



## **City & Guilds International Spoken ESOL**

Classroom Activities Using a Voice Recorder

**PEOPLECERT**

## Introduction

Technology in language teaching is a familiar topic in teacher training and development courses and at conference workshops. Over the years, technology has had a great influence on what happens in the classroom and, if used imaginatively, it should allow teachers to unlock the potential for successful learning.

Here are some practical ideas for using voice recorders in teaching groups of learners of the English language. All the activities have been tried and tested by practising teachers in a variety of situations: at a range of different levels and ages; with monolingual and multilingual groups; on year-round and short courses.

Technology should not dictate or limit what we teach or how we teach it. The same applies to examinations: they should reflect what happens in the classroom. The City & Guilds International Spoken ESOL test promotes the learning and teaching of communicative language skills. These activities have all been adapted for ISESOL preparation and the voice recorder offers an extra dimension to make them more successful for learners and teachers. The benefits of using the voice recorder include:

### Error correction

Language learners often want to be corrected when they are speaking, while teachers would prefer to let spoken production and interaction flow without the interruption which restricts fluency. The Common European Framework of Reference discusses the action to be taken with regard to learner mistakes and errors (CEFR p 155) and the options which teachers frequently agree with are: (c) *all errors should be noted and corrected at a time when doing so does not interfere with communication (e.g. by separating the development of accuracy from the development of fluency)* and (d) *errors should not be simply corrected, but also analysed and explained at an appropriate time*. The use of the voice recorder makes this possible and gives teachers the kind of permanent record of learners' spoken language which we have in writing.

### Learner autonomy

The introduction to *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy* quotes the basic principles underlying Communicative Language Teaching and the development of autonomous learning. These include:

*Give learners considerable say in the decision-making process*

*Place teachers in the role of facilitator whose task is to develop and maintain a supportive class atmosphere*

*Stress the role of other learners as a support group*

As you will see, the activities described are designed for the learner-centred classroom. The voice recorder is not just the teacher's aid, it is also the learners' and helps lead to the self-realisation which is part of learner autonomy.

### Test preparation

The International Spoken ESOL test is recorded at the centre and sent in to City & Guilds for assessment. Candidates can be inhibited when being recorded and too often limit what they say out of fear of making mistakes.

If learners become familiar with the practice of recording what they say, and see that it leads to long-term improvement, they will naturally perform more confidently and successfully as ISESOL candidates.

### **Assessor's view**

This is the activity seen from the point of view of the assessor (the examiner who marks the recorded test). The comments focus on the ISESOL test part(s) the activity is suitable for and how it can help candidates develop the skills they need in order to meet the assessment criteria of *Task Fulfilment and Coherence; Accuracy and Range of Grammar; Accuracy and Range of Vocabulary; Pronunciation, Intonation and Fluency*.

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## 1. More or less

This is a game I often use in my teaching. The students are in two teams. Each team prepares questions to ask the other team. The questions can be answered in one word or short phrase, e.g.: 'What's your favourite TV programme?' or 'Do you play a musical instrument?'

When the teams are ready, team A chooses a representative to answer the other team's questions for a minute. He or she tries to limit the number of questions by giving an extended answer. For example, if team B asks 'What's your favourite TV programme?' a simple answer like 'Friends' leaves the way open for the next question. An extended answer like 'Friends; I always watch it because I think it's very funny' delays the next question. After a minute, we swap and team A asks questions to a team B representative.

We normally play two or three rounds with different students answering questions. The winners are the team who ask most/answer fewest questions. I play the role of referee and signal when it's time for the next question.

**With the voice recorder, I can let the students decide whether or not an answer is acceptable and how many points are won. Here's how I've adapted it for my ISESOL classes.**

1. I divide the class into two teams as above and give each of them two or three different ISESOL topics to base their questions on.\* It must be possible to answer each question in a word or short phrase.
2. The teams nominate a representative to answer the other team's questions for a minute. We play the game and record it. I am still the referee but I try to let the game flow.
3. We listen to the recording and discuss whether or not an answer is acceptable. Teams may argue, for example, that an opponent answers far too slowly or just repeats words: 'My favourite TV programme is Friends because it is very, very, very, very funny ...' As referee, I encourage challenges but tend to side with the students giving the answers.
4. Students sometimes challenge on the grounds of errors, for example: Q. 'Which is your favourite city?' A. 'Venice. I go there last year on holiday.' I only accept this kind of challenge if the error would prevent communication at levels B2 plus, and I usually give the speaker's team the chance to identify the error and save the point.
5. It's nice to do this activity near the start of a course because the questions help people to get to know one another. I like to keep the recording and play it back later in the course. Students don't always realise the progress they make in speaking and this shows them that they really are building their vocabulary and becoming more fluent.

\* The ISESOL topics for each level can be found at [www.cityandguilds.gr](http://www.cityandguilds.gr)

### Assessor's view

This activity is ideal for **Part One** of the ISESOL test. It is possible for candidates to answer some of the prompts in just one or two words but they will get credit for expanding. They will also warm up for the rest of the test and perform with more confidence. Producing a wider range of language can be the difference between a Pass and a First Class Pass. It's also good to put accuracy into perspective and make it a focus only if errors seriously impede communication.

## 2. Simon Says (please)!

This is a simple, popular party game. One person gives instructions like ‘Simon says “stand up and sit down again”’ ‘Simon says “put your right hand in the air”’ ‘Simon says “turn to the left.”’ The players have to follow the instruction correctly (if they put the wrong hand in the air, for example, they are out of the game). If the instruction is given as “turn to the left” without ‘Simon says,’ before it, the players have to do nothing or they are out. The last player left in the game wins. The game is great fun and I’ve adapted it in this way for classroom practice.

