

November 2022



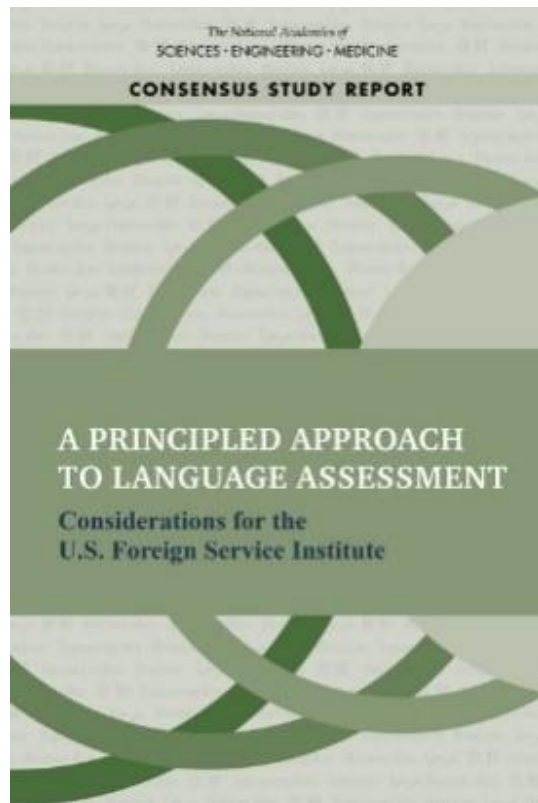
Language Testing and Assessment Division
School of Language Studies



Status of Language Testing Reforms:

Briefing for SLS Instructional Staff

National Academies Report



*National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. A Principled Approach to Language Assessment: Considerations for the U.S. Foreign Service Institute. The National Academies Press.
<https://doi.org/10.17226/25748>.*

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

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STUART ELLIOTT, Study Director



NAS Committee. (2020, September 25). *A Principled Approach to Language Assessment: Considerations for the Foreign Service Institute*. Interagency Language Roundtable.
<https://govtilr.org/Calendars/principal.pdf>



Three Initial Task Force Deliverables (2021)

- Statement of Test Purpose, Use, and Impact
- Selection of 13 approaches
- Long-term institutional structure to guide and support language testing

Follow-on Deliverables (2022)

- Generate guidance for test design team
- Review design work and make recommendations for adoption

FSI Review

2020 – Publication and Internal Review

2021/22 - Language Testing Task Force

- *Reviewed study*
- *Made recommendations*
- *Implementation started in July 2022*

Statement of Test Purpose, Use, and Impact

Task-based constructs

- Integrated language skills, including listening, speaking, and reading
- Typical and high-frequency work interactions
- Formal and informal settings
- Building relationships and social capital
- Conducting official U.S. government business
- Gathering and reporting information
- Communicating U.S. policy publicly and privately

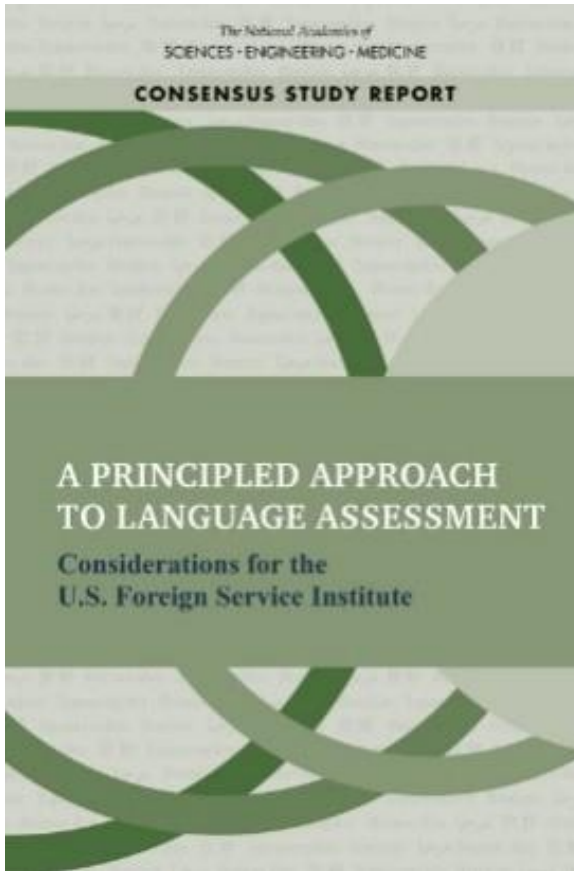
Criteria:

