

TIPS AND EXAMPLES OF SPEAKING AND WRITING

LEVEL 3 = B1

⇒ *Your expected outcome should be **LEVEL 4 = B2***

⇒ *Your answers or responses should be longer, more detailed and more advanced.*

SPEAKING STRATEGIES AND TIPS

In the speaking test, the test takers will be assessed based on criteria such as **grammar**, **vocabulary (& ideas)**, **pronunciation (& intonation)**, **fluency**, and **discourse management**. Therefore, it is important for the test takers to grasp useful piece of advice in order to obtain a satisfactory score for the speaking test. Three parts of the speaking VSTEP test will be discussed in the following sections.

1. Part 1: Social Interaction

In this part of the speaking test, test takers are required to talk about themselves, their interest, their study or their work and other general topics.

Strategies and tips for part 1

Answer the questions naturally and briefly

Try to use idioms or slangs frequently

Useful expressions

Reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Because</i> - <i>Because of</i> - <i>Due to the fact that</i> - <i>The reason for this is that</i>
Likes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I (really) like/love/enjoy +V-ing</i> - <i>I am a big fan of</i> - <i>I am passionate about/crazy about</i> - <i>I fancy</i> - <i>I prefer</i> - <i>I am fascinated by</i> - <i>I am into</i>

	<i>- I am fond of</i> <i>- I am keen on</i>
Dislikes	<i>- I don't really (like/love/enjoy)</i> <i>- I can't bear</i> <i>- I can't stand</i> <i>- I am tired of</i>
Opinions	<i>- If you ask me, I would say that</i> <i>- Well, personally speaking,</i> <i>- Frankly speaking,</i>

Question types



Yes/no questions

Are you a student?

Do you like your job?

Can you swim?

Have you ever been to Ha Noi?

Will you continue to learn English after graduation?



WH questions

What do you often do in your free time?

When did you graduate from university?

Where are you from?

Why did you choose this major?

How do you go to work every day?



Identify the question type and answer the following questions

When do you have free time?

What do you do for a living?

What are your responsibilities at work?

What is the most interesting part about your work?

Is there anything you don't like about your job?

How do you usually spend the weekend?

What do you do on your holidays?

Do you like to travel on your holiday or in your free time?

What is your favorite sport?

What is the most popular sport in your country?

Do you think primary school children should have sport classes at school?

Do you think the Internet will replace newspaper one day?

Which section of the newspaper do you like to read?

Are bicycles popular in your city?

Do you think bicycles are suitable for present society?

Sample answers

	Questions	Answers
1.	When do you have free time?	<i>I have free time all the evenings and on the weekend. I guess you could say that I have a pretty good life because a lot of people nowadays don't have a lot of free time.</i>
2.	What do you do for a living?	<i>I work in foreign trade department. I am in Sales. It's my job to bring foreign investors to the city to open up a business here.</i>
3.	What are your responsibilities at work?	<i>I need to have a strategy for bringing foreign investments to my city. I work together with other departments to basically sell and promote my city as a good place to start a business.</i>
4.	What is the most interesting part about your work?	<i>The most interesting part of my work is meeting people from other countries. To me, people are very interesting and I am keen on learning the customs and cultures about other countries.</i>
5.	Is there anything you don't like about your job?	<i>The pay is one thing that I don't like about my job. My boss is another thing I don't like about my job. The distance to the office is the last thing I don't like about my job.</i>
6.	How do you usually spend the weekend?	<i>I sleep late and watch movies. I go out with my friends or I work on different projects that I haven't had time</i>

