this. I will hold a maple for you off today's delivery with your name on it, so it does not sell over the weekend. I will write the whole thing up now with your photos, and put it in front of her first thing Monday. And I will call you before noon either way. If she says no, I will tell you she said no.

Topic 5

For two years you have driven your neighbour Beatrice, who is eighty-one and no longer drives, to her hospital appointments. The next one is Thursday at two o'clock. It took five months to get, and she has been waiting for it since March. This morning a company you applied to called with an interview, and the only time they have left this month is Thursday at two. Nobody else is free to take Beatrice, and the hospital is forty minutes away. Choose ONE of the following. Call Beatrice, explain the situation, and tell her what you are going to do about Thursday. OR call the company's recruiter, explain the situation, and ask what can be arranged.

Model answer

Beatrice, it is me. Listen, Thursday is still on. I am taking you. But I want to tell you something before you hear it in my voice. A company rang this morning about an interview, and the only slot left was Thursday at two. So I have asked them for the Friday instead. If they say no, they say no, and I will find another job. You have waited since March for this appointment, and you are not giving it up so I can sit in a waiting room somewhere else. Now, I know you. You are about to tell me to go to the interview and never mind you. Do not. I will pick you up at twenty past one, the same as always, and this time I will remember the parking change. If you want to make it up to me, you can buy the coffee afterwards.

SPEAKING TASK 7

Expressing Opinions

30 seconds preparation · 90 seconds recording

Task 7 asks what you think, and unlike Task 5 there is nobody to persuade and no picture to lean on. It is ninety seconds of argument built out of nothing but your own head. Raters want a position in the first sentence, two or three reasons that are actually developed, at least one concrete example, and, at the top bands, an honest account of the other side that you then answer. Sitting on the fence or arguing both sides evenly costs marks under Task Fulfillment. There is no correct opinion here, so pick the side you have more to say about rather than the one you happen to hold.

Topic 1

Do you think high schools should start the school day later in the morning? Explain your reasons.

Model answer

Yes, and honestly I think it is one of the easier problems we could fix. My position is that high schools should start at nine rather than eight, and the reason is not that teenagers are lazy. It is biology. Their body clocks genuinely shift in adolescence, so a sixteen year old lying awake at midnight is not being difficult. She physically cannot fall asleep, and then we wake her at six thirty. My nephew catches a bus at ten past seven in January, in the dark. He is not learning anything in first period, and everybody involved knows it. What I find persuasive is the districts that have already tried this. When schools push the start back an hour, attendance goes up, and in some places the teenage crash rate has dropped noticeably. That is a public health result from a timetable change, which is about as cheap as policy ever gets. Now, I do understand the objection, and it is a real one. Buses run in shifts, and parents leave for work at eight, so a later start opens a childcare gap in some families. That is not nothing. But we are asking teenagers to absorb the whole cost of an adult scheduling convenience, and I think we have the wrong group carrying it. Move the start. Move the buses afterwards.

Topic 2

Some cities charge households a fee for every bag of garbage they put out. Do you think this is a good idea? Explain your reasons.

Model answer

I am in favour, with one condition, and I will come back to that. The argument for charging by the bag is that it is the only thing anyone has found that reliably works. When garbage is free at the point of use, there is no reason to think about it, so we all fill whatever the bin holds. The moment a bag costs two dollars, people start looking at what they are throwing away. The town where my sister lives cut its landfill volume by roughly a third in the first year. Not through education campaigns. Through two dollars. And I would argue it is fairer than what we do now, because at the moment the person putting out one bag a month is subsidizing the household putting out six, through their property taxes. The obvious objection is that it hits low income families hardest, and that is true if the policy is designed lazily. So, my condition. Recycling and compost stay free, always, and every household gets a number of free tags a year based on its size. Then the fee only bites the people throwing out far more than everybody else, which is exactly who it should bite. What I would not accept is a flat charge with no free allowance, because at that point it stops being an incentive and becomes another bill.

Topic 3

Do you think that sports teams for children under twelve should keep score? Explain your reasons.