- Capitalize on the strengths and diversity of the workforce
- Employ a comprehensive approach
- Ensure tests and scores are relevant, fair, useful, and realistic
- Assess **integrated language skills** in speaking, listening, and reading



Study Review Outcomes

Task Force Recommendations from 13 NAS Study Approaches



- *In implementation:*
 - More transparent scoring criteria
 - More detailed score reports
 - QA by using additional scorers
 - Scenario-based assessment
 - Multiple measures
 - Scoring listening on the speaking test
- *Pending further consideration:*
 - Utilizing recorded listening tasks
 - CAT for reading and listening



Test Design Parameters:

- Keep tests roughly the same length as current tests
- Administer any future computer-administered reading/listening test preferably on the same day as the speaking/listening test, or the day before or after the speaking/listening test, if it better fits the examinee's schedule.
- Embed any task preparation or topic priming (e.g., introductory reading or listening passages) in the same test session.
- Ensure smooth flow of the test without abrupt interruptions, segmentations, or transitions to different parts of the test.
- Explore use of language supports for task preparation and topic priming while ensuring test security.



Gap Analysis of Speaking Test

- Address potential for bias (EEO protected categories)
 - ✓ Professional rather than personal introduction
- Eliminate presentation / explanation of topic in Speaking Part II
 - ✓ Scenario-based task to recast Work-related Exchange
- Improve flow of test to make conversation feel more natural and authentic
 - ✓ Pre-conference / pre-meeting scenario throughout test
- Reweight scoring criteria to give listening equal weight with speaking
 - ✓ New integrated speaking and listening task rubrics
- Reweight scoring criteria to give greater weight to 'communicative effectiveness' and 'interactional competence' over 'grammar' and 'vocabulary'
 - ✓ New order of main abilities: 1) Functional Ability, 2) Content Meaningfulness, 3) Contextual Appropriateness, 4) Precision of Forms and Meanings

Gap analysis of Reading Test

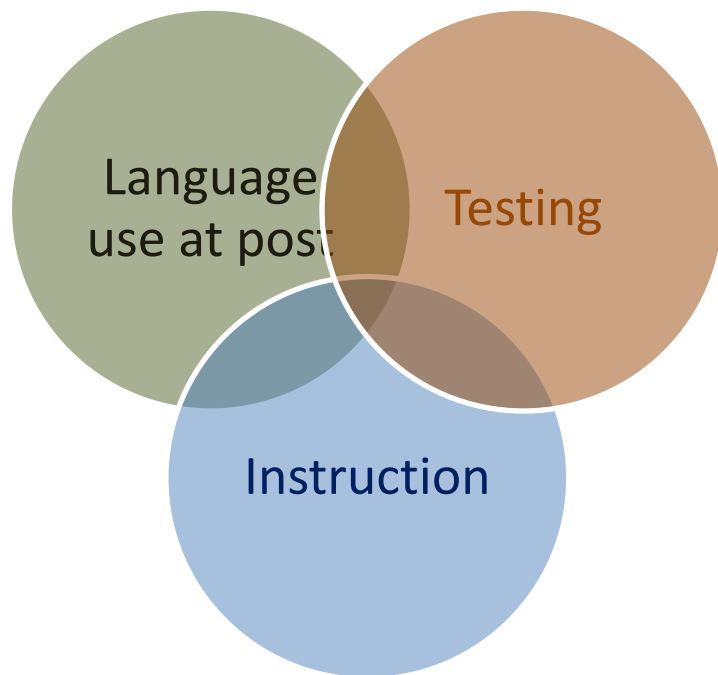
- ✓ **Maintain current format with oral report in English**
- ✓ **Explore CAT test, but not a high priority**
- ✓ **Eliminate focus on esoteric language use, e.g., use of poetry and testing of literary / cultural knowledge for upper proficiency bands**

