

Example of a Task Specification (Fulcher, 2003)

Title: Picture Description Task as Part of a Larger Speaking Assessment

General Description: The picture description component is designed to elicit an extended sample of speech from the test taker in order to test monologic fluency, the ability to describe, compare and contrast, two pictures which should be familiar. The focus of the assessment is on achievement strategies to compare and contrast, using appropriate vocabulary to communicate with the interlocutor.

Prompt Attribute: The student is given two pictures of familiar scenes. The interlocutor says: "I am giving you two pictures. Please take a minute to look at these. I will then ask you to describe each picture, and ask you one other question about them. You will then have three minutes to talk about the pictures. Do you understand what you have to do?" [Answer any questions the test taker may have]

After one minute, say: "Would you describe the pictures for me, and then tell me X"

In place of X insert: "Would you prefer to go to A or B for your holiday?" "Would you prefer to do activity A or B as a sport?" "Would you prefer to do A or B as a hobby?" [If the test taker needs an additional prompt to continue speaking, ask: "Why do you say that?"]

When the test taker concludes, say: "Thank you. I will take the pictures. We will now move on to the next part of the test."

Each task must use two pictures that offer a contrast. These may be pictures of places (town/countryside, seaside/mountains etc.), activities (surfing/skiing, sailing/hiking), or hobbies (stamp collecting/gardening, reading/listening to music). No specialised vocabulary should be needed to describe the pictures, or compare and contrast the themes or activities.

Response Attribute: The test taker will describe each picture. It is expected that they will identify the theme, activity, or hobby, even if they need to use circumlocution if they cannot name the theme, activity or hobby. The description should allow a person who has not seen the picture to imagine what it contains. The test taker should then compare and contrast the two pictures with a reasonable degree of fluency.

Sample Item: "I am giving you two pictures. Please take a minute to look at these. I will then ask you to describe each picture, and ask you one other question about them. You will then have three minutes to talk about the pictures. Do you understand what you have to do?"



[Wait for 1 minute]

“Would you describe the pictures for me, and then tell me where you would prefer to go for a holiday?”

[If the test taker needs an additional prompt to continue speaking, ask: “Why do you say that? Encourage the test taker to justify their choice]

“Thank you. I will take the pictures. We will now move on to the next part of the test.”