

FCE Speaking Skills

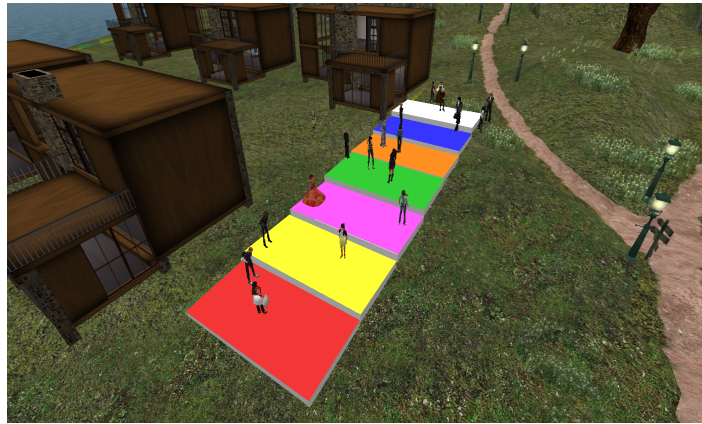


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Background to the Course Concept

Originally thought of as an adaptation of the *Avalon Debating course*, but aimed at general English learners studying for the discussion part of the speaking paper of the University of Cambridge ESOL examination *First Certificate in English (FCE)*. The course concept was later changed to encompass all four parts of the FCE speaking paper, as it was perceived this would be of more value to the learners.

For more information about the Cambridge FCE, see:

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/general-english/fce.html>

For more details and notes from the course reiterations see:

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Speaking-Skills-Course>

Overview of the Course

This course aims to give learners practical advice and help with the speaking paper of the University of Cambridge ESOL examination *First Certificate in English (FCE)*. The idea is that learners who are unable to practise this otherwise, and those who want extra practice, can do so, as well as meeting learners from different parts of the world. The course has been designed to give background information about the exam and tips for improving performance as well as time for practising each of the four parts of the speaking paper.

Requirements and Recommendations

Language Level: B1-B2

Prior knowledge of virtual worlds: The learners should have some basic knowledge about movement and communication skills. The teacher should have intermediate skills (communication and movement, etc.) Basic building skills (placement of objects, uploading and placing images on objects) are also required of the teacher.

Recommended size of group: 16 or smaller, although groups larger than 16 can be catered for if the teacher has help with monitoring the students.

Target audience: Any learner at B1-B2 level with an interest in taking the Cambridge FCE. No prior knowledge of this examination is required.

Number of lessons: 6+. The activities can be repeated with different materials, depending on the needs and requirements of the learners.

SL environment requirements: The beginning and end of each class require a space where group discussions can be held. Most of the pair-work needs to be undertaken in an area where learners can work together and not be heard by other pairs and yet be close enough to be monitored by the teacher. The best solution for this that we have

found is by using separate audio parcels close together (to see the parcel boundaries, the teacher needs to activate *World->Show->Property Lines* from the menu in *Second Life*).

Recommended space: Avalon *pair-work parcels* (see image at the top of the page): <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/174/110/26>

SL objects needed:

- FCE Picture boards – part 2 . Details available from: <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/FCE-Speaking-Skills-repository>
- FCE Picture boards – part 3. Details available from: <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/FCE-Speaking-Skills-repository>
- Table and chairs (set up to simulate real life FCE examination)

SL tools used by students during the course: Basic movements, voice, chat, IM, friendship tools, teleport.

Course management tools: Some form of 2D online space where the course description and course information can be communicated and where learners can also ask/answer questions and make comments (in a forum, etc.). In the pilot, a custom social networking space was used (<http://fcespeakingskills.grouply.com/>) but we could have easily used another tool such as *Moodle*, *Ning*, or a wiki, etc.

Student in-word initiation: VOIP (*Skype* or similar) contact before the course starts, as an initial point of contact for learners could be used to facilitate voice tool set-up.