Scoring both Speaking and Reading

- ✓ **Cap scoring at ILR 4, in line with Department requirements**
- ✓ **Develop integrated scoring rubrics specific to Foreign Service domain, and map to the ILR framework**



Washback



General proficiency



Foreign Service context



Reviewed >100 suggestions from Test Design Competition and Test Design Team



Developed prototypes



Conducted >80 testing sessions



**Current version of
revised speaking test**



Social Event

Pre-conference or pre-meeting scenario

[a] Setup

[1] Social Conversation

[2a] Q&A

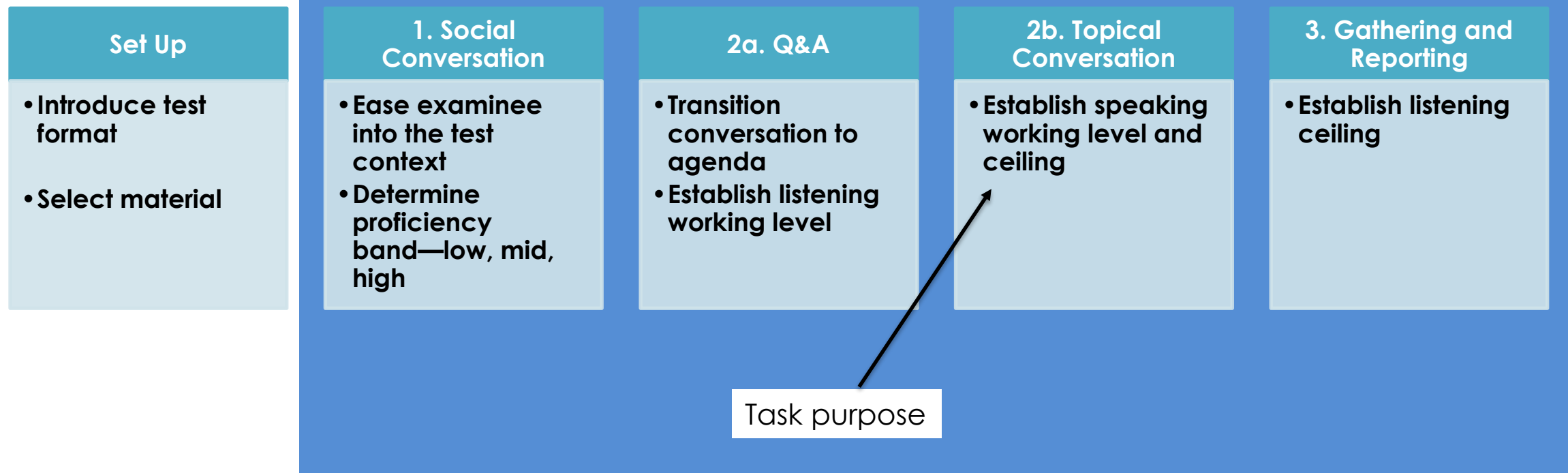
[2b] Topical Conversation

[3] Gathering and Reporting Information

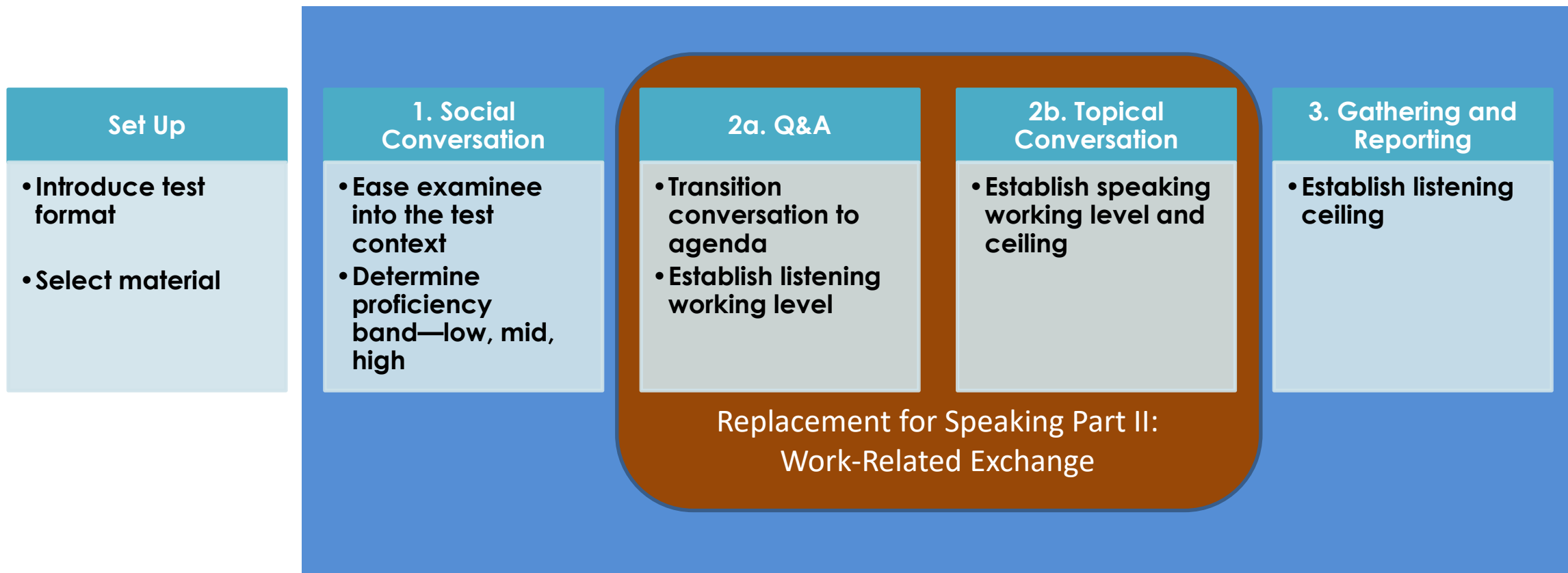


Speaking Test Structure