The players have to follow instructions as in the original game but I’ve taken away ‘Simon says’ because it doesn’t mean anything to my students and instead they have to follow instructions if they have the word ‘please’ (either before or after). ‘Please’ is very, very important in English and they often forget it.

So (i) if I say ‘Please stand on one leg’ or ‘Stand on one leg, please’ the students have to do it – more or less immediately, not just following others - and (ii) if I don’t say ‘please’ they have to stay perfectly still. Any player who doesn’t do this isn’t out of the game, but he or she loses a point and the winner is the one who has lost the fewest points when I have given my instructions (normally about 12 to 20).

**The voice recorder allows me to let the students give the instructions. I always did this myself in the past because it was difficult for the students to think of instructions and say them quickly enough. Now they have time to prepare and this is what I do.**

1. I divide the class into two teams. Two students from each team – the Recorders leave the room with the voice recorder (they don’t need a room, they can record in the corridor outside). They work together to think of instructions to give – four or five each - and decide which ones will have ‘please’ and which won’t. When they are ready, they record the instructions. They take it in turns and leave five or six seconds in between.
2. So that I can give the Recorders any help they need, I set the other students the task of discussing what instructions they think they will hear. They do this in their teams and they write down as many as they can think of – if it’s there, they’ll get a point with no penalties if it isn’t. I collect their lists just before we play the game.
3. When the Recorders are ready, we play back their recording and the students in the two teams follow the instructions. The same points system applies – a point lost for each instruction missed. I play the role of referee and if an instruction isn’t clear, I rule it out. The game is usually chaotic and great fun.
4. Next, I ask the players in the two teams to think back to the lists they wrote and say how many instructions they guessed right (I don’t give them the lists back yet). I put the instructions they claim on the board. Then we play the recording again to check and add up the points.

### Assessor’s view

Pronunciation is one of the assessment criteria we use. What this activity does is put a focus on natural production including weak forms. As students learn to speak at a more natural speed, the language they produce will be more effective in communication – exactly what assessors are listening out for in all parts of the test. The introduction of ‘please’ etc. is a great idea; politeness phrases are an important part of effective communication.

### 3. What? Where? How?

I want my students to practise the language functions I present in class but it's often difficult to get them to do this. They feel awkward acting out in front of the class and to be honest, the other students don't always pay attention or take their classmates seriously.

**The voice recorder gives me the chance to put the focus on functions and to let the students take control. Here's a very simple activity which always works.**

1. We split into three groups. Two of the groups stay in the classroom and divide into teams A and B. The others – 'The Recorders' it doesn't matter exactly how many but I normally make it 4 to 6 students – take the voice recorder into a spare room or anywhere outside the room.
2. The Recorders come up with situations to act out – if necessary, I give them ideas, like *'You arranged to meet at 7 p.m. One of you arrives at 7.30, the other is waiting in the rain'* or *'Your friend took her/his driving test yesterday; find out how it went.'* They have to think of a dialogue with two or three turns each, but they can't actually mention the topic (*'Did you pass?'* is okay but *'Did you pass your driving test?'* isn't.)
3. While the Recorders are planning their situations, I set teams A and B a task. They look at the list of functions included at the level\* and write down ten they think they may hear (e.g. apologising, congratulating, complaining, agreeing, disagreeing) and the form of words which will express them ('I'm really sorry' 'Well done!'). They do this in their separate groups.
4. I go back to the Recorders and instruct them to record their exchanges and make a note of (i) what the situation was and (ii) how the two speakers are feeling (one angry, one apologetic; both happy etc. etc.). They don't write a script, just brief notes.
5. I go back to teams A and B again and check that they are choosing functions and exponents. I also tell them that their classmates will be expressing how they feel (angry, happy etc.) and that they should listen out for this as well as for the functions.
6. It's difficult to predict exactly how long it will take the Recorders to be ready but that's not a problem because teams A and B can discuss with me the situations, functions and exponents they think they are going to hear.
7. The Recorders join us. We play the recording and check the answers. I normally accept approximate answers – if a team has written 'angry' and the Recorders have written 'impatient' that's probably close enough. At higher levels, we can make finer distinctions like 'declining (politely)' and 'refusing (rudely)'.

#### **The Assessor's view**

This activity works on two levels for **Part Two** of the ISESOL test, where candidates and interlocutors act out everyday social situations. It gives the students who make the recording the chance to use language functions fluently (and at higher levels to use intonation to emphasise meaning). It also gives you the chance to work with the students who are going to listen and to make them more familiar with the settings and language functions they will meet in the test.

## 4. It's really me!

Questionnaires are always popular. I often use them as reading activities, which is fine but I don't feel that my students always exploit them as interesting topics to speak about. The discussion tends to be rather general and unfocussed.

**The voice recorder gives me the chance to use questionnaires to introduce a real study focus into a speaking skills development lesson. Here's what I do.**

1. I divide the class into two main groups. One stays in the main room, the others go out to record an interview (it depends on numbers in the class but I normally ask for 2 volunteers to be Interviewees and 2 – 4 to be the Interviewers).
2. We all have the same questionnaire. Here's a general example – you can adapt it for lots of different topics.

