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OET Speaking



Strategies for the speaking component of the OET test



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In this tutorial

- Roleplay Format and Structure
- OET Assessment Criteria
- Possible Scenarios for Roleplays
- An Example Roleplay
- OET Dos & Don'ts



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Roleplay Format and Structure

- The speaking sub-test of the OET test involves two roleplays scenarios. The interviewer will take the part of the patient and the candidate will act as the medical professional. The interview is usually about 20 minutes long and structured as follows:
- A check of your identification check (this is not assessed)
- A short conversation about the candidate's medical career, for example, "what have you been doing in the last couple of years" (this is not assessed)
- The first 5-6 minute roleplay, with 2/3 minutes to prepare (assessed)
- The second 5-6 minute roleplay, with 2/3 minutes to prepare (assessed)



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Preparation Time

- The preparation time is critical. You need to read the roleplay card handed to you and you can make notes on the card or underline key words.
- If there is anything you are uncertain of, especially vocabulary, you may ask the interviewer for clarification. This is important because if you misunderstand the situation it will effect how you approach the task.
- At this point, if you are not 100% confident, you should enroll in a preparation course of some kind. Candidates should not underestimate the important of practice and guidance for this part of the test.



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Using the role Play Card

- The information on the roleplay card is useful to judge the seriousness of the situation and how to begin the roleplay.
- For example if your roleplay is set in an old peoples home, it would be wrong to start your conversation with "Thanks for coming today" (because the patient already lives there). Similarly if the role play is set in an accident and emergency department (A&E) it would be inappropriate to start your roleplay by asking "How are you today?" better to find out what the problem is straight away.
- Therefore, the first important lesson is to read the card carefully and act appropriately for the situation.



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Control the Roleplay

- Whatever roleplay scenario you find yourself with, it is your task to start the roleplay. The interviewer will not start the roleplay for you.
- You are the medical professional and you need to be in control of how the roleplay will develop. A suggested structure is as follows:
 - Briefly introduce yourself according to the scenario.
 - Ask questions to make an initial diagnosis .
 - Respond carefully to the patient's responses.
 - Provide an explanation of the condition & respond to further questions and concerns of the patient.
 - Provide advice and reassurance as required.
 - Short simple concluding sentence.



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1) Briefly introduce yourself according to the scenario.

- You only have 5-6 minutes so it is important to cover all of the stages mentioned in the last slide.
- In an accident and emergency department of a hospital it would be appropriate to say: *"Hello, I am Doctor Robertson and I will be looking after you today, now ~ "*
- On a hospital ward a candidate could start by introducing themselves "Good day, my name is Cathy, I'm the nurse on this ward and I'm gong to be looking after you today, are you feeling comfortable?"
- In this stage, introduce yourself, find out if the patient or family member is feeling secure, and move on to the next stage.



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2) Ask questions to make an initial diagnosis

- A common mistake is for candidates to ask too many questions, for example by collecting family history, and wasting too much time.
- The role card should give you a good idea where to start. You need to collect relevant medical information for the role play but not an entire history of the patient/examiner. For example;
- You are talking to a 42-year-old patient, a heavy drinker who has just been admitted with gastritis.
- You could ask,
 - "How long has the discomfort been going on?"
 - "and you say you drink, how much would you say per week?"
 - "does anyone in the family have a similar problem?"



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3) Respond carefully to the patient's responses

- It is important that you respond with empathy and care to the patient/examiner's responses.
- Just like in real life, language and voice register, intonation, and the type of language chosen for each scenario is important.
- Remember that in Australia the medical system relies on a patient centered approach. Doctors and nurses do not always know best and patients are consulted and advised, decisions are made by the patient once the treatment options are known.
- The patients responses will also test your ability to listen to others, and to appropriately deal with patients who may not like your advice.



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4) Provide an explanation of the condition & respond to further questions and concerns of the patient

- While the OET claims not to test medical knowledge, obviously if the roleplay asks you to advise a patient to stop smoking, then you will need some knowledge about 'stop-smoking therapies'.
- In most of the scenarios you will need some background knowledge and the ability to concisely communicate that knowledge to the patient, either as an explanation of the condition or various options concerning treatment.
- It is vital therefore, that you practice as many different roleplays as possible, and anticipate how the patient/examiner may respond to your advice.



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5) Provide advice and reassurance as required

- Having diagnosed the problem and provided an explanation of the condition, treatment, or therapy, your task now is to offer the patient advice and reassurance.
- It is important to listen carefully to the patient and to empathize (understand how and why they feel/think as they do) and recognize their thoughts and emotions as valid. Again this will test your English ability.



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6) Short simple concluding sentence

- Paraphrase what has been agreed (treatment/therapy if any) with the patient and check that they have understood your explanation.
- If appropriate, arrange for a follow on appointment or referral, or on a hospital ward, arrange to drop by and check later.
- Remember to keep your conclusion concise and functional.



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Review

- Let's review this model for the speaking sub-test.
- Briefly introduce yourself according to the scenario.
- Ask questions to make an initial diagnosis .
- Respond carefully to the patient's responses.
- Provide an explanation of the condition & respond to further questions and concerns of the patient.
- Provide advice and reassurance as required.
- Short simple concluding sentence.