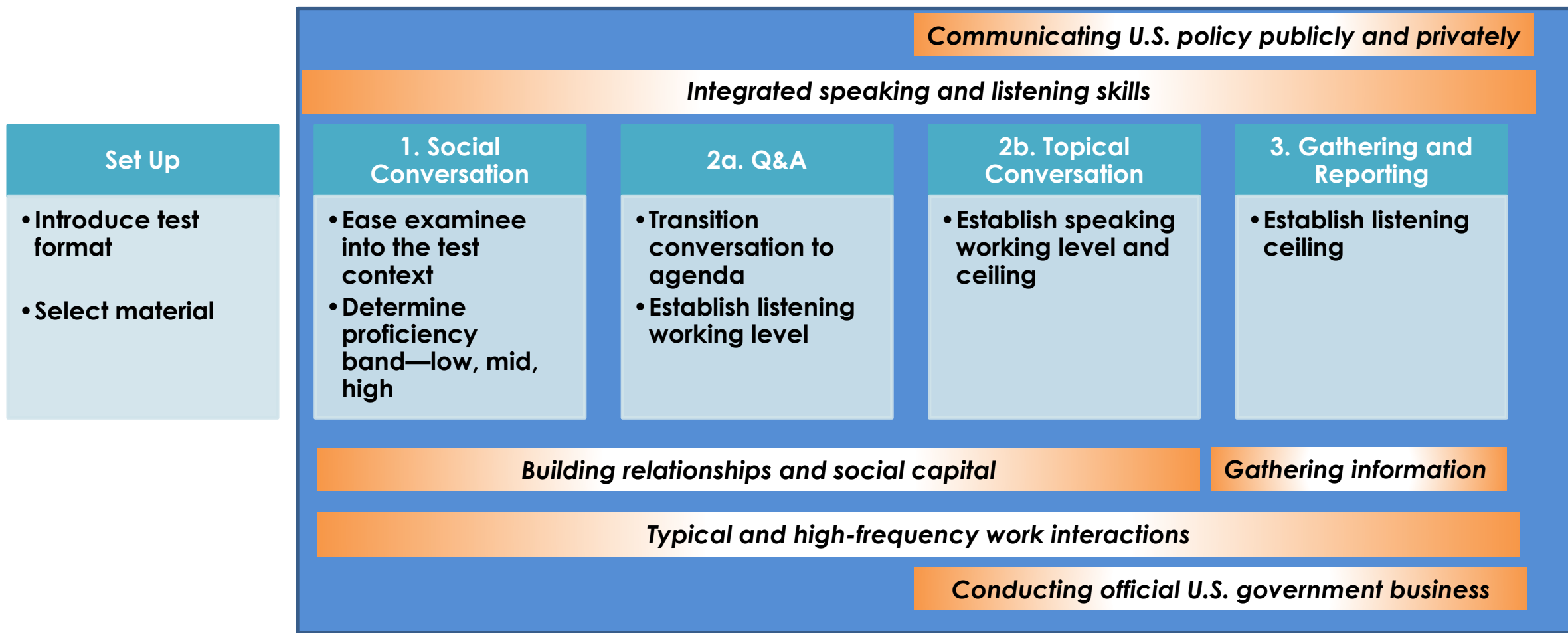
Pre-conference / Pre-meeting Scenario



Speaking Test Structure



Speaking Test Structure



Speaking Test Agenda

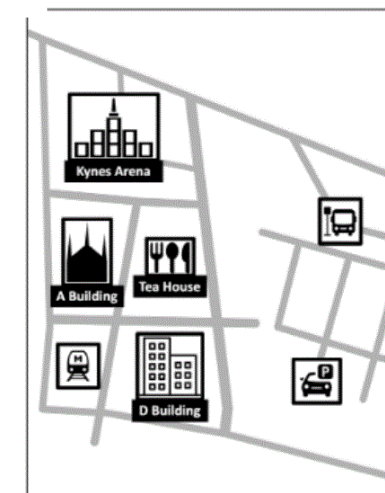
- Written in English
- Agenda:
 - 5 topics per career track
 - 2 career tracks
- Career tracks:
 - Consular
 - Economic
 - Diplomatic Security
 - Management
 - Political
 - Public Diplomacy
 - International Development
 - IT
- Example set of agendas:
 - Consular/IT
 - Economic/Political
 - Management/Public Diplomacy
 - Diplomatic Security/International Development

MEETING AGENDA

Fall 2022
7:30 – 19:00

Foreign Affairs Professional Association

	Time	Location	Event
	7:30 – 8:00	Kynes Arena	Welcome Address
AM	8:10 – 9:00	A-301	1. Considering the main purpose of foreign aid
	9:10 – 10:00	A-308	2. The effectiveness of international organizations today
	10:10 – 11:00	A-331	3. The connection between politics and cultural exchange
	11:10 – 12:00	A-426	4. The political influence of prominent corporations and businesses
	12:10 – 13:00	A-409	5. Perspectives and challenges of a two-party political system
	13:00 – 14:00	Tea House	Lunch with Community Members
PM	14:10 – 15:00	D-2023	6. Economic inequality in tax requirements
	15:10 – 16:00	D-2254	7. A cost-benefit analysis of universal healthcare
	16:10 – 17:00	D-2263	8. The economic impact of child labor
	17:10 – 18:00	D-2252	9. Cashless transactions in the interest of sustainable economies
	18:10 – 19:00	D-2023	10. Wage (In)Equality in a globalized economy