**Is it you?** Put + in the box if you generally agree, ++ if you strongly agree, x if you disagree and x x if you strongly disagree. Put ? if you don't know or don't have any strong feelings.

a) Maths and sciences are more interesting for me than literature and history.	
b) I am happy to spend time alone.	
c) I usually listen to music if I'm working or studying.	
d) I enjoy crosswords and word puzzles.	
e) I like to organise people and lead a team.	
f) I am good at reading maps and floor plans.	
g) Sports and physical activities are an important part of my life.	
h) I believe that everything has a rational explanation.	

3. The Interviewees complete the questionnaire outside the room before speaking about it. The main group splits into two teams, who discuss and decide what answers they think *their classmates the Interviewees* will give (e.g. '(b) Ali will say ++ and Sara will say x'). They do this separately and I explain that they'll get a point if they guess right about their classmates' agreement/disagreement and a bonus point if they are right about the strength of his/her agreement – in the example above, if Ali agrees they get a point, if he agrees strongly they get two points.
4. I join the Interviewers and instruct them to put the statements to the Interviewees and record their answers on the voice recorder.
5. I tell the Interviewees not to give just 'Yes' 'No' or 'double plus' as answers. Their task is to give a full answer, e.g.  
Interviewer *'Sports and physical activities are an important part of my life'*  
Interviewee *'Absolutely. I run every day and I love tennis and football.'*  
I remind them that words like 'really' and 'quite' can make what we say stronger or less strong and that the way we say things also gives clues to how strongly we feel.
6. While the Interviewers and Interviewees record, I go back to the main group and we discuss what answers they expect from their classmates and what extra information they may give, for example *'I love to organise people and I'm the captain of the school basketball team.'*
7. I get the whole group together again and the two teams say what answers they think their two classmates have given. I make a note of these on the board. Then we play the recording **and** discuss the answers. I ask the teams

to say why they think an answer was strong (dis)agreement or just (dis)agreement and then we check the Interviewees' original answers.

8. There are lots of follow-ups to this activity. When my students have actually focused on what makes the things they say sound different, they're far more willing to work on stress and intonation as well as on choice of words 'nice' or 'fantastic', or on word order like 'I don't really like sport' and 'I really don't like sport.' When we do a questionnaire activity like this later in the course, the students who play Interviewees really throw themselves into it.

**Assessor's view**

This activity practises spoken interaction and spoken production – which is what ISESOL tests. It's good for Part One, which is always about personal information. The focus on intonation in the interviewees' responses is very helpful as this is such an important part of **pronunciation**.

It also invites the use of a wider **range** of language, which is important because in the test candidates are sometimes reluctant to say more in case they make mistakes. As assessors, we always want to hear more from candidates and are ready to give credit whenever we can.



## 5. Projects & Presentations - an idea from CLIL

We've recently introduced Content & Language Integrated Learning as part of our curriculum. We had a teacher INSET workshop not long ago and here's an idea I got from a colleague who teaches Maths (I'm sure my Maths teachers at school never thought they could teach me anything!)

In Maths, it's more important to show how you get things right than just to get a correct result – to show your workings, as my colleague described it. Communicative Language Teaching is great, but one of its weaknesses is that we tend to accept anything that gets the essential message across and don't always look at how we can help learners continue to improve. If we're not careful, our students can reach a plateau at B1 level and feel they are stuck.

**Here's how I have adapted the 'show your workings' idea for the language classroom and how the voice recorder has given my students the chance to show what they can do already and how they can do it even better.**

1. Our DOS likes us to build projects into our teaching. We base these on wider topics, study visits and so on. We then work in groups to prepare and present our project to other students, to other teachers, sometimes to parents. The presentations will be different from group to group: posters, radio programmes, booklets, videos, powerpoint etc. etc. – we give the students the chance to decide what they want to work on. So far, so good; it's real and the students love it.
2. The DOS's idea is that the process of planning and deciding what the students do, who does what etc. should produce lots of interaction and be as valuable as the presentation itself. This is fine in theory but in practice what happens is that the students get so caught up in producing the presentation that they don't bother to talk about it or they talk about it in their own first language. They're not being difficult, it's just that they don't see any real need to use English in the preparation stage and I can't be everywhere with every group all the time (and I hate to keep on nagging them to 'use only English!').

**The voice recorder helps me be a facilitator – and a teacher – instead of a dictator!**

3. Each group works on its presentation as usual – they will receive positive evaluation and feedback as always. They also have the chance to use the voice recorder to show how they planned their presentation and worked as a team. At some stage – it will vary from presentation to presentation – they take the voice recorder and as a group discuss who is going to do what etc.
4. It's pure learner autonomy. My only role at this stage is to hand over the voice recorder and let the students get on with it. Afterwards, I listen to what each group has said and include the planning and preparation in my evaluation. If the presentation itself isn't always perfect ... which can happen ... all is not lost. As with the Maths, you can get credit for your workings even if your result isn't quite there.
5. Usually, once a presentation is over, it's over and a lot of hard work is lost. With the recording I have of the students' planning discussions I have a ready-made speaking skills development lesson. What I find is that the students communicate okay but tend to use limited or awkward structures like '*We put photos on the front of brochure*' or '*Maria, you write introduction?*' Nothing wrong with this but we can analyse it together and see how what works can work better – it makes it so much easier for me to introduce '*Shall we ... ?*' '*Let's ...*' '*Why don't we ... ?*' '*Can you ...*' as helpful improvement rather than correction.
6. I have shared this with colleagues – Language, as well as Content, can take the lead in CLIL and help learners communicate what they know.

**Assessor's view**

Great for two important aspects of the ISESOL test!

**Part Three** is all about using the language of discussion, decision and at higher levels negotiation, so introducing 'Why don't we ..?' etc. in a positive way is really good.

