

SPEAK Test FAQ's

What is the SPEAK Test?

The SPEAK test is the institutional version of the Test of Spoken English. It is a recorded oral examination that lasts approximately 20 minutes. The test is individually administered in the IEI office. The test taker views and listens to twelve questions, and his or her answers are recorded. Recordings are scored by a minimum of two trained raters.

Who is required to take the SPEAK Test?

All F1 students at the University of Memphis for whom English is not the first language must take the SPEAK test and obtain a score of 50+ in order to be appointed as Teaching Assistants or Graduate Assistants with any of the following assignments: classroom or laboratory teaching, discussion leader or any other teaching activity requiring oral communication with students and the posting of grades. Students who have scored 26 or higher on the speaking portion of the TOEFL iBT are not required to take the SPEAK test. The test score must not be more than two years old.

What do the scores mean?

The lowest score is 20, and the highest score is 60. Scores are reported in 5-point increments.

Assessments about responses are made considering the following categories:

Functional competence: the speaker's ability to select functions to reasonably address the task and to select the language needed to carry out the function (functions are the purposes of communication: giving directions, arguing, apologizing, etc.).

Sociolinguistic competence: the speaker's ability to demonstrate an awareness of audience and situation by selecting language, register (level of formality), and tone that are appropriate.

Discourse competence: the speaker's ability to develop and organize information in a coherent manner, and to make effective use of cohesive devices (conjunctions, transition markers, order markers) to help the listener follow the organization of the response.

Linguistic competence: the effective selection of vocabulary (including proper word forms), control of grammatical structures, and accurate pronunciation, along with smooth delivery, in order to produce intelligible speech.

The following is a general description of the abilities at each 10-point score level:

- 60** The speaker understood the question and answered appropriately. The rater could receive and understand the answer with little effort (native-like efficacy, effective; not necessarily error-free).
- 50** The speaker understood the question and answered appropriately. The rater could receive and understand the answer with reasonable listening effort. The rater may have a question about the response (near-native efficacy, generally effective).
- 40** Communication breaks down or the speaker's answer was not appropriate to the question. The rater understood the basic idea of the answer but not all the details, or there were several gaps in receiving and it would take considerable effort, visual support, or questioning to feel that all the necessary information was exchanged (somewhat effective). One-on-one communication is probably most effective, but communication to groups will be less effective.
- 30** The rater catches only words and an occasional idea. The speaker's frequent re-starts, hesitations, and inappropriate pacing or pausing make it extremely difficult to understand. It is not clear what the function of the response was (not very effective).
- 20** The individual did not give a response, or the individual's response was not intelligible. The rater had no idea what the function of the response was (not effective).

How often can I take the SPEAK Test?

You can take the SPEAK Test once during each testing period. Tests are offered in July, November and April. The number of test versions available is limited, so the number of times you can re-test is also limited.

How can I apply for the SPEAK Test?

To schedule a testing time, contact:

Intensive English for Internationals
205 International Center
Phone: (901) 678-2107
E-mail: iei@memphis.edu

Is there a charge or a fee?

There is no charge. The Graduate School covers the cost.

When can I take the SPEAK Test?

To see the current schedule for testing, please go to the IEI web page:
<http://iei.memphis.edu>

Can I test on another date or time?

The dates are set according to the contract deadlines set by the Graduate School office.
No tests will be administered other than on the posted dates.

When and how can I get my score?

The SPEAK Tests are graded and the scores are emailed to you and your department within one week. All scores will be submitted to the Graduate School office in time to meet the contract deadline.

How can I prepare for the SPEAK Test?

You can schedule a time to take a practice test. The practice test is provided to familiarize you with the format of the test and the type of questions. It will not be recorded or scored. To schedule a practice test time, contact:

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205 International Center
Phone: (901) 678-2107
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It is important to speak clearly and to answer all of the questions as completely as possible since raters of your speech sample will evaluate your proficiency level based on what is recorded. Remember that the SPEAK Test is a test of your ability to speak English, so practice speaking English with native English speakers as often as possible.

What is the exam procedure, and how long does it take?

Length of Test: The actual test is about 20 minutes long and consists of 12 questions. Check-in and closing instructions take about another 10 minutes. You should arrive at the exam location (125 Patterson Hall) about 5-10 minutes before your scheduled exam time. You should plan on about 30 minutes total for this test.

Photo ID Required: At check-in, you must present your photo ID. Your UM student ID is preferred, but your passport or driver's license is also acceptable.

No Other Materials Needed: You do not need to bring any other materials to the test.

Test Environment: You will be tested individually in a quiet room. You will be listening to and reading from a computer. All of your responses will be recorded on the computer. You will not be allowed to stop or pause the progress of the test before the test ends. Cell phones and other electronic devices are not allowed in the testing area.

What happens if I arrive late?

You may be allowed to test at a later time the same day if there is another testing session available. This is not guaranteed. It is possible that you will have to reschedule for another test day if spaces are available.

What happens if I do not show up for a test?

You will need to reschedule your testing time. If it is possible, contact the IEI office to let them know that you will be unable to test at your scheduled time. Usually the testing times fill up quickly; you may not be able to reschedule.

What score is required to be a graduate teaching assistant?

The University of Memphis requires a minimum score of 50 on the SPEAK Test to qualify for a GTA appointment.

What if I have already taken the TOEFL iBT and scored 26+ on the speaking portion of the test?

We will request a copy of your score from the admissions office. The score must not be more than two years old. You will not be required to take the SPEAK Test.

What if I have already taken the SPEAK Test at another institution and I scored 50+?

We will request an official letter from that university showing your qualifying SPEAK score. The score must not be more than two years old. You will not be required to re-take the test.

What happens if I don't make a score of 50?

If you score 45 or below, you may re-take the SPEAK test, but you must show evidence of having attended required remediation. **If you have not done the required remediation, you will not be allowed to re-take the test.** The number of test versions available is limited, so the number of times you can re-test is also limited.

If you score 45, you may teach **for ONE SEMESTER ONLY while attending required remediation**. If your score 40 or below, you will be assigned to other GA duties.

Remediation Options:

AUSP 4001/6001 (Accent Modification): 1 hour credit. Permit required. Space limited. Instructor: Contact John Sandidge (jlsnddge@memphis.edu) for information and permit.

SPEAK Prep Class: Non-credit. Hybrid/online course; \$160. Includes text. Contact the IEI office at iei@memphis.edu for registration information.