Meeting Map



Speaking Test

Part I: Social Conversation

- **Purpose**
 - Determine proficiency band—low, mid, high
 - Ease EE into the testing context
- **Scenario**
 - Pre-conference/meeting gathering
 - Examinee: conference/meeting attendee
 - Examiner: English-speaking colleague of Examinee
 - Tester: conference/meeting attendee who speaks the language of the test
- **Components**
 - Professional introduction
 - Casual conversation
 - More complex conversation



Speaking Test

Part IIa: Q&A

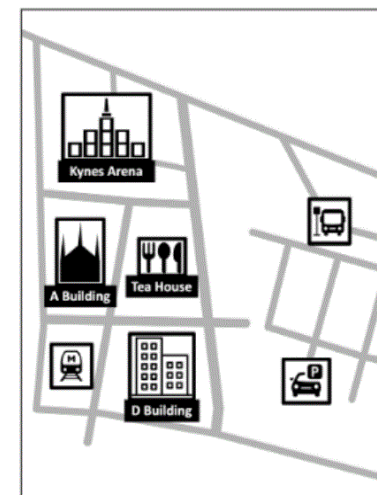
- **Purpose**
 - Transition conversation to agenda
 - Establish listening working level
- Testers asks the Examinee about information on the agenda.

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Meeting Map



Speaking Test

Part IIb: Topical Conversation

Foreign Affairs Professional Association

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Meeting Map

- **Purpose**
 - Establish working level and ceiling for speaking
- The Tester discusses 2-3 professional topics with the Examinee in the language of the test.



Speaking Test

Part III: Gathering and Reporting Information

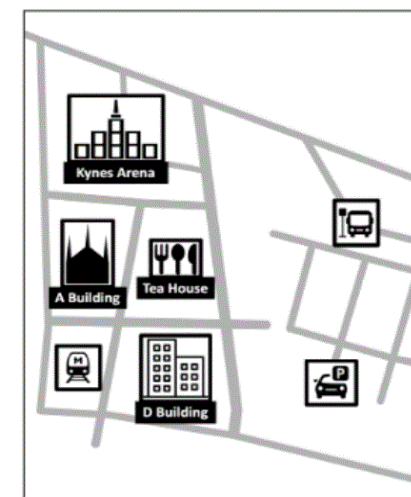
- **Purpose**
 - Establish ceiling for listening.
- Examinee selects 1 topic and interviews the Tester in the language of the test.
- The Examinee reports the Tester's responses to the Examiner in English.
- The Examinee asks 4 main questions (not including follow-up questions).

Foreign Affairs Professional Association

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Meeting Map



Speaking Test Structure

Set Up

- Introduce test format
- Select material

1. Social Conversation

- Ease examinee into the test context
- Determine proficiency band—low, mid, high

2a. Q&A

- Transition conversation to agenda
- Establish listening working level

2b. Topical Conversation

- Establish speaking working level and ceiling

3. Gathering and Reporting

- Establish listening ceiling



Questions

Sawyer, D. B. (2022, October). Language testing reforms at the Foreign Service Institute: What test-takers need to know. *The Foreign Service Journal*. <https://afsa.org/foreign-service-journal>



LTA Websites

OpenNet:

<http://fsi.state.gov/SLS/6951>

SharePoint:

<https://usdos.sharepoint.com/sites/SLS/LTU/SitePages/Home.aspx>