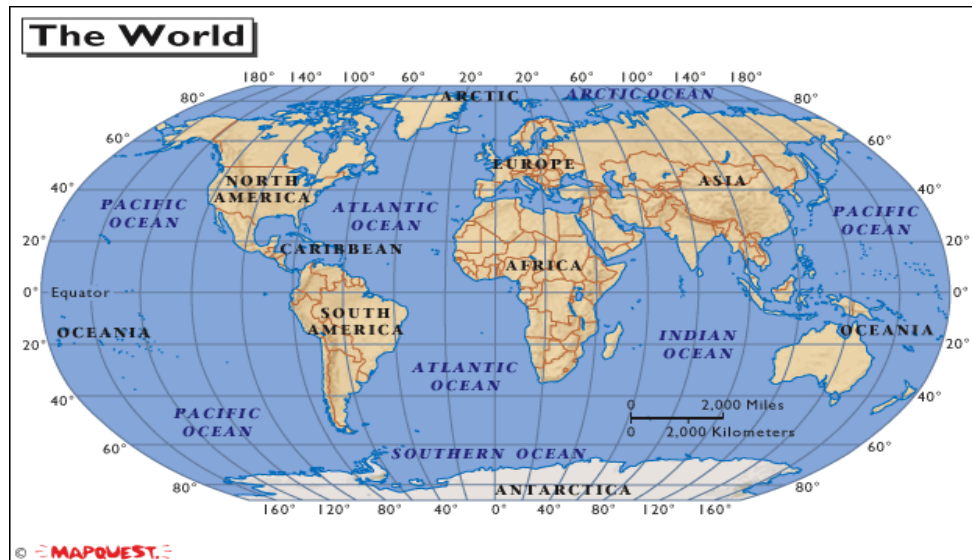
ISESOL is a primarily communicative test. If candidates communicate the message appropriately at a given level, they have every opportunity to succeed in the examination. At the same time, if they can communicate with a higher degree of **Accuracy** and **Range**, they will have every chance of achieving a First Class Pass.

## 6. Transportation Machine - Where in the world?

An imaginative idea which has sometimes needed a little too much imagination to work in class. I offer my students the chance to use a transportation machine – just press the buttons and instantly you reappear anywhere in the world. They discuss places they will go to and tell one another about them. The problem has been that it somehow lacks a dimension and doesn't quite seem real.

**The use of technology in the voice recorder has given this activity the missing dimensions. Here's what I do.**

1. I tell the students that the voice recorder also has a transportation machine facility and that I'm going to give them the chance to use it. I ask for three or four volunteers to leave the room and I'll show them how to use the transporter.
2. I explain to the travellers that they are going to spend a day together in four different places of their choice (morning in XXXXX, lunchtime in YYYY etc.) and I let them discuss this for a couple of minutes while I join the other students.
3. I tell the students in the classroom what's going on and tell them I'm going to press the transport button to give them the chance to travel as well. Again, they discuss four places they're going to go to.



4. I instruct the Recorders to start at the end of their day, describing what they can see around them, giving clues but without naming the place they're in. So they can say *'It's very busy with lots of people and very high buildings. There are lots of shops and theatres and hotels. People are speaking English but not with an English accent. There's a big park in the middle of the city.'* But they can't say *'We're in New York.'* They then say where they went earlier in the day, what they saw, what they did and so on. They share the commentary and take it in turns to record.
5. The group in the classroom is going to do something similar. They are going to write about where they are now and where they went to, what they did earlier etc. Again, we share the task among the students in the group and different students – solo or in pairs – write about the different places.
6. When everyone is ready (if one group finishes significantly before the other I add an extra place to visit as there's extra time) we get together in the classroom. The ones who recorded read what their classmates have written, the ones who wrote listen to the recording. Each group discusses where they think their classmates have been to and say what gave them clues *'beach, big waves and people surfing, pineapples ...'*

7. As a follow up, they ask one another questions to extend the activity *'What did you eat?'* *'What were people wearing?'*

**Assessor's view**

This is a good way to develop Part Four skills. Candidates need to produce longer stretches of language and to be able to describe, narrate and so on.

This activity gives an opportunity to use a wider Range of vocabulary – four different places to talk about - and structure – especially with the focus on 'what is happening now' and 'what we did earlier.'

The fantasy element is useful practice. In the ISESOL test, candidates are assessed on language not on strict factual information. They sometimes forget this and miss the opportunity to talk about 'My best holiday' or 'A sport I would like to try' because they are too caught up in reality.

## 7. I mean ...

My students know that pronunciation is important but they tend to focus on individual sounds they find difficult (like 'th' or different ways we can say words ending in 'ough.' I tell them that intonation is really important because it changes meaning but it is so difficult to get them to really hear what I mean and practise it in pairs and group work.

**The voice recorder has helped me because it gives my students the chance to think about how they are going to say a sentence, record it – more than once if necessary – and observe the effect it has on listeners. This is what I do.**

1. I produce a number of statements or questions which can each be said in different ways to give different meanings. Here's a sample.
  - (a) London is a great place to work.
  - (b) They said James was okay.
  - (c) Why don't you phone him?
  - (d) I think you were right.
  - (e) Doctor Salt can see you at four thirty.

We look at an example in a whole group. If we take (a), we can say:

**London** is a great place to work. ('Other cities may not be')

London **is** a great place to work. ('You were right!' or 'Even if people say it isn't')

London is a **great** place to work. ('Not just so-so.')

London is a great place to **work**. ('... but I wouldn't want to live there.')

We could put the stress on 'a' or 'place' or 'to' but it wouldn't make any real sense.