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Speaking Assessment Criteria

Overall Communicative Effectiveness

For this criterion, you need to demonstrate your capability to handle a typical conversation between a doctor and a patient.

This means you must lead the conversation based on the roleplay scenario on your card. You must ask questions clearly to find out the patient's condition and /or main concern. You must also respond appropriately to questions from the patient (interviewer).



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Speaking Assessment Criteria

Intelligibility

This refers to how clearly you speak and can be broken down into the following categories:

- Pronunciation
- Intonation
- Syllable and word stress
- Rhythm

While you are not expected to speak like a native speaker, it is expected that what you say can be clearly understood.

Therefore you need to ensure that you pronounce words clearly, particularly words specific to a medical consultation.

For all people from non English speaking backgrounds there are some sounds, stress patterns or rhythm which are difficult.

It is important that you identify which aspects of English are difficult for you and work hard to improve in those areas.

Recording your own speech is a useful starting point.



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Speaking Assessment Criteria

Fluency

This is a challenging category. You need to practice roleplay scenarios regularly so that you have the confidence to respond to the scenario and patient with a reasonable degree of fluency. If your speech contains too many hesitations and pauses you will be marked down.

On the other hand, if you rush your speech there is a risk that you won't be understood.

Nervousness is often a cause of fluency problems and the best way to overcome this is regular practice using a variety of roleplay scenarios.



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Speaking Assessment Criteria

Appropriateness

This criterion refers to your choice of vocabulary and manner of speech. The roleplay is a formal situation so you need to use formal expressions and avoid overly casual expressions. For example: Overuse of yeah can sound casual. Yes is more appropriate. Or Wanna Vs would like to. It is also important to explain medical conditions, treatments and medications using non medical terminology so that patient without any medical knowledge could easily understand. For example: If you say: You are febrile the patient would probably not understand. It is much better to say: You have a fever. Another common error is incorrect use of pronouns. Him when the patient is a female or Her when the patient is a male. If you have difficulties with pronouns, write them down in large letters on your role-play card as a reminder!



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Speaking Assessment Criteria

Resources of grammar and expression

This relates to how accurately you speak. To achieve a B score you will need to demonstrate good grammatical control in your speech. Common errors occur in the following areas:

- Asking questions: What seems to be the problem?/How long have you been....? Practice in this area is essential.
- Verb tense: You will need to demonstrate flexibility and accuracy in all verb tenses. Be especially careful with present perfect Vs simple past and passive forms
- use of articles: Do you have headache Vs Do you have a headache
- Countable/uncountable nouns: Let me give some advices Vs Let me give you some advice
- Verb subject agreement: Your condition have worsened Vs Your condition has worsened



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Possible Scenarios for Roleplay

- The roleplay scenarios are based on real situations you are likely to encounter in your work as a doctor in Australia. There are a variety of possible settings for the roleplay as follows:
- Emergency Department of a Hospital
- Hospital Ward
- Suburban Medical Clinic
- Hospital Outpatients
- General Practice
- An old people's home



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An Example Roleplay

Candidate's Card: Nursing Setting Hospital Ward

Nurse You are talking to a 42-year-old patient, a heavy drinker who has just been admitted with gastritis.

Task Find out about the patient's general background: family, habits and general health.

Respond to the patient's questions about lowering his alcohol consumption. Give advice in a positive and friendly way.



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An Example Roleplay

Roleplayer's Card: Nursing Setting Hospital Ward

Patient You are a 42-year-old male who has been admitted to hospital with gastritis. The nurse is collecting information from you. You live in your own home with your wife, who is 36 years old, and you have three teenage children living at home. You have been drinking alcohol for 25 years and often suffer abdominal upset or pain.

You would like to lower your alcohol intake but have tried several times and have not succeeded.

Task Answer the nurse's question about your family situation, and ask for advice about how to give up drinking.

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OET Dos & Don'ts

Do	Don't
Read the roleplay card carefully and ask the interviewer if you are unsure of any of the words or expressions in the task.	Plan what you are going to say in advance. React to the scenario on your roleplay card and plan your role accordingly.
Practice as many tasks as possible with a partner to ensure you are familiar with the speaking test. Remember it is very different to IELTS and requires different language skills, such as the ability to persuade, convince and reassure.	Ignore the task requirements and say what you think based on your medical knowledge. Remember it is a test of English language ability and not a place to demonstrate your medical knowledge.



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OET Dos & Don'ts

Do	Don't
Take charge of the roleplay. You are a medical professional and should act accordingly.	Wait for the interviewer to lead the roleplay. This is your job.
Act confidently and if you are unsure of the details of the condition, just make it up! Remember it is a test of English not your medical knowledge.	Show how nervous you are as this can negatively affect your result. Lots of practice is the best way to overcome nerves
Stay focussed on the task at hand. You only have 5-6 minutes to complete the task!	Spend too much time on unrelated matters such as a detailed medical history as you do not have time for this.



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Conclusions

- In this tutorial we have seen that the OET test is fairly structured and requires practice to pass successfully.
- Don't be frightened by the complexity of the task, with the proper coaching most health professionals can pass the speaking module.
- At OETpreparation.com we specialize in finding the right course for you, at the right time and at the right price.
- Contact us using the contact page or email <https://noahsnestedu.com> info@noahsnestedu.com and we can advise you on the best preparation course for your need.