

WIDA ACCESS SPEAKING FAQ



Students used to score very high on speaking and now they score very low. What are the factors that caused this?

Four main factors brought about this change in scores:

- **Expectations** – With the move to college and career ready standards, WIDA found that they were not measuring academic language at the same level expected in CCR standards. Even students who scored a perfect score may not have met the rigor contained within CCR standards. As a result, WIDA increased the expectations of speaking – specifically in the area of academic speaking.
- **Local Testing to Online Testing** – The move to online administration meant that the entire test design of speaking had to be reworked. Scores on the listening and reading modalities determine the rigor of the speaking portion.
- **Scoring** – Scoring of the speaking portion has moved from a local process to a centralized one. Trained scorers, without bias, use a standardized scoring rubric to score responses. Raters are trained to anticipate false starts, hesitations, reformulations, repetitions, and other typical characteristics of extemporaneous speech. Students are not penalized for such speech and self-corrections may contribute to a higher score.
- **Standard Setting** – With an updated assessment and updated expectations, WIDA conducted a standard setting to reset the cuts for the assessment. According to Gary Cook from WIDA, prior to the standard setting, the concern was that the test design and the expectations of how the test was scored was not meaningful as over 50% of students consortium wide received a perfect score. The standard setting committee were shown impact data of their proposed cuts, and approved the increased level of rigor required.

Besides the scoring rubric, are there examples of the types of responses expected from students?

WIDA helps demonstrate the types of answers students should give through “Nina.” Nina is the student in the practice test and summative assessment that demonstrates responses to the student. Direct students to pay close attention to the answers given by Nina as a guide to how they should answer questions. Each year, WIDA attempts to make additional practice items available for use.

The test only allows one attempt per item. Why?

We expect students to sometimes make mistakes in their responses. If students feel they have made a mistake, they are encouraged to continue speaking. Please keep in mind that student responses are not scored for factual accuracy and raters are trained to not penalize minor grammatical or lexical mistakes. WIDA explored the possibility of introducing a 'do-over' button to the ACCESS Speaking test. However, that enhancement was rejected as impractical and we were concerned that students' second attempts may not necessarily be better than the first attempt. There are also significant practical concerns of tracking multiple audio files from individual students and ensuring that the student submitted and raters retrieved the intended audio file. For a large-scale assessment such as ACCESS, a do-over button introduces significant risk and we are not convinced that it would contribute to students delivering better responses.

In daily speech, many ELs use short one or two word answers. Are the practical ways to get them to speak in longer segments?

It is recommended teaching students the rubric – where they are on the scale and what they need to do to move forward. A practical suggestion is to record student speaking samples and conference with them as they reflect on their performance. Students should also become familiar with the technology used to record their voice.

Districts are also encouraged to design activities that closely mirror what they are being asked to do on the speaking assessment. Activities should be based in core content areas and student performance should be recorded and analyzed by teachers and students

There are several free resources that can be used – check out the [“Improving Speaking Performance”](#) document on our website for more information.