2. I split the group into two. One group leaves the classroom with the voice recorder, the other students stay in the main classroom. I sub-divide the group in the classroom into two, three or four teams – it varies with numbers.
3. The teams in the classroom practise saying the sentences in different ways and decide how many possible meanings they can get out of each. I let them get on with this and join the Recorders.
4. I usually give the Recorders the same set of sentences with different words in *bold*, as above. At higher levels, I let them decide how to say the sentences and then confirm or prompt to make sure we cover all reasonable possibilities.
5. While the Recorders practise, I join the teams in the classroom. I ask them to make notes of what different meanings they have given the sentences. For example
  - Doctor Salt **can** see you at four thirty. (confirming an appointment)
  - Doctor Salt can see you at **four** thirty. (changing a time) (she's busy at three thirty)
6. If it looks as if the teams will be ready before the Recorders, I ask them to think up a couple of sentences like the ones above that they can present to the opposing teams. I join the Recorders and supervise. If we're not happy with one or two recordings, it's easy enough to do it again.

7. We all get together in the classroom. The teams say how many different real meanings they think each sentence can have – e.g. Team A ‘3’ Team B ‘4’ - without giving examples at this stage. I put the numbers on the board and collect the notes they wrote about different meanings.
8. We play the recording and check how many different ways the Recorders produced each sentence – with my help, they have recorded every meaningful variation and left out anything which is very dubious.
9. I act as referee and award points. If the Recorders have said ‘Why don’t you phone him?’, for example, and a team has made the note – *she* never listens – that gets a point. I encourage discussion among the teams, play the recording again to settle disputes and am generous in awarding points; I’m not so much interested in who wins or loses as in getting as much practice as possible of intonation.

**Assessor’s view**

Great for the assessment criterion *Pronunciation, Intonation and Fluency* and in particular for Part Two of ISESOL. Candidates often produce the right language exponents but don’t deliver them with an intonation pattern which emphasises the meaning. Anything which helps them move in this direction is a step towards Pass and First Class Pass performance.

## 8. Crystal Ball (i) – Early days in the course

This is something I've done very successfully as a writing activity in the past. At an early stage in the course, the students write predictions about what will happen (in the next two or three weeks if it's an intensive course or over months if it's a longer course). We put the predictions in an envelope, seal it and open at a fixed future date to read and find out which predictions came true. I've never done it as a speaking activity because it was quite awkward to make recordings and store them.

**The voice recorder makes it easy for the students and for me. Here's what we do.**

1. We split into two groups. One group writes predictions as before, the other records them onto the voice recorder (they can use a spare room or any area outside the classroom).
2. I encourage the students to think about everyday topics of interest to them. The topics in the ISESOL syllabus work fine for this purpose. Depending on numbers in the class, we swap groups so that both have the chance to speak and write – I usually give five or six topics for the written predictions and a different five or six for the speaking.
3. I tell the students not to worry about getting things wrong, either the predictions themselves or language mistakes – you'll see why when you read Crystal Ball (ii) – this activity is just for fun in our class. If necessary, I prompt with general ideas (what will happen in a popular TV programme, what the weather will be like etc. etc. but ideally I want to be an unobtrusive monitor.)
4. I take in the written predictions as before and save the voice-recorder version as a file on my laptop.
5. Towards the end of the course I take the predictions into the class and put the students into their two original groups. They read/listen to what their classmates wrote/recorded and give feedback – in writing for the written predictions and in speaking for the spoken. We then discuss the predictions in the whole group and decide who looked into the future most accurately.
6. I like to do this part way through preparation for the ISESOL test because my students can often see that they are making general progress in their speaking (and writing too, if they're taking the IESOL test). For test preparation, I encourage them to listen/read for the positive – if they can understand what their classmates have said/written, communication has been successful and if they could do it at the start of the course they will definitely be able to do it near the end – that's a sure prediction!

### Assessor's view

Communication is vital in ISESOL. Candidates are sometimes reluctant to speak – we can hear it in the recorded tests – and it's excellent for motivation to show them what they *can do*, not what they can't.

## 9. Crystal Ball (ii) - Near the end of our course and into the future

This has become a follow up to the writing/recordings in Crystal Ball (i). When my students listen to what they said at an earlier stage in the course they are often a little embarrassed at some of the grammar or pronunciation mistakes they made, how limited their language was, how long it took to say something. I tell them not to feel embarrassed and that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process but of course I encourage them to think about how they can improve themselves (they can see it in their writing, but it has been much more difficult to demonstrate the same kind of thing in their speaking).

**The voice recorder makes it possible for us to focus on specific features of the students' speaking and work towards long-term improvement in coherence, range, pronunciation and fluency.**

1. This time, the students are going to write/record predictions which next year's/next month's group will read/listen to – I am going to do this. As before, we split into two groups to write predictions and record them onto the voice recorder.
2. I encourage the students to think about everyday topics of general interest to most people, even students they've never met. The topics in the ISESOL syllabus are ideal, we can all relate to weather (will it snow, rain, be sunny on a significant day?) or sport (will XXXXX win Wimbledon, or the World Cup?) or entertainment (will the UK win the Eurovision Song Contest? will a comedy film win the Oscar for best picture?).
3. I don't need to tell the students to focus on accuracy, pronunciation, range and fluency – they are keen to do this because this time the communication will not just be among our own class; they want to show how good their English is. The writers use an English – English dictionary, plan headings and paragraphs etc. while I spend time with the speakers. We work on all aspects of speaking and I encourage them to say more than just 'XXXXX will/won't win the Cup.' – we look at how words and phrases like *may, might, could, probably, definitely, almost certainly, is going to* make predictions sound more or less confident. The speakers take time to prepare, make notes etc. then take it in turns to make a prediction and add reasons or other details. I also introduce discourse markers like '*First; let's think about; and finally*' and so on.
4. We read/listen to the work the groups have produced to evaluate it as good use of language as well as interesting content. What the students produce may not be perfect – it doesn't need to be – but it's always much improved on the work in the Crystal Ball (i) activity (and it gives me an excellent, authentic model when I do Crystal Ball (ii) with future groups).
5. I do this in the run up to the ISESOL test. My students like the fact that the interlocutor is known – it makes them feel more relaxed – but there is sometimes a risk that they won't feel the need to show what they can do to a teacher they know. I explain that the Assessor, like future students, is someone they don't know and is an important person that they need to impress.

