

Practice for the Oral Exam

11

INTERPERSONAL SPEAKING: CONVERSATION

Description

The objective of the interpersonal speaking part of the exam is to provide a sample of speech in a simulated conversation. On the page with the script, you will see a text box with a set of directions. There are two boxes, one in English and another in Spanish. You will then see the curricular theme and be given an introduction to the conversation. You will have one minute to read the instructions and one additional minute to read the introduction and outline of the conversation. After the two minutes have passed, the conversation will be played without pauses. The lines that are recorded are in a shaded box, and your part is in the un-shaded part. In each case, there is a very general description of the kind of information or response that is appropriate. After each time the other person speaks, you will have 20 seconds to record your response. There will be five places for you to participate in the conversation. At times, you may be asked to initiate the conversation in response to a stimulus, such as a telephone ring.

Suggestions

Clearly, there is a wide range of expressions that would be appropriate in each conversation. The conversation cannot be so specific that there is only one correct response or answer to a question. It will be helpful to know a range of expressions that are common in conversations at different points of the talk. For example, if you are asked to give a greeting, you should have a number of them ready to use. Pick an expression that would correspond to the context. If you are to talk to a close friend, you would use *tú* in addressing him or her. If it is morning, you would say *Buenos días*, instead of *Buenas noches*. If you are to close the conversation, you can close with any number of expressions, from *Hasta luego* to a more formal kind of closing for a more formal conversation, such as *Gracias por los consejos* or *Le agradezco mucho por su ayuda*. There will be times for you to express reactions, issue an invitation, make a suggestion, ask a question for additional information or for clarification, or make an observation about a familiar topic. Some of the expressions are short and could be used at the beginning of your response while you formulate what you are going to say. Expressions, such as *¡Qué va!*, *¡Ni idea!*, *¡Qué lata!*, *¡Qué idea!*, *¡No me digas!*, *¡Ni modo!*, *A ver, bueno pues*, are all exclamations that continue a conversation and fulfill the requirements of the conversation, while at the same time give you time to think.

In addition to vocabulary, be sure to make a mental note of the grammar you may want to use in the conversation. For example, there may be natural opportunities to use the subjunctive. When you are asked to give a reaction, you can use the subjunctive following a verb of

emotion, doubt, or an impersonal expression. When you are asked to make a recommendation, you can use the subjunctive after a verb of volition, such as *querer*, *recomendar*, *aconsejar*, *sugerir*, or *mandar*, *exigir*, *requerir*, or the most common one, *pedir*. The grammar you use in the informal speaking part is similar to the kind you would use in the informal writing part of the exam.

In a normal conversation, some hesitation is acceptable, but long pauses while you translate from English to Spanish are going to be obvious. To maintain a natural flow to the conversation, think ahead. When you see that a reaction is called for in the script, you can make a mental note of words to expect to either hear or use. Remember that writing out words or sentences takes time. If you start writing down things to say, you will lose too much of the allotted 30 seconds. When you look at the script before listening to the conversation, make a quick mental note of

- where the conversation takes place,
- with whom you are speaking,
- what the main topic is, and
- what kind of information you need to supply in the conversation.

Standard informal and formal greetings should be so familiar to you that you do not need to spend time thinking about them. If you know how to begin and end the conversation, you can focus on the middle part when you review the script before recording your responses. The rest of the topic will be about something every teenager might have in common, so you can anticipate the topics, in part, if you think through your own life experiences.

Strategies for completing the informal speaking part of the exam should include the following points:

- Read the outline carefully, especially after reading the explanation of the context of the conversation.
- Know the instructions so well that you do not have to pay much attention to them. This will allow you more time to study the outline of the conversation. The extra time is useful for remembering expressions and structures you may want to use.
- Decide immediately whether to use *tú*, *Ud.*, or *Uds.*
- Jot down words that you might want to use on the lines in the booklet where you are to speak. For example, if the outline says that you are to thank someone, you could jot down *agradezco*, or if the script calls for you to reject an offer to do something, you could jot down *lo siento que no* (then use the subjunctive). If the outline asks for details, think ahead about words associated with the topic, such as terms used in sports, at school, or at a party.
- Try to visualize the person with whom you are speaking. It is easier to talk to someone face to face than on a telephone.
- If you do not understand a sentence that you hear, pick one word that you may be given.
- Rephrase if you get stuck with a sentence that you cannot complete because of one word you do not know.
- Use as much of the 20 seconds as you can. Do not leave long pauses. The directions in the script are very general, but you can be very specific in giving examples or narrating events in your responses.
- Correct yourself if you know you have made a mistake.
- Relax and say something. If you do not say anything there is nothing to evaluate.