Pearson English International Certificate

Lesson Plan Ideas: Skill Building Activities

Describe Image
Describe Image tasks test learners’ ability to speak in an extended way about an image, linking different parts and ideas.

These tasks assess test takers’ ability to develop ideas within a short talk and tests the accuracy of their speech including grammar, word choice, pronunciation, and fluency.

Test takers do 4–5 Describe Image tasks at all levels.

The kinds of image used for this task vary in detail and complexity across the test levels.

Images can include photographs and illustrations.

Test takers should speak fluently, use accurate pronunciation and describe all the key features of the image.

Before recording a description of the image they see, test takers have 25 seconds to study it and prepare.

On screen, the task will look like this:

The Recording Status box on the screen displays a countdown for the preparation time until the microphone opens for test takers to begin reading aloud.

Before recording begins, there is a short tone.

Test takers have 25 seconds to describe the image for A1 and A2 tests. Test takers have 40 seconds to describe the image for B1, B2, C1 & C2 tests.
Strategies for Success

- Test takers should start describing the image immediately after the tone.
- Test takers should not start speaking before the tone, because their voice will not be recorded and the introduction to their description may be missing.
- Start by first describing the main features of the image. Test takers should always ensure they describe all key parts of the image within the time limit.
- Move onto describe smaller details of the image if there is time.
- Link different parts of the description. Test takers should explain the position of different parts of the image, use linking words to show how different parts relate to each other, and, when appropriate, compare and contrast different features of the image.
- Provide as much detail as possible. Test takers should try to demonstrate their vocabulary range by describing pictures in detail.
- Do not rush: test takers should speak at a steady, natural pace. Speaking too quickly will reduce test takers’ score for Fluency.
- Finish speaking before the recording progress bar reaches the end when the word ‘Recording’ changes to ‘Completed’. Test takers should keep an eye on the recording progress bar to ensure that they finish describing the image within 25 seconds (A1 and A2 tests) / 40 seconds (B1, B2, C1 & C2 tests).
- Use preparation time effectively:
  - Focus on the main information. Test takers should study the image carefully and use the onscreen notepad to make notes of key features.
  - Organise the description of the image. Test takers should plan the order in which they will describe the features of the image.
  - Think about words to use that will demonstrate a wide range of vocabulary.
- Place emphasis on key words within the description of the image’s features.
- Avoid hesitation and repetition, as this can reduce a test taker’s fluency score.
- Keep speaking until the end of the time limit.
Describe Image: Activities for all learners

The images used in the Describe Image tasks will vary in terms of content type and detail according to the level of the test. Test takers at lower levels are likely to be presented with images of common, everyday activities, while higher-level test takers can expect more detailed images that require them to use a wider range of vocabulary. Learners of all levels will need to understand the requirements of the task and get used to planning and delivering descriptions within strict time limits. All learners should also be trying to build their vocabulary so that they know the words needed to describe the images they encounter.

Understanding the task

After introducing the Describe Image task to your learners and explaining the Strategies for Success on page 1, check that they have understood using the following comprehension questions and/or gap-fill summary.

Comprehension questions

1. What kind of images are in Describe Image tasks?
2. What skills do Describe Image tasks assess?
3. What should test takers do when preparing to speak?
4. When should test takers begin speaking?

Answers: 1) photographs and illustrations. 2) Speaking, including accuracy of grammar, vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation. 3) Focus on key information; Organise ideas; Think of vocabulary to use. 4) After the tone, once the countdown has ended.

Gap-fill summary

When doing Describe Image tasks, test takers should (i)________ their answers effectively. Talk about the main (ii)_______ of the image first, before going on to describe the (iii)_________. You should use words that are appropriate for the (iv)_______ and try to ensure that your (v)________ is as accurate as possible while talking.

Options  Key
a) context   b) features   c) structure
     d) grammar   e) details   

Key
(i) c  (iv) a
(ii) b   (v) d
(iii) e
Describe Image:
Activities for all learners

Timed activities

You can use a wide variety of images to help your learners get ready for the Describe Image tasks. The most important thing you will need for class is at least one, preferably more than one, timer. This will be used to count down the 25 seconds for preparation so that learners can get used to taking in a new image and planning their response within this time limit. After the 25 seconds preparation time, you will also be able to use the timer to time their responses to ensure they can describe the image within the 25-second/40-second time limit. Remember that test takers do four Describe Image tasks in the test, so it is important to build their stamina by getting them to practice doing four in a row.

1) First, find 8-16 images suitable for your learners. You can use the practice tasks on page 6 and/or images you find online.

2) Divide students into pairs, giving each pair 8 images, all face down.

3) Make one learner the test taker and one learner the time monitor. You may want to allow time monitor to use the timer on their phones so that they have one each.

4) Learners practice preparing each description within 25 seconds and then describing each image within 40 seconds, switching roles after doing four tasks.