Learning Goals

- **Language:** Practice of: general interactional and social language; organising a larger unit of discourse; comparing, describing, expressing opinions; sustaining an interaction; exchanging ideas, expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing, suggesting, speculating, evaluating, reaching a decision through negotiation, etc.
- **Social:** To get to know language learners from other countries and being able to communicate with them about their life and interests.
- **Technical:** Grounding in how to use virtual worlds for learning, as a tool for communication.

Storyboard

The idea is that the learners come together and learn about what taking the speaking paper of the Cambridge FCE examination entails. After an overview of the course and the exam, they are encouraged to meet the other learners, working in pairs and practising part one of the exam (general interactional and social language) at the same

time. The learners change pairs from time to time. Towards the end of the class, the learners come together again for a general discussion and Q&A session with the teacher. They are also encouraged to meet each other and practise in-between classes. Each of the first four classes a different part of the oral exam is practised, and in the fifth class the learners get to practise an entire speaking paper from start to finish. In the last class, the learners do the same as in class 5, but in exam conditions (as far as Second Life permits), with the teacher acting as interlocutor (and another teacher if possible as examiner, although this is optional). While pairs are being examined, the other learners are encouraged to listen to their performance, and while feedback is given by the teacher at the end of each test.

Reward Models

The learners are given an Avalon certificate of attendance at the end of the course if they have attended 75% of classes. They also receive written feedback from the teacher about their performance in each part of the speaking paper, with ideas of what they need to improve on before they take the actual FCE examination.

Pre-Course Technical Initiation

Learners are contacted individually via email and invited to join the 2D online space, where instructional materials (from the Avalon multimedia toolkit : <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Introductory-Multimedia-kit-for-learners>). If they are new to Second Life, a time can be arranged when they can meet a technician or instructor in SL in order to check their sound, chat and receive help with basic movements in-world. If there has been a problem with creating the SL account, then the learner can be contacted via VOIP (*Skype*, or *Google Talk*, for example) and given real-time support. Learners that are already experienced SL users should not need to go through this phase.

LESSON 1

Suggested virtual world environment:

The recommended environment for all classes is the same. A space large enough for all to meet is necessary for the beginning and end of this class, with an additional area suitable for learner pair-work practice (such as the pair-work parcels on *Avalon Learning*: <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/174/110/26>)

3D objects used: none

2D materials used (slides, text, etc):

Cambridge FCE Handbook

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/resources/teacher/fce.html#o8>

Cambridge ESOL Teacher support (FCE Speaking) :

<https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/exams/generalenglish/fce/speaking>

More details of 2D material:

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Meeting-1:-Introductory-meeting>

Course management tools: The basic information about the meeting can be communicated via email/course site (or LMS). Course overview / details on the pilot was given here:

- Course details (for learners)
<http://fcespeakingskills.groupy.com/page/theclasses>

On the pilot course, the following information was also sent to learners before the first meeting:

- Announcement/Open invitation to the course:
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/31099394/AVALON-FCE-Speaking-Skills-May-2010>
- Initial learner communication about course:
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/31718837/AVALON-FCE-Speaking-Skills-Instructions>
- Invitation to first class:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/31970747/AVALON-FCE-Speaking-Skills-Class-01>

Aims: The aim of this lesson is to introduce the learners to each other and to working in a virtual world; to give learners an overview of the course, the exam, and the speaking paper; to practise part 1 of the FCE Speaking paper (general interactional and social language).

Summary of Activities:

- Gathering
- Introductions / sound check
- Course outline
- FCE exam overview
- FCE Speaking paper overview
- Speaking paper part 1 advice & tips
- Speaking paper part 1 pair-work practice
- Final end gathering for discussion / reflections
- Homework assigned

LESSON 2

Suggested virtual world environment:

The recommended environment for all classes is the same. A space large enough for all to meet is necessary for the beginning and end of this class, with an additional area suitable for learner pair-work practice (such as the pair-work parcels on *Avalon Learning*: <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/174/110/26>)

3D objects used: FCE Speaking paper part 2 picture boards

Details available from: <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/FCE-Speaking-Skills-repository>

2D materials used (slides, text, etc):

Cambridge FCE Handbook

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/resources/teacher/fce.html#o8>