Model answer

I think they should keep score, and I say that as somebody who used to believe the opposite. What changed my mind is that not keeping score does not actually work. If you have ever stood at the side of a field at an under-ten game, you know that every single child out there can tell you the score. They keep it in their heads anyway. So the adults are not removing the competition, they are pretending to remove it, and children can spot an adult pretending from fifty metres away. The lesson they take home is not that winning does not matter. It is that grown-ups will bend the truth to keep things comfortable. And I do think losing is useful, in small doses, early, when the stakes are a Saturday morning and your mum is standing right there. Learning to lose four to one and then go for pizza is a skill, and you would far rather learn it at eight than at twenty-eight. Now, the case against is real. I have met the parents who take it much too seriously, and that damage is not imaginary. But the problem there is the adults, not the scoreboard, so deal with the adults. Taking the score away just moves the pressure somewhere the children cannot see it. It does not remove it.

Topic 4

Do you think there should be a fixed age at which people must retire? Explain your reasons.

Model answer

No, I do not, and I would go a bit further. I think a fixed retirement age is a crude tool that we keep mostly for administrative convenience. My main objection is that it measures the wrong thing. Age is a proxy for capability and it is a poor one. I have worked with a fifty-two year old who was completely finished, and with a surgeon of seventy-one who I would rather have had operating on me than most of his department. If the concern is competence, then test competence. Airline pilots are checked twice a year and nobody calls that age discrimination. Second, people's circumstances are not remotely the same. Somebody who arrived in this country at forty-five, or who took twelve years out to raise children, has not had the same runway, and a fixed age tells them their working life is finished on a date that somebody else chose. But I will concede the strongest argument on the other side. A fixed age does open room for younger workers, and it protects people from employers who would quietly push out anyone over sixty. That is a genuine tension, and I do not think it disappears. My answer is that we should defend the right to retire at sixty-five absolutely, and keep it a right rather than a deadline.

Topic 5

Do you think that employers should be allowed to require a doctor's note when an employee takes a single day off sick? Explain your reasons.

Model answer

No. And I think this is a rule that quietly does the opposite of what it was written to do. A single day should be taken on trust. My first reason is what the rule physically makes a sick person do. You have a fever. To prove you have a fever, you get dressed, cross town, and sit in a waiting room for two hours breathing on everybody in it. To collect a piece of paper. That is a public health problem we are creating on purpose. My second reason is that the paper is worth nothing. A doctor cannot verify a migraine or a stomach bug. She can only write down what you have just told her. So we burn an appointment, and often a fee, on a document with no information in it, while somebody who needed that appointment waits another week. Now, the other side is real, and I want to say so. Some people do abuse sick days, and a supervisor scrambling to cover a shift at six in the morning is right to be frustrated. But the note does not catch them. It catches the honest ones, because they are the only ones who bother going. So watch the pattern, not the day. If somebody is off every second Monday, deal with that person. Do not manage everybody as though they were that person.

SPEAKING TASK 8

Describing an Unusual Situation

30 seconds preparation · 60 seconds recording

Task 8 puts something odd on the screen and asks you to describe it down the phone to a named person who cannot see it for themselves. Underneath the strangeness, this is a circumlocution test, and that word is the whole task: the thing in front of you has no ready-made name, so you have to build one out of ordinary words, shapes, spatial relations and comparisons. Two candidates can be shown the identical object and notice the identical things; what separates them is the machinery they can bring to it, and the difference between a funny looking gadget and a description a listener could draw from is entirely in the sentences. Practise the same four moves every time: orient your listener with something familiar, walk through the parts in a fixed spatial order, stop on the one feature that has no name, and then ask. The wrapper has four beats and candidates reliably drop the last one, which is why you are there, why your listener cannot simply look, who you are calling, and the request you close with.

Topic 1

You are at a home decor shop looking for a wedding present for two friends, and you find the object in the picture below. It costs \$150. The shop has a no photography sign at the door, because their designs get copied, so your friend Ingrid cannot see it for herself. Call Ingrid, who is paying for half of the present, describe the object to her, and ask her whether you should buy it.

Model answer

Ingrid, hi. I am at that home shop on Bank Street and I think I have found the wedding present, but they have a no photography sign up, so I cannot show you. Right. Imagine a single ribbon of steel, about as wide as three fingers and roughly the length of your arm. Somebody has bent it into a loop that crosses over itself twice, so it climbs up on one side, almost to my elbow, and dips right down to the table on the other. The low dip is where the fruit goes. It balances on three points, just where the ribbon touches down, and there is nothing else holding it up. The outside is brushed matte, and the inside is polished like a mirror, so a lemon sitting in it appears twice. It is a hundred and fifty. Should we buy it?