		<i>for during the week. Sometimes, if I am really tired or stressed from the week, I will just stay in bed all weekend.</i>
7.	What do you do on your holidays?	<i>For most holidays, I just stay home and rest and enjoy myself but if it's a particularly long holiday, I like to travel. If I stay at home, I can read and play computer games and do what I like to do. I can spend time with my friends</i>
8.	Do you like to travel on your holiday or in your free time?	<i>If it's a long holiday, I like to travel, especially to places I have never been to before.</i>
9.	What is your favorite sport?	<i>My favorite sport is definitely soccer. I love the feeling of being out there on the field and just running with the wind.</i>
10.	What is the most popular sport in your country?	<i>I think it's basketball, football also is always the most popular sport in my country. Badminton and ping pong are close behind.</i>
11.	Do you think primary school children should have sport class at school?	<i>I certainly think so because primary school children have a lot of energies and if they must remain sitting at the school desk the whole day, they will not be able to concentrate. They want to go out and play.</i>
12.	Do you think the Internet will replace newspaper one day?	<i>Yes, I definitely think so. I think that if more people have access to the Internet and computers, papers will eventually become a thing of the past. It's quicker and easier to update the webpage on the Internet than to print a whole newspaper.</i>
13.	Which section of the newspaper do you like to read?	<i>My favorite sections of a newspaper are sport section and the entertainment section. I like to keep up with celebrities.</i>
14.	Are bicycles popular in your city?	<i>Bicycles are generally popular in my country probably because they are cheap transportations and you can get good exercise when riding them.</i>

15.	Do you think bicycles are suitable for present society?	<i>Not always because it is difficult to travel from place to place and this makes bicycle not so practical. On the other hand, bikes are very suitable for present society because it is very environmentally friendly and cheap.</i>
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2. Part 2: Situation Discussion

In this section, the test taker will be given a situation with three options for him/her to choose. He/She will have ONE minute to prepare what he/she is going to say. Then, he/she will have TWO minutes to present his/her best choice for the situation and his/her reasons. More importantly, the test taker should state the reasons why he/she does not choose the other two options.

Strategies and tips

- Choose **the best option with the most convincing reasons** & mention the reasons **why you do not choose the other TWO options**.
- Include **THREE parts** including the introduction, body and conclusion in your talk.
- Pay attention to the time limit (**TWO MINUTES** for your talk only).

A sample of a situation

You and your friends have collected some money to support the victims of a heavy storm.

You have three possible ways to help: **donating the money to a charity organization, giving the money directly to the victims, and buying them necessary things.**

A sample of a talk

Introduction		<i>In this situation, I think donating the money to a charity organization is my best choice.</i>
BODY	Reasons for your choice	<i>Although donating money to a charity organization can be slow for the victims to receive money, I think it is the best way as my donation is small and can be helpful to a few people only. In fact, the charity organization can collect money from many people at the same time, so it can be</i>

	<i>Reasons for not choosing the other two options</i>	<p><i>more practical and effective in terms of planning and using the money to help the victims.</i></p> <p><i>I don't choose giving the money directly to the victims because giving the money directly to the victims can be inconvenient. I don't choose buying them necessary things as I may not know exactly what the victims need.</i></p>
Conclusion		<i>To sum up, donating the money to the charity organization is the best choice for me.</i>

A suggested template

Introduction	<i>In this situation, I definitely believe that ____Option A____ is the best choice because of the following reasons.</i>
Body	<p><i>First, ____reason 1____</i></p> <p><i>Second, ____reason 2____</i></p>
	<p><i>Now, I would like to move on the reasons why I don't choose the other two options.</i></p> <p><i>As for ____Option B____, ____reason 3____</i></p> <p><i>In terms of ____Option C____, ____reason 4____</i></p>
Conclusion	<i>To sum up, ____Option A____ is the best choice for ____ because of the reasons I have just mentioned above.</i>

OR a better structure will be the use of comparison when you give reasons for your best choice and integrate the reasons why you don't choose the other two options.

Example:

Situation: You are considering a gift for your close-friend birthday. Which one is the best choice for you: a T-shirt, a school bag or a book? Explain.

A sample talk:

Introduction	In this situation, I think that giving a book is the best choice because of some reasons.
Body	<p>First, in terms of benefits, a book is <u>more useful than</u> the other two <u>gifts/ options/ choices</u>. A book can help my friend relax and widen knowledge. In fact, reading a book is very relaxing. Also, my friend can learn good things from it. In contrast, a T-shirt or a school bag can't do those.</p> <p>In addition, regarding mental impact, it is also <u>more meaningful</u> because the book improves thinking skills and memory. I think a book will provide my friend <u>more positive effects than</u> a T-shirt or a school bag.</p> <p>Finally, about interests, my friend is a bookworm (my friend is very interested in reading), so giving him a book is better than buying him other gifts.</p>
Conclusion	In conclusion , for the above reasons, I believe that a book is the best gift for <u>my friend's birthday</u> .