Cambridge ESOL Teacher support (FCE Speaking) :

<https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/exams/generalenglish/fce/speaking>

More details of 2D material:

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Meeting-2:%C2%AoFCE-oral-part-2>

Course management tools: The basic information about the meeting can be communicated via email/course site (or LMS). Course overview / details on the pilot was given here:

- Course details (for learners)
<http://fcespeakingskills.grouply.com/page/theclasses>

Aims: The aim of this lesson is to give advice/tips to the learners about part 2 of the FCE speaking paper; to give learners more practice communicating to each other by voice in Second Life; to practise part 2 of the FCE Speaking paper (organising a larger unit of discourse; comparing, describing, expressing opinions).

Summary of Activities:

- Gathering
- Discussion of homework / sound check
- FCE Speaking paper part 2 overview
- Speaking paper part 2 advice & tips
- Speaking paper part 2 pair-work practice
- Final end gathering for discussion / reflections
- Homework assigned

LESSON 3

Suggested virtual world environment:

The recommended environment for all classes is the same. A space large enough for all to meet is necessary for the beginning and end of this class, with an additional area suitable for learner pair-work practice (such as the pair-work parcels on *Avalon Learning*: <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/174/110/26>)

3D objects used: FCE Speaking paper part 3 picture boards

Details available from: <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/FCE-Speaking-Skills-repository>

2D materials used (slides, text, etc):

Cambridge FCE Handbook

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/resources/teacher/fce.html#o8>

Cambridge ESOL Teacher support (FCE Speaking) :

<https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/exams/generalenglish/fce/speaking>

More details of 2D material:

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Meeting-2:%C2%AoFCE-oral-part-2>

Course management tools: The basic information about the meeting can be communicated via email/course site (or LMS). Course overview / details on the pilot was given here:

- Course details (for learners)
<http://fcespeakingskills.grouply.com/page/theclasses>

Aims: The aim of this lesson is to give advice/tips to the learners about part 3 of the FCE speaking paper; to give learners more practice communicating to each other by voice in Second Life; to practise part 3 of the FCE Speaking paper (sustaining an interaction; exchanging ideas, expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing, suggesting, speculating, evaluating, reaching a decision through negotiation, etc.).

Summary of Activities:

- Gathering
- Discussion of homework / sound check
- FCE Speaking paper part 3 overview
- Speaking paper part 3 advice & tips
- Speaking paper part 3 pair-work practice
- Final end gathering for discussion / reflections
- Homework assigned

LESSON 4

Suggested virtual world environment:

The recommended environment for all classes is the same. A space large enough for all to meet is necessary for the beginning and end of this class, with an additional area suitable for learner pair-work practice (such as the pair-work parcels on *Avalon Learning*: <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/174/110/26>)

3D objects used: FCE Speaking paper part 3 picture boards

Details available from: <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/FCE-Speaking-Skills-repository>

2D materials used (slides, text, etc):

Cambridge FCE Handbook

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/resources/teacher/fce.html#o8>

Cambridge ESOL Teacher support (FCE Speaking) :

<https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/exams/generalenglish/fce/speaking>

More details of 2D material:

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Meeting-2:%C2%AoFCE-oral-part-2>

Course management tools: The basic information about the meeting can be communicated via email/course site (or LMS). Course overview / details on the pilot was given here:

- Course details (for learners)
<http://fcespeakingskills.grouply.com/page/theclasses>

Aims: The aim of this lesson is to give advice/tips to the learners about part 4 of the FCE speaking paper; to give learners more practice communicating to each other by voice in Second Life; to practise part 4 of the FCE Speaking paper (organising a larger unit of discourse; comparing, describing, expressing opinions).