### Assessor's view

Thank you! I don't think we see ourselves as important – the CEFR puts Assessment last after Learning and Teaching – but it's nice to hear that other people do.

It's true that candidates who are well prepared and make an effort to perform to their best make a good impression on the assessor. It's like getting ready for an interview: if you feel confident, you naturally present well.

The Crystal Ball activity is a natural for Part Four, where planning and attention to detail really can turn a Pass level of performance into a First Class Pass.



## 10. My great Uncle Jack

My great Uncle Jack has been a well-loved character in my classes for years. He lives in the house he was born in, in the village he was born in about 100 years ago. He's perfectly happy with the world he has always known: it has everything he wants and he sees no need to travel or to use 'modern technology' (like electricity, for example). I sometimes spend the weekend or holidays with my great Uncle Jack, and when I meet my students again I'm completely out of touch with what has happened. They have to fill me in, or compare their break with mine, and it makes a nice start to a new week or new term.

**The voice recorder has given my great Uncle Jack a new lease of life! Now I can give the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the chance to communicate with him - and vice versa. We don't even need electricity, as batteries will do the job. Here's what I've done.**

1. On my latest visit, I told my great Uncle Jack about the students I work with and how they use all sorts of fantastic new technology he's never dreamed of. Of course, he didn't believe me – he thinks I'm making it up and to be honest I'm not very good at explaining things. If only my students could do it for me ...
2. I split the group into smaller groups of three. In each group, two of the students are going to exchange given information and express their opinions while the third member of the group – the Monitor - listens and makes notes.
3. The two students who exchange information and opinions each have a task sheet – here's an example:

Student A	Student B
<p>We each have a list of technology people use all the time in our days. Let's compare the items on our lists and think about how we would explain them to someone not familiar with modern technology. Let's try to decide which of our lists has the things people today would find it most difficult to live without.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• Microwave oven</li> <li>• Mobile phone</li> <li>• I pod</li> <li>• Anything else</li> </ul>	<p>We each have a list of technology people use all the time in our days. Let's compare the items on our lists and think about how we would explain them to someone not familiar with modern technology. Let's try to decide which of our lists has the things people today would find it most difficult to live without.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You tube</li> <li>• Dishwasher</li> <li>• Internet</li> <li>• DVD player</li> <li>• Anything else</li> </ul>

4. The students exchange information and opinions for two to three minutes. Then, I get together with the Monitors and ask about good ideas they heard (I make sure there's something from every group, because I also monitor during the interaction.) We decide who should record what – again, I try to give everyone a more or less equal chance to contribute.
5. We get the Monitors back with their groups and they prime them for their contributions to the recording. I've stressed that my great Uncle Jack is, naturally at his age, a little hard of hearing so clear pronunciation and taking turns to speak – 'what do you think?' and so on will help him follow the exchanges.

6. We record, pairs in turns, and discuss which technology we can't live without – it doesn't matter if we can't decide - and I promise to take the voice recorder with me the next time I visit my great Uncle Jack.

(The only problem I've had with all this is that my students now want my great Uncle Jack to record an answer ... any suggestions?)

**Assessor's view**

Perfect for Part Three! The candidate and interlocutor need to take turns and if they discuss all – or at least most – of the options on their lists they are bound to use a wider range of language.

The focus on comprehensibility is just right: like great Uncle Jack, the assessor isn't too worried about perfection but does need to hear things clearly so that he/she can give credit where credit is due.

## 11. Writing to communicate

My students usually find writing the least motivating of the four skills. It is seen as quite hard work and not much fun ... not very *Communicative*. It's true that in today's world people write more briefly, rely on spell and grammar checks, avoid writing extensively wherever possible and express themselves in spoken language. There's nothing wrong with any of this but it doesn't help my students prepare for the IESOL test or help *me* to help *them*.

Here's a simple activity I've used successfully to help me evaluate and improve my students' writing. I've adapted it to include an element of interaction as well – if my students feel that writing isn't somehow a kind of solitary confinement, that's a leap forward.

1. I invite the students to work in pairs – they can choose their partners.
2. I give each pair a slip of blank paper – A4 size cut in half is fine for the purpose.
3. I ask the questions! I read them out and the students have to write their answers – each half of the team writing his/her bit. It doesn't matter what the topic is; I generally make it a mix of the familiar topics in the IESOL syllabus at the level. Five or six questions is probably about right, perhaps a couple more if there doesn't appear to be much writing going on.

Here's a very general sample of questions I might ask. The students write their answers, not the questions. They have a minute to talk about it and then a minute or two to write their answers.