3. Part 3: Topic Development

In Part 3 of the test, the test taker is given a topic with some suggested ideas. To develop a talk based on the topic, the test taker may use the suggested ideas and/or his/her own ideas. The test taker has 1 minute to prepare for his/her talk.

Strategies and tips

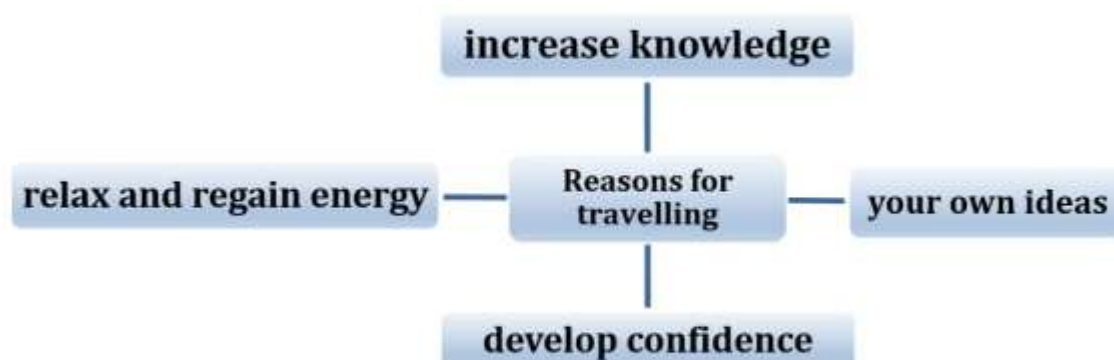
You will be given a mind map with 3 suggested ideas. You can use the given ideas to talk or you can develop the topic based on your own ideas.

There should be THREE parts including the introduction, body and conclusion in your talk.

You will be given THREE minutes to talk so you should pay attention to the time limit.

After developing the ideas for the topic, you are required to answer ONE or TWO of the 3 follow-up questions.

Topic: There are different reasons why people love to travel.



A sample answer:

Introduction	People travel <i>because of</i> several reasons.	
Body	The <i>first</i> reason for traveling is <i>that</i> it helps young people increase knowledge of many fields.	<i>For instance</i> , travelers can explore many new places. <i>As a result</i> , they know more about the culture, people, and history.
	<i>Another</i> advantage of traveling is <i>that</i> it helps people get rid of the pressure of work and regain energy after a hard-working week.	<i>Consequently</i> , people feel better and work more effectively.
	<i>Last but not least</i> , traveling helps people widen their social relationship.	<i>And then</i> they become more confident.
Conclusion	<i>In short</i> , young people love to travel <i>because of</i> numerous reasons mentioned above.	

A suggested template:

Introduction	Given statement	
Body	Main idea 1	Supporting ideas
	Main idea 2	Supporting ideas
	Main idea 3	Supporting ideas
Conclusion	Paraphrasing the given statement	

Another topic: There are several **benefits** of **taking a part-time job**.

Another sample talk:

Introduction	<p>Working part-time has a lot of noticeable advantages for students. Today, I'll talk about some <i>of the benefits</i> that <i>students may have</i> when they have a part-time job.</p> <p># Today, I would like to present about some <i>benefits</i> of <i>having a part-time job</i>.</p>
Body	<p>First of all, a part time job helps students improve soft-skills. For example, the students can contact people more easily. They can also develop planning and time management skills.</p> <p>In addition, when students have a part-time job, they can gain work experience. This experience is very useful for their future job because it will make their CV more impressive.</p> <p>Finally, working part-time helps students earn money to support their life and their study. It also means that it will reduce the financial burden for the students' families.</p>
Conclusion	<p>In conclusion, I've just presented the <i>advantages</i> of <i>working part-time for students</i>.</p>

WRITING STRATEGIES AND TIPS

Task 1: Write a letter (20 minutes)

Tips to write a letter

- Read the task carefully and decide the purpose of the letter.
- Categorize the types of letter such as: thank-you letter, letter of advice, letter of complaint, information-given letter, and so on.
- Underline key words to better understand the purpose of the letter and words needed for paraphrasing while writing.
- Brainstorm how to answer each question or idea.
- Start to write and pay attention to sentence structures, vocabulary to express ideas while writing.
- Manage time to write around 15 minutes.
- Revise and edit the letter by checking grammatical mistakes, punctuations, spelling, connectors, contents and so on in about 5 minutes.