Topic 2

You are at an art school degree show and your niece has entered the piece in the picture below. The show closes on Sunday. The gallery does not allow photographs of unsold student work, so your brother Emil, who is her father and is away for the weekend, cannot see it for himself. Call Emil, describe the piece to him, and ask him whether he wants to come and see it before the show closes.

Model answer

Emil, it is me. I am at the degree show, and you need to come and see what your daughter has made. They do not allow photographs of unsold student work in here, so I cannot send you anything. Picture an old brown leather suitcase, the proper hard kind with the metal corners, standing up on one end. The lid is half open and hinged at the top, so it hangs there like a mouth. And instead of clothes, the whole inside is packed with a honeycomb, wooden six-sided cells, right to the edges. Sticking out of about a dozen of those cells, at every angle, are ordinary teaspoons. Just the handles showing, like bees. The case stands on four little brass bird feet, and there is a luggage tag on the handle with nothing written on it. Do you want to come down before it closes on Sunday?

Topic 3

You have just arrived at a rented cottage north of Kingston for a week, and the thing in the picture below is hanging from the ceiling over the kitchen counter with vegetables already in it. The owner left no note about it. There is no internet at the cottage and your phone has no data out there, so you are calling from the cottage landline and your friend Delphine, who has rented this cottage before, cannot see it for herself. Call Delphine, describe the thing to her, and ask her how you are supposed to use it.

Model answer

Delphine, hi, it is me, calling from the cottage landline. There is no internet up here and I have no data, so I cannot send you a picture. There is a thing hanging over the kitchen counter and I cannot work out what to do with it. Imagine a bicycle wheel with the tire taken off, hanging flat, level, like a chandelier. Four chains come up off the rim and meet in a ring at the top, and that hangs on a hook in the ceiling. It hangs from the hub, so the whole wheel spins if you push it. Around the rim there are eight bulldog clips on wire loops, all different lengths, so they dangle at different heights. Three of them are holding mesh bags, onions, garlic and some dried herbs. Two are empty. How am I supposed to use this thing?

Topic 4

You are clearing out your late uncle's basement in Winnipeg and you find the brass mechanism in the picture below on his workbench. You would like to get it working again, but it is too heavy to carry anywhere and parts of it are damaged. Your phone camera has been broken since you dropped it, so your cousin Teodor, who repairs clocks for a living, cannot see it for himself. Call Teodor, describe the mechanism to him, and ask him how to get it working again.

Model answer

Teodor, hi, it is me. I am in our uncle's basement clearing the house, and my phone camera has been broken, so I cannot send you a photo. There is a brass thing down here. Picture a heavy round oak base, about the size of a dinner plate, with a brass column standing up out of the middle, forearm high. Four brass arms come off the column at different heights, each a different length, each ending in a small painted ball. The biggest is a walnut, the smallest is a pea. One arm ends in nothing, just an empty socket. There is a crank on the side, but the knob has split off, so it is a bare stub, and the little locking lever has snapped in half. When I turn the stub, two arms move and two do not. How do I get it going again?

Topic 5

You have just moved into a house in Regina and the previous owners left the thing in the picture below standing on a post in the back yard. Nobody told you what it is for, and you cannot tell whether any of it still works. Your sister Sofia is driving back from Calgary and cannot look at her phone, although she can talk hands free. Call Sofia, describe the thing to her, and ask her whether you should keep it or take it down.

Model answer

Sofia, hi, are you still driving? Do not look at your phone then, I will just describe it. We have moved in, and the last owners left something on a post in the back yard. I cannot tell if it does anything. A grey cedar post, about shoulder high, with a square wooden plate nailed on top. On the plate there are four yogurt cups, stuck on the ends of two bicycle spokes crossed at right angles, and the whole cross spins on a nail. All four cups face the same way around. Above that, an arrow cut out of a licence plate, and it swings. Halfway down the post, a pop bottle cut in half with the top half turned upside down inside the bottom, like a funnel, and a strip of tape up the side with marks on it. Do we keep it or take it down?

Say it out loud, on the clock

These topics are only worth marks once you have spoken them under the real prep and recording times.

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