1	What do you normally do in the first fifteen minutes after you wake up in the morning?
2	Which colour(s) do you never wear and why?
3	How do you usually spend your birthday/your holidays/the weekend?
4	What do you always do on a long journey?
5	What type of TV programmes do you rarely watch? Why?
6	Do you sometimes get angry? (If yes, why?)
7	What do you often think about when you are on your own?
8	etc. etc. etc.

4. I make sure that the conversations the students have before they write are whispered so nobody else can hear. If one or both of them can't think of an answer to a question, I tell them to leave it blank.
5. When everyone has written answers, I collect each pair's paper (I repeat any of the questions if necessary). They fold it over and don't put any names on it. I put a number on each of the folded papers (1 to whatever number of pairs we have).
6. I ask the students in their pairs to write the names of the other pairs on a blank sheet of paper. I give them two or three minutes to discuss in their pairs what answers they think their classmates have probably given to some of the questions. While they do this, I look through the answers so I know I can read them, make any corrections, change first person to third person etc. (e.g. the paper says #2 '*I am never wearing grey because is bored colour*' I want to report back as '*one of this pair never wears grey because it's a boring colour.*')
7. I read out the answers – changing '*I*' to '*He or she*' or '*they both*'. The other students in pairs listen to all the answers and write down who they think wrote them. (I've tried getting the students to read out one another's writing but it doesn't work – they often struggle and of course they can't make the quick corrections and improvements a teacher can).

8. The students say who they think wrote the answers and we discuss this and give points to the ones who got it right. It also expands into lots more discussion and the students get to know more about one another, which gives a communicative purpose to writing.
9. I take the writing away and have a record I can look at in my own time. I can use it in future study sessions to focus on spelling, grammar or whatever seems to fit general needs rather than correct any individual student's errors.
10. Having written short answers, the students are often surprisingly willing to expand in their own time. It's easy to have topics for voluntary homework – from my sample questions above, you can come up with *'I wish I was like you. You always seem such a calm person. Do you ever get angry? Do write and tell me ...'* or *'Different colours are important to me for different reasons. For example ...'*

It's easy to make this suitable for a different level – one way is to look at the number of words candidates have to write in the IESOL test and suggest this for your students' writing.

My students have enjoyed this simple activity and I get them to help me with my other groups. They record similar questions onto a voice recorder – it really doesn't take more than a few minutes – and I play it to my students at a level or two below.

It's amazing how it focuses my students on accuracy – they know that if they are a B2 group asking questions to A2 or B1 level students, they have to make sure their grammar and vocabulary are accurate and that their pronunciation is very clear.

Students of different levels don't always get the chance to communicate face-to-face – they are obviously in different groups – but in real life this is what happens. It's great to see that writing – often seen as boring and solitary – can open up communication.

**Assessor's view:**

This activity encourages learners to write clearly so that their message can be understood. The teacher has to be able to read the handwriting for the writer to have a part in the listening/guessing identity activity. As assessors we also need to be able to read what candidates have written: handwriting which is easy to read makes a positive impression on the target reader and handwriting which is very difficult to read can cost marks. The learners also need to make sure that what they write answers the question and gives sufficient information, another important feature of test performance. The idea of expanding this into a speaking activity, again with a focus on accuracy, is excellent – it shows learners that they are in control of the productive skills and have the chance to impress the assessor in both IESOL and ISESOL tests.

## 12. I know who you are!

This is a simple question-and-answer activity. Students act out an interview in pairs. One of them pretends to be a famous person, the other asks questions and puts prompts which will elicit clues to his/her identity without actually giving names. The rule is that the questions can't be just 'Yes/No' like 'Are you a sports person?' they have to be 'What sports do you play?' or 'Please tell me about the sports you play.' The rest of the group listens and says who the interviewee is. It's fun but the students acting out the interview can be a little nervous in front of the class and the others can tend to guess the identity too soon and not listen to the rest of the interview.

**The voice recorder has made it possible for me to develop this activity and to make far wider use of it not just in a group but with other groups as well. This is what happens.**

1. The students get into pairs. One in each pair chooses the identity of someone (real or fictional) the others are very likely to know and the other thinks of interview prompts which will produce clues about who he/she is. I ask them to come up with five or six questions based on different everyday topics like family, clothes etc. (the ISESOL syllabus is an obvious starting point and I usually give them a list of these). The topics will depend on the famous person and what is generally known about him/her. They prepare in different parts of the room so their classmates can't overhear.
2. To avoid everyone choosing the same person, I usually have categories on separate slips of paper which they draw as lots without the others knowing what's there (sports person, singer, cartoon character, politician – again, it depends on the group and their interests). I monitor and help out by suggesting how questions and prompts can be modified so they produce clues but don't give the game away, especially at the start of the interview. I remind them they need to say things clearly and give enough information to help their classmates get the answer.
3. When everyone is more or less ready, I ask for the first pair to leave the room and record their interview. This gives any pair still not quite ready a few minutes to finish.
4. If possible, I want everyone in the group to record an interview. This works fine with 12 to 15 students – if we have an odd number, one interview can be with a famous couple (if it's a very large group and this isn't possible, I give some of the students the chance to record this time and others at some future date). The pairs record one after the other until we have around six interviews.
5. We need an open-ended activity to involve the rest of the class while the pairs are out of the room recording. I take the opportunity to focus on the topics candidates may talk about in Part One of the ISESOL test and ask them to think of different everyday prompts in selected categories – later, I'll give them the interlocutor copy from a sample paper so they can see if the prompts they thought of are there (word for word or broadly). It gives them confidence if they know what to expect.
6. When I have all the recordings, the students get together in their interview pairs. We play each recording – they listen to every prompt and answer, no shouting out – and the pairs can write a name at any stage, but they have only one try; they raise a hand to signal that they think they've got the speaker's identity and I make a note of the stage in the recording.
7. At the end of each recording, I ask who the pairs thought the speaker was. If they're right, they get a point – if they were the first to guess and write down, it's two points but no points if they were wrong. The winners are the ones with most points.