Example:

You have an English friend. He is planning to visit your hometown. He has written to you and asked you for some information. Read his letter and reply him.

Hello An,

I'm planning to visit your hometown next summer. I have some questions about your place before I go. I hope you can help me answer them. Where is your hometown located? What food or drink can I enjoy when I am there? Where should I visit if I go there? What's the weather like in summer? What kinds of clothes should I bring?

Wait for your reply.

Jim

Write an email responding to Jim.

You should write at least 120 words.

An example:

Hello Jim,

I'm glad to receive your email. I'm very happy when I know that you're planning to visit my hometown next summer. I'll provide the answers to your questions.

My hometown is Can Tho city, which is located in the center of the Mekong Delta. When you go to Can Tho, you can enjoy different kinds of foods and drinks. For example, you can eat Vietnamese pancakes or duck hot pots. Also, you may try coconut juice and other kinds of fruit juice. If you are in Can Tho city, you can visit various interesting places. For instance, tourists often stop by Ninh Kieu Quay for sightseeing. In addition, they can visit My Khanh Garden for relaxation. Moreover, if you like, you can go to Truc Lam pagoda.

In summer in my hometown, it's pretty hot and humid. Sometimes, it rains. Therefore, you should prepare some convenient clothes such as a hat, T-shirts, jeans or shorts, sandals or sneakers, and a raincoat or umbrella.

I'm looking forward to seeing you in my hometown.

Best wishes,

An

(Word count: 135 words/ main content)

Task 2: Write an essay (40 minutes)

TYPE 1: An Advantage – Disadvantage Essay

A good advantage-disadvantage essay should consist of the following common parts.

INTRODUCTION	Paragraph 1	State the topic
BODY	Paragraph 2	Advantages
	Paragraph 3	Disadvantages
CONCLUSION	Paragraph 4	Restate the topic

Example:

Write a well-developed essay on the benefits and drawbacks of consuming fast food too much.

A sample essay:

Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Background information ➤ Topic ➤ Thesis statement 	<p>Nowadays, fast food is very popular everywhere in the world. More and more people like to have/ having fast food. Some people enjoy fast food because they think (that) it has many benefits, but other people do not support the view. In this essay, the advantages and disadvantages of eating fast foods are discussed.</p>
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<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Topic sentence ➤ Main idea(s) ➤ Supporting ideas/ Details (<i>explanation s, examples, causes- effects, reasons, purposes,...</i>) 	<p>There are many benefits for people when they eat fast food. <i>First of all</i>, people can save time because they do not need to cook. In fact, it is quick to get the ready-made fast-food meals. <i>Another benefit of</i> consuming fast food is convenient [<i>Secondly</i>, consuming fast food is convenient]. Today, fast food stores are popular, so it is easy to find a place to eat. <i>Finally</i>, people have a wide range of choices with various dishes. This suits the needs of different people, and fast food is also delicious or tasty.</p>
<p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Topic sentence ➤ Main idea(s) ➤ Supporting ideas/ Details (<i>explanation s, examples, causes- effects, reasons, purposes,...</i>) 	<p>However [On the other hand], eating fast food may cause many negative effects. The <i>first</i> disadvantage refers to health problems. For example, if people eat too much fast food, they may have serious diseases related to digestion, cancers, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Fast food often contains many unhealthy elements such as cholesterol, or salt, which affects people's health negatively. <i>Secondly</i>, people are addicted to fast foods easily. As a result, they will gain weight, and they will experience health problems. Especially, some people no longer possess good-looking appearance. <i>Finally</i>, people should not eat too much fast food or eat fast food regularly because fast food lacks nutrients for the body functions. In other words, people will not feel healthy, and they are not strong if they consume a lot of fast food.</p>
<p>Conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Summary of the ideas ➤ (Prediction/ advice/ ...) 	<p>In conclusion, those are some advantages and disadvantages of consuming fast food. People should not eat it too much or too regularly to keep them fit and healthy.</p> <p>In conclusion, eating fast food offers [gives/ provides] people both benefits and negative effects. For benefits, people can save time, experience convenience and have a wide choices of various dishes. For negative effects, they may have health problems, be addicted to fast food, and lack nutrients for a healthy body.</p>

