

# OVERVIEW OF THE NEW JERSEY JUDICIARY'S TEST OF ENGLISH SPEAKING PROFICIENCY (Spoken English Test)

Language Services Section (LSS)  
Administrative Office of the Courts  
Trenton, New Jersey

## ***Introduction***

Two of the key competencies that a court interpreter must have are: (1) understanding spoken English at a conversational pace, and (2) speaking English sufficiently well that the key actors in a courtroom, such as judges, attorneys, parties and court reporters, understand the interpreter's spoken English without undue difficulty. This means the court interpreter's use of the English language with respect to pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar must meet minimum standards. The New Jersey Judiciary purchases an external exam (Spoken English Test) that reliably and validly measures a person's ability to understand spoken conversational English and speak English in the four areas listed in the preceding paragraph.

## ***Who Should Take the Test?***

The following groups of interpreters are **required** to take this test:

- Persons who are in the process of becoming approved court interpreters who work in languages for which there is an abbreviated court interpreting oral performance examination. At the present time, that includes the following languages: Bosnian, Chuukese, Croatian, Marshallese, Serbian, and Turkish.
- Persons who are in the process of becoming *registered* court interpreters (i.e., interpreters in any language for which no court interpreting oral performance examination is available). This includes individuals who intend to work *both* in one or more languages for which there is a court interpreting oral performance examination *and* one or more languages for which there is no such exam. This group consists of candidates who become eligible to take this test when they have reached an appropriate score on the written test and have completed the one-day Orientation Seminar.
- 3. Persons who are already working as contract interpreters and who wish to upgrade their classification level. This exam is one of the six criteria that drive the classification of interpreters, whether they are in the first or second group mentioned above. Interpreters who have tested below the Master level established for this exam or have never taken the exam but wish to upgrade their classification may take this exam again in the hopes of obtaining a higher score, justifying a higher classification.

## ***How Does One Register for the Spoken English Test?***

Candidates who are taking an abbreviated oral exam or who work in a language for which there is no oral performance exam at all, who completed the written exam and the Orientation Seminar or who wish to upgrade their classification may register to take the Spoken English Test by sending an e-mail to [Pamela.Arce@njcourts.gov](mailto:Pamela.Arce@njcourts.gov). ***All testing is done on Friday mornings in Trenton only! Also, all communication is done via e-mail only.***

Please include the following information in your e-mail:

1. One's full, legal name, phone number, e-mail address and language; and
2. One's preferences as to which **three Friday dates** one prefers to take the test, keeping in mind that the test is only offered on Friday mornings between 8:30 and 11:30 a.m.

Once we receive a request to take this test, we will make the necessary arrangements and notify the candidate of the date and time of their exam via e-mail. Specific directions for getting to the test site will be provided upon request.

***PLEASE NOTE: All candidates who work in a language for which there is no oral exam must be scheduled to take the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) exam immediately following the Spoken English Test (SET). While there is no fee for the SET, there is a \$60 fee for the OPI. Please click on the following link for more information: [Overview of the Oral Proficiency Interview](#).***

## ***What Should Candidates Do to Prepare for the Test?***

Since this test measures the ability to understand and produce everyday, conversational English, there is no specific suggestion as to how to prepare for it. It does not require or make use of any technical terminology or high-register forms of English usage. However, it is recommended that candidates be well rested on the day of the exam in order to be able to concentrate and do their best.

## ***What Should Candidates Bring with Them to the Test and How Should They Dress?***

Some form of identification, preferably a photo ID of some kind, is the only thing candidates should bring with them. Candidates should dress comfortably and casually.

## ***What Will the Test Process Be?***

On the day of a candidate's test appointment, the major steps of the exam will be as follows:

1. A test proctor will find the candidate who will be waiting at a designated waiting area and escort him or her to an office where the test will be administered.
2. Once in the office, the test proctor will:
  - a. Verify the candidate's identification;
  - b. Provide a brief overview of how the test will be administered; and
  - c. Give the candidate the opportunity to ask questions.

3. The proctor will give the candidate a sheet of paper that provides all of the instructions for the test. A sample of