Summary of Activities:

- Gathering
- Discussion of homework / sound check
- FCE Speaking paper part 4 overview
- Speaking paper part 4 advice & tips
- Speaking paper part 4 pair-work practice
- Final end gathering for discussion / reflections
- Homework assigned

LESSON 5

Suggested virtual world environment:

The recommended environment for all classes is the same. A space large enough for all to meet is necessary for the beginning and end of this class, with an additional area suitable for learner pair-work practice (such as the pair-work parcels on *Avalon Learning*: <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/174/110/26>)

3D objects used: FCE Speaking paper part 2 & 3 picture boards

Details available from: <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/FCE-Speaking-Skills-repository>

2D materials used (slides, text, etc):

Cambridge FCE Handbook

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/resources/teacher/fce.html#o8>

Cambridge ESOL Teacher support (FCE Speaking) :

<https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/exams/generalenglish/fce/speaking>

More details of 2D material:

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Meeting-2:%C2%AoFCE-oral-part-2>

Course management tools: The basic information about the meeting can be communicated via email/course site (or LMS). Course overview / details on the pilot was given here:

- Course details (for learners)
<http://fcespeakingskills.grouply.com/page/theclasses>

Aims: The aim of this lesson is to give advice/tips to the the learners about the FCE speaking paper in general; to give learners more practice communicating to each other by voice in Second Life; to practise all parts of the FCE Speaking paper .

Summary of Activities:

- Gathering
- Discussion of homework / sound check
- FCE Speaking paper (reminder) overview
- Speaking paper part advice & tips (general)
- Speaking paper (all parts) pair-work practice
- Final end gathering for discussion / reflections
- Homework assigned

LESSON 6

Suggested virtual world environment:

The recommended environment for all classes is the same. A space large enough for all to meet is necessary for the beginning and end of this class, with an additional area suitable for learner pair-work practice (such as the pair-work parcels on *Avalon Learning*: <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/174/110/26>)

3D objects used: FCE Speaking paper part 2 & 3 picture boards

Details available from: <http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/FCE-Speaking-Skills-repository>

2D materials used (slides, text, etc):

Cambridge FCE Handbook

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/resources/teacher/fce.html#o8>

Cambridge ESOL Teacher support (FCE Speaking) :

<https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/exams/generalenglish/fce/speaking>

More details of 2D material:

<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/Meeting-2:%C2%AoFCE-oral-part-2>

Course management tools: The basic information about the meeting can be communicated via email/course site (or LMS). Course overview / details on the pilot was given here:

- Course details (for learners)
<http://fcespeakingskills.grouply.com/page/theclasses>

Aims: The aim of this lesson is to give the learners an opportunity to take the FCE speaking paper under exam conditions (as far as possible in SL); to give learners more practice communicating to each other by voice in Second Life; to have their performance evaluated while taking the FCE Speaking paper and to receive constructive feedback from the teacher/examiner.

Summary of Activities:

- Gathering
- Discussion of homework / sound check
- FCE Speaking paper exam conditions overview
- Speaking paper preparation advice & tips
- Speaking paper examination (in pairs) followed by feedback
- Final end gathering for discussion / reflections
- Final goodbyes

Evaluation of Students

The last class is used as an evaluation session. Instructors can mark the learners according to the Cambridge FCE speaking paper criteria (see *Teacher Handbook* : https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/digitalAssets/109701_fce_hb_deco8.pdf) and should give oral feedback (just after each pair has been examined) on learner performance, followed up with written comments (perhaps at the time the certificate of attendance is issued)

Reflections

Interest in the course was high. Some of the first classes had more than 20 learners in attendance. Learners summarise reflections such as teacher reflections and student reflections from the course.

Adaptations

This summary is based on a pilot course of 6 classes. The nature of the examination means that more practice is necessary before learners are ready to take the FCE speaking skills paper. Additional meetings based on the framework above could be easily added. Variety could be provided by changing the topics of the material (photographs and discussion suggestions) to give learners the opportunity of talking about a wider selection of vocabulary. Language input sessions could also be added in-between the classes in this framework if a teacher wanted to work on other skills (reading, writing, listening, etc) and grammar/vocabulary.

Although the pilot course was aimed specifically at B1 / B2 learners and those studying for an exam in English, the framework could be easily adapted for higher level exams in English (CAE / CPE, etc) and also for equivalent examinations in other languages with similar speaking parts (e.g. The *DELE* (Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera) *Intermedio* offered by the Spanish Ministry for Education, Culture and Sport).