



**Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board**

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ORAL ASSESSMENT IN SINGAPORE: A RESPONSIVE APPROACH**

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# Introduction



In Singapore, English Language is ...

- ◆ the working language
- ◆ the main language of instruction in schools
- ◆ used in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual setting
- ◆ used by students of different profiles
- ◆ used by students with varying proficiency in the language

# Reviews of English Language Syllabuses



- ◆ 3 curriculum and assessment reviews in the last 3 decades
- ◆ Each review a comprehensive study of teaching and learning
- ◆ Extensive consultations with stakeholders
- ◆ Changes exemplify new curriculum emphases
- ◆ Changes made to assessment to align with curriculum and teaching

# Changes to Oral Assessment



## Scope of the Paper

- ◆ Changes in the last 3 decades – 1990s, 2000s & 2010s
- ◆ Considerations for Syllabus Review
- ◆ Changes to come

# Oral Examination in the 1990s

In the 1990s the aim was for students to be able to ...

- ◆ read English texts with good pronunciation
- ◆ speak English clearly and fluently
- ◆ comprehend and use English in different contexts
- ◆ converse on everyday matters in good English

# Oral Examination in the 1990s

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- ◆ The curriculum was designed to teach the skills required
- ◆ The assessment tested these skills taught

# TEST FORMAT

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- ◆ 2-component test design – Reading Aloud and Conversation
- ◆ Reading Aloud tested *Pronunciation and Articulation* as well as *Rhythm and Fluency*
- ◆ Conversation tested *Fluency* and *Content*
- ◆ The *Oral Paper* carried a weighting of 10%

# Oral Examination in the 1990s



For Reading Aloud, candidates were assessed on their ability to

- ◆ pronounce correctly and articulate clearly
- ◆ read with variations in pitch and tone as well as with appropriate rhythm and good pace



# Oral Examination in the 1990s



For Conversation, candidates were assessed on their ability to

- ◆ speak clearly with self assurance and with little prompting
- ◆ make a number of relevant points and amplify the points made with appropriate examples

# Oral Examination in the 2000s



- ◆ The curriculum sought to develop ability to express clearly a personal opinion in addition to reading fluently and expressively and engaging in conversation
- ◆ The *Oral Paper* was re-named the *Oral Communication Paper*

# Oral Examination in the 2000s



- ◆ A thematically linked 3-component test design was introduced
  - ✓ Reading Aloud
  - ✓ Picture Discussion
  - ✓ Conversation
- ◆ The revised *Oral Communication Paper* carried an increased weighting of 20% in line with increased emphasis on oral skills

# Test Format



For Reading Aloud, candidates were assessed on their ability to

- ◆ pronounce correctly and articulate clearly
- ◆ read with variations in pitch and tone as well as with appropriate rhythm and good pace
- ◆ read with expressiveness

# Test Format



For Conversation, candidates

- ◆ provide personal response, express themselves clearly and engage in a conversation

For the new Picture Discussion Component, candidates

- ◆ interpret and explain, with supporting details, coherently and in good English situations depicted in the given picture

# Assessment Intent



This means students must be able to ...

- ◆ communicate in English effectively
- ◆ interact with English speakers worldwide

# Oral Examination in the 2010s

- ◆ The curriculum built on strengths of previous syllabus and gave emphasis to key areas
- ◆ A thematically linked 2-component test format with the new Spoken Interaction component was designed
  - ✓ Reading Aloud
  - ✓ Spoken Interaction

# Oral Examination in the 2010s

Currently in the 2010s, the new skills assessed are:

- ◆ ability to read an English text taking into consideration purpose, audience and context (PAC)
- ◆ ability to sustain an interaction with an interlocutor in internationally acceptable English



# Oral Examination in the 2010s

Reading Aloud in 2010s requires candidates to

- ◆ read a text with a specific purpose to a specific audience in a given context

For Spoken Interaction, candidates are to

- ◆ hold a sustained interaction with an examiner in good conversational English taking care of their pronunciation

# Test Item Samples - Reading



*The Jurong Bird Park is home to some 8 000 birds at any one time. Of these, 95 per cent are born in the Bird Park, bought, or acquired through exchanges with other parks around the world. The remaining birds are given to the park by the public.*

*Some of the birds received from the public are injured wild birds. The rest are mainly parrots given up by their owners, who are perhaps irritated by the birds' constant chattering.*

*Interestingly, a significant number of birds are given to the park between September and March. This is the period when birds migrate south. The birds that are given to the park are probably those that are exhausted or deprived of food and water during their long migratory flight.*

*The injured birds, brought to the parks, are treated and .....*

# Test Item Samples – Picture Discussion



*Where do you think this picture was taken?*

*Why are the children standing in line?*

*What will happen next?*

# Test Item Samples - Conversation



*Which places of interest would you recommend to a visitor from another country? Why?*

*What kind of responsibilities do people who keep pets have?*

# Test Item Samples -Read with PAC



*You took part in a school project which was to find out about places where young people in your neighbourhood meet. You have written a report for your project which you will now share with your class.*

*My task was to investigate an area within a one-kilometre radius of the school and to gather information on where young people meet up after school and at weekends. I'm afraid I have to report back that there are, in fact, very few suitable places in our area. I discovered that the three main meeting places are as follows:*

*One, the cafe on the corner of Cooper Street, opposite the train station. As most of you know, this is very small and is situated at a busy junction.*

*Two, the food court on the main road. This is always packed and there is very limited space. Often we just want to meet up for a chat but end up buying food that we don't really want.*

*And three, ...*

# Test Item Samples -Spoken Interaction



*Would you choose this place for a meal with friends? Why or why not?*

*What are the popular places where young people like to meet in your neighbourhood?*

*Many teenagers seem to prefer meeting in air-conditioned places. Do you think this shows that teenagers are too pampered these days?*

# Moving Ahead



- ◆ A series of trials since 2009 to introduce ICT into our oral examinations
- ◆ Value-add is a key principle in introducing ICT-based tests into our oral assessments

# Conclusion



- ◆ Changes in Oral Assessment in the last 3 decades have been made in response to new emphases in the curriculum
- ◆ Regular comprehensive reviews have and will be carried out to ensure that our education system is responsive in preparing our students with English Language competencies and skills needed for work and life in the global economy





**Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board**

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