	Therefore, people should not eat it too much or too regularly to keep them fit and healthy.
	In conclusion, eating fast food offers people both benefits <i>such as saving time, convenience, and a wide range of food choices</i> and negative effects <i>like health problems, fast food addiction, and a lack of nutrients</i> . Therefore, people should not eat it too much or too regularly to keep them fit and healthy.

TYPE 2: An Argumentative Essay

Approach 1: A balanced-argument essay

A good balanced-argument essay should consist of the following parts.

Introduction	<i>While I agree that..... I believe that</i>
Body paragraph 1	<i>On the one hand, I agree that..... (support the statement)</i>
Body paragraph 2	<i>On the other hand, I believe that..... (give examples or arguments to point out that the statement is wrong)..... .</i>
Conclusion	<i>In conclusion, while..... (restate the statement)..... , I do not believe that(you reject the statement in some cases).....</i>

Example:

Task: *When choosing a job, the salary is the most important consideration. To what extent do you agree or disagree?*

Sample answer

Many people choose their jobs based on the size of the salary offered. **While I agree that** money is a critical factor when deciding on a career, **I believe that** other factors are equally important.

On the one hand, I agree that money is necessary in order for people to meet their basic needs. **For example**, we all need money to pay for housing, food, bills, health care, and education. If people chose their jobs based on enjoyment or other non-financial factors, they might find it difficult to support themselves for a high quality of life. Artists and musicians, **for instance**, are known for choosing a career path that they

love, but that does not always provide them with enough money to live comfortably and raise a family.

Nevertheless, I believe that other considerations are just as important as what we earn in our jobs. **First**, personal relationships and the atmosphere in a workplace are extremely important when choosing a job. Having a good manager or friendly colleagues, **for example**, can make a huge difference to workers' levels of happiness and general quality of life. **Second**, many people's feelings of job satisfaction come from their professional achievements, the skills they learn, and the position they reach, rather than the money they earn. **Finally**, some people choose a career because they want to help others and contribute something positive to society.

In conclusion, while salaries certainly affect people's choice of profession, **I do not believe that** money outweighs all other motivators.

Word counts: 250 words

Approach 2: A one-sided essay

A good one-sided essay should consist of the following parts.

Introduction	<i>Personally, I completely disagree/agree with this view.</i>
Body paragraph 1	<i>For a variety of reasons, Firstly, Secondly, for example, Finally,</i>
Body paragraph 2	<i>Apart from the practical concerns expressed above, I also believe that</i>
Conclusion	<i>In conclusion, I believe that</i>

Example:

Task: People nowadays spend their free time less actively than in the past. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Sample answer

Some people say that people are less active than they were in the past. There are points for and against this idea, but overall, I agree with the statement. In this essay, I will explain why.

In my opinion, the main reason why people become less active is computers. Several years ago, we went to speak to our colleagues, walked to their desk or office. Now we send an email without getting up from our seat. Even our free time is less active because we play computer games and go on social media. Before, people walked to a cafe to

meet their friends or went to their house. Nowadays, though, we chat on line at home. Moreover, in today's world, parents are scared for their children's safety, so they prefer to keep them at home. For many, it is easier to stay at home than to go out.

On the other hand, some physical activities are becoming more popular. There are more gyms than there used to be and it is fashionable to go running or to the gym. In my view, though, only some people do these things. Most people join a gym but not very regularly. However, they never stop playing computer games and watching TV! Also, these days everyone takes their driving test as soon as possible and starts driving. In the past, young people walked and went by bus.

To sum up, I agree that people are less active in their free time compared with the past. Now people are lazier and less fit than they were before.

Word counts: 262 words