**Now that I have the recordings, this activity has been really useful for follow-up in the lesson or, ideally, at a lesson in the near future.**

I ask how and when the students know who the famous person was. We can listen again to check. It leads very naturally from 'I wear a blue and red costume ...' to 'He said he wore a blue and red costume ...' etc. I'm a Communicative teacher and I don't want to be too pedantic about grammar in a fluency activity, but there is a

time and place for language points like *reported speech*. The problem is that my students don't always see the real value of speaking activities; they sometimes think that having fun and learning don't go together. When they see that a fun speaking game can be the basis for a 'serious' grammar lesson it adds a new dimension to learning and teaching.

I have also used the recordings to play to other student groups and give positive feedback. This shows my students that they *can* communicate. Sometimes, they ask if they can record again before another group listens so that they can correct any mistakes and add words and phrases. This is fine by me: we want to encourage long-term improvement.

#### **Assessor's view**

This activity is ideal for Part One. Students can become familiar with the pattern and they have a genuine Communicative purpose – they not only respond to prompts but really give information about who they are.

The focus on clear Pronunciation is useful and also the need to produce enough Range to be successful. As assessors very often notice, a successful Part One leads to good performance throughout the ISESOL test.

## 13. Roving reporters

This is an activity I've used on many occasions – you have probably done something similar. I get the students in my class to think of interview questions to ask people outside the class. In a language school in an English-speaking country it's easy to find members of staff to interview and when I've taught in a place where English isn't the first language, it's always been possible to find someone they all know like another student, teacher or any member of staff who is willing to answer one or two questions in English. We then use the answers in a future speaking. It's good to take the language presented and practised in the classroom outside the classroom and to bring language from the outside in – it makes it real.

**The voice recorder makes it even more real. It gives my students the chance not just to tell their classmates about their interviews but actually to present them. The others are far more interested in hearing what was said than just hearing about what was said and it is easy to motivate them to practise speaking skills. Here's what I do.**

1. I hand over the voice recorder to a pair of students. They are going to interview someone in the school (or outside in the afternoon/over the weekend if convenient). The interviews should be natural, so the roving reporters need to use appropriate language – we discuss this 'Excuse me..' 'Can I ask you..?' 'Do you mind ..?' etc.
2. As a whole group, we decide which topics we are going to ask about and what questions and follow up prompts the roving reporters might put to the interviewee(s). I guide them in their choice of topics – it makes sense to use those in the ISESOL test. I also try to get the students to think beyond 'Do you watch TV?' and expand into 'What kind of TV programmes do you watch? Which don't you watch?' and tell the reporters that 'Why?/Why not?' questions can be useful for follow up.
3. Here's what we do in a lesson in the near future (I find it's best not to make it the next lesson in case the roving reporters haven't managed to conduct successful interviews, it's good to have the chance to listen to the recording before planning a lesson featuring it). The roving reporters briefly say who they interviewed and which of the topics they asked about. If the interview includes, for example, 'Which time of the year do you like most? Which don't you like?' I make it into a quick pair work discussion task; it takes seconds to put this on the board:

**Which is the best time of year for someone to visit this part of the world and why? Discuss this and order these times of year 1 = best to 4 = worst.**

**Autumn | Winter | Spring | Summer**

**What activities would you arrange for a visiting group of overseas students?**

4. While the students in pairs discuss the topic, I get together with the roving reporters in another part of the room or outside. We listen to the interview(s) and decide how we will present them – it's usually fun to ask the other students to speculate on the interviewees' answers, especially if they are people we all know.
5. I ask the pairs for feedback on their discussion – I stress that it doesn't matter if they haven't agreed, the important thing is to speak and to cover as much ground as possible. It's good that the roving reporters and I haven't been listening to the discussions because the other students really need to tell us what they've said.
6. Now we prepare to listen to the interviews. The roving reporters ask the group – we often play in teams, keeping to the pairs who carried out the discussion task. – I encourage them to give certain clues based on their classmates pair discussions. 'We interviewed Charlie and his answer was very similar to this pair.' etc. The group are always interested to hear if their guesses are correct, especially if we award points.
7. It's surprising just how much you can get from this activity when you have a recording to make it interesting. If the roving reporters have asked their interviewee half a dozen questions, you have lots of discussion topics and tasks. It's an activity my students often ask to repeat (everyone wants a turn at being a roving reporter). I also

like the activity because it makes the students very active. They take control of the learning, which I think is important. The simple fact that I give them the voice recorder to take away gives them the feeling that this isn't just my class with my equipment, it's ours.

### **Assessor's view**

This activity gives useful practice for different parts of the ISESOL test. The focus on interview topics and prompts is great for Part One – it gives the students the interlocutor's view. The focus on 'Excuse me' etc. is ideal for Part Two.

The pair discussion the roving reporters' classmates carry out is just right for Part Three and it's good that the emphasis is on Range and Fluency rather than Accuracy (if the teacher is otherwise occupied, he/she can't correct errors and the students need to get on with it).

It's good that the activity gives the students more control because that's what happens as the ISESOL test develops. The recordings can be used as a stimulus for Part Four practice as well: the prompts used in the interviews can easily be adapted as Part Four topics e.g. 'My favourite time of the year.' prepared and presented by different students.