Building vocabulary

Encourage your learners to use new vocabulary when practicing Describe Image tasks. GSE Teacher Toolkit is an excellent resource for selecting appropriate vocabulary for your learners to study. For Describe Image tasks, they are likely to need to use a variety of nouns and verbs to describe the things and activities in each image. It is also important to get your learners in the habit of adding as much detail as possible by using adjectives and adverbs to their descriptions. You can use the toolkit to identify useful vocabulary by selecting the appropriate CEFR level for your learners, choosing topics, such as ‘shopping’ and ‘nature’, and picking which grammatical category/categories to focus.
Describe Image: Activities for all learners

For example, you can find a list of B2 adjectives about the topic ‘clothes, fashion and beauty’, which can be downloaded as a PDF or spreadsheet:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOCABULARY</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY</th>
<th>GSE</th>
<th>CEFR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coloured</td>
<td>Clothes, fashion, and beauty</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>B2 (A2-B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colored</td>
<td>Clothes, fashion, and beauty</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>B2 (A2-B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shiny</td>
<td>Clothes, fashion, and beauty</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>B2 (A2-B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bold</td>
<td>Clothes, fashion, and beauty</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>B2 (A2-B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>light</td>
<td>Clothes, fashion, and beauty</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>B2 (A2-B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>navy</td>
<td>Clothes, fashion, and beauty</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>B2 (A2-B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casual</td>
<td>Clothes, fashion, and beauty</td>
<td>adjective</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>B2 (A2-B1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Record yourself

A common issue that learners have with computer-based tests is feeling anxiety when talking into a computer. This is especially true for learners who are only used to face-to-face, classroom-based learning. It’s important to get your learners used to talking into a device, so asking them to record descriptions on their smart phones can be an excellent practice activity to get them ready for the test environment.

This gives them a chance to get used to the mode of testing and also, when they listen back to what they have recorded, they can analyse their own strengths and weaknesses, and compare what they have said with the image they were describing.
Describe Image:
Activities for A1/A2

English users at the A1 level should be able to use simple phrases and sentences to describe familiar matters, such as people and common places. At A2, English users should be able to use a series of sentences with linking words to describe a wider range of topics, such as education and the environment. Describe Image tasks test the ability to do this by assessing speaking skills, including grammar, word choice, fluency and pronunciation. You can help your learners prepare for the test by using the A2 example image below and other practice tasks on page 6.

Vocabulary tennis

Depending on your learners’ age and the class size, you may want to use a real ball for this fun vocabulary building activity. Divide your class into two groups or separate the class into pairs. Then, give them a topic, such as ‘food’ or ‘parks’. One group/partner in a pair says a word related to this topic, and then – if you are using a real ball – throws the ball to a member of the other group/their partner, who must then say another word related to the topic.

This continues until someone cannot say a new word, at which point the other team/learner wins a point. A fun variation, especially if you do not want to risk using a real ball, is asking learners to gesture as if they are holding tennis racquets. Before doing this activity, it can be useful to give learners some preparation time to use a bilingual dictionary to research some useful words related to the topic. This can boost their vocabulary even further.
Describe Image:
Activities for A1/A2

Describe and draw

Divide your class into pairs or groups of three. Give a practice image to one student and ask them to describe it within 40 seconds. Ask their partner(s) to draw what they hear their partner describing. Once finished, they can compare what they drew to the practice image.

This can be a good way to engage learners and get them focusing on the position of features within an image. It can also be a lot of fun. And don’t worry: because the images used at A1/A2 level are usually quite simple, this activity does not require your learners to be any good at drawing.

Where is it?

A1/A2 learners will need to build their vocabulary for describing the position of different features within the image. Help them learn useful expressions, such as ‘… is next to the…’ ‘in the right corner, there is…’ and ‘in the middle of the picture we can see…’, by using fun activities that involve a little competition. For example...

Activity 1: Describe the position of something in an image without saying what it is. Learners must race to tell you what you are describing.

Activity 2: Find something in the classroom (e.g. behind a student’s chair). Describe where it is and have students race to get it.

Activity 3: Shout out the names of two objects in the classroom and have students race to write a full sentence describing where they are in relation to each other (e.g. ‘the monitor is on top of the desk’). The first student/team to write a full, grammatically correct sentence wins.

Using the GSE Teacher Toolkit, you can select the topic ‘Location and position’ to help identify words for your learners to practice using.
Describe Image: Activities for B1/B2

At B1/B2 levels, English speakers need to be able to produce connected speech, using appropriate linking words, to present a clear, detailed description of a wide range of topics. Describe Image tasks test the ability to do this by assessing speaking skills, including grammar, word choice, fluency and pronunciation. You can help your learners prepare for the test by using the B1 example image below and other practice tasks on page 6.

Integrating skills

Although Describe Image tasks assess speaking skills, it can be useful to get your students writing out their descriptions of images when preparing for the test. This can help them understand how to plan and organise ideas, as well as identify how much information is needed to make their description of an appropriate length. After showing students how to organise their ideas, give them an image and ask them to write a description of 5-7 sentences. In pairs, they can then first peer review each other’s work before recording/timing themselves as they read the description aloud.

Organising ideas

Describe Image tasks test learners’ ability to organise a short presentation in a logical way: this means stating the main feature of the image first, before going on to give further details, and then rounding off with a final sentence or two as a conclusion. Get your learners in the habit of organising descriptions of images in this way by cutting up well-structured paragraphs into separate sentences and jumbling the pieces up. Ask learners to organise the sentences into the appropriate order:

- Introduction sentence(s) describing main feature(s)
- Supporting sentence(s) explaining details of the image
- Concluding sentence(s) restating the main feature(s)

This activity can also be useful for helping learners build awareness of how to use a variety of linking words.
Describe Image:
Activities for B1/B2

Comparing and contrasting

B1/B2 learners will need to develop a range of language for comparing and contrasting features in the images. As well as comparative and superlative adjectives, it can be useful for learners to have practice using adverbs like ‘approximately’ ‘slightly’ and ‘significantly’ and connecting words like ‘similarly’ ‘whereas’ and ‘meanwhile’. These words will make their descriptions more detailed and the links between features more clear.

You can find level-appropriate wordlists by selecting ‘comparing and contrasting’ under ‘Topic’ on the GSE Teacher Toolkit. Definition-matching activities where learners match a word to its definition can be used to introduce the meaning of new vocabulary. Then, before asking learners to use the new words to describe practice images, it is useful to get them describing things they are more familiar with, such as two cities/countries they know well. This will help to develop their confidence in using the new vocabulary before they use it on practice tasks.
Describe Image: Activities for C1/C2

C1 and C2 users of English must be able to present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects with a logical structure, integrating sub-themes and developing particular points, and including an appropriate conclusion. Describe Image tasks test the ability to do this by assessing speaking skills, including grammar, the appropriateness of words to the context, fluency and pronunciation. Use the two example tasks below and others on page 6 to help your learners prepare.

Describing trends

At C1/C1 levels, tasks are likely to include images related to contemporary topics and trends. Test takers need to be ready to describe recent changes, so you should help them practise using words to describe trends, such as ‘rise’ ‘decline’ and ‘fluctuate’, as well as words used to describe the nature of change, like ‘slight’ ‘marked’ and ‘gradual’. You can use graphs displaying statistical data and images of new technologies for test practice.

It is also useful to regularly start discussions in class that give students the opportunity to use this kind of language. For example, you could ask questions like ‘what do you think has been the biggest change in your country during your lifetime?’ or ‘how has your country changed since the childhood of your parents?’ generation?’
Describe Image: Activities for C1/C2

Describing processes

Graphics used for Describe Image tasks may require test takers to describe some kind of process. This usually means they will need to use the passive voice (i.e. verb formations such as ‘…is made by’ and ‘has been developed’).

Play your learners videos of processes that will interest them, such as plastic recycling or how chocolate is made, then ask them to write summaries and/or give short presentations about the processes they have seen.

At C1/C2 level, learners will usually be quite comfortable with forming passive sentences, but it is possible they will not have used this kind of sentence structure much before, especially alongside progressive and perfect verb tenses. To help develop their awareness of passive constructions, it can help to present them with a series of sentences containing active verbs and ask them to rewrite the sentences in the passive voice.
Describe Image:
Activities for C1/C2

Collocation Pelmanism

C1/C2 learners are likely to be familiar with many collocations (pairs of words that regularly occur together) but they are also likely to need to develop their awareness of formal collocations, frequent combinations of words used in essays and presentations. These will help them to describe the kind of images used on Describe Image tasks in a way that is suitable for the context. Use the Academic Collocation List (ACL) created by Pearson to identify combinations of words that your learners need to practise using. Then, create sets of 10 two-word combinations on 20 cards, with one word on each card. Give groups of 3–4 learners a set and ask them to place all the cards face down.

Learners then take it in turns to turn over two cards. If the two cards form a strong collocation (e.g. ‘address’ and ‘issue’ or ‘classic’ and ‘example’), the learner can take and keep the pair of cards. If the cards do not form a collocation, they should be turned face down again. Learners take it in turns until all of the cards have been taken. The winner is the learner with the most pairs of cards at the end.

You can read about and download the Academic Collocation List here:
https://www.pearsonpte.com/teachers/academic-collocation
Describe Image:
Practice Tasks A2
Describe Image: Practice Tasks B1
Describe Image:
Practice Tasks B2
Describe Image:
Practice Tasks C1
Be yourself in English.