

Lesson Plan: ACE in Exams

Attitude, Creation, Experience under a clock — for C1+ IELTS, Cambridge, and Trinity candidates

Level: C1-C2

Time: 50-60 minutes

Focus: Speaking, exam mindset

Exam link: IELTS Speaking, Cambridge CAE/CPE, Trinity GESE

Learning objective

By the end of the lesson, students can apply the ACE framework (Attitude, Creation, Experience) to speaking test conditions, building composure and real-time construction skills that improve performance independently of grammar or vocabulary knowledge.

1. Warmer (5 minutes)

Ask: describe a moment in a past exam (any subject, any language) where a question caught you off guard. What happened? Did you freeze, guess, or something else? Discuss briefly, this happens to every candidate, in every language, at every level.

2. Presentation: the ACE framework for exams (10 minutes)

Attitude. What you do with a question you don't fully understand decides more of the score than people realise. A confident, adjusted guess beats a hesitant, technically-correct answer that took thirty seconds to arrive.

Creation. Building an answer in real time, under a clock, is a distinct skill from simply knowing the grammar. This is trainable specifically, through timed practice, not just general study.

Experience. Treating the speaking test as a real conversation, not a performance of memorised phrases, produces more natural and better-marked language. Examiners are trained to notice purely recited answers.

3. Controlled practice: the confident guess (10 minutes)

Present students with 4-5 deliberately ambiguous or unfamiliar exam-style questions. In pairs, students must answer within 15 seconds, no "I don't understand", practising a confident, reasonable interpretation rather than freezing.

- *"How has the concept of privacy changed in your lifetime?"*
- *"Do you think progress always makes life better?"*
- *"What's the relationship between tradition and innovation in your country?"*

4. Freer practice: timed real-time construction (15 minutes)

In pairs: student A asks an IELTS/CAE-style Part 3 or GESE-style discussion question, student B answers for exactly 60 seconds without stopping, even if it means using a filler phrase to buy thinking time ("That's an interesting question, let me think..."). Swap roles. This trains the Creation skill specifically: sustaining real-time construction under time pressure.

5. Application: mock speaking test (10 minutes)

Run a short, realistic mock speaking test segment (3-4 questions) in pairs or small groups. Afterward, each student identifies one moment where they used Attitude (confident recovery), one where they used Creation (built an answer live), and reflects on whether it felt like communication (Experience) or performance.

6. Wrap-up (5 minutes)

Discuss: this becomes more important, not less, the higher the level. At C1/C2 and IELTS Band 7+, marking increasingly rewards composure and natural real-time construction over rehearsed delivery. Two candidates with near-identical grammar can land in different bands purely on how they handle an unexpected question.

The ACE framework (Attitude, Creation, Experience) is part of ThriveFul, an educational philosophy developed by Ian Springham.

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Free to use in the classroom. For more lesson resources: ianspringham.co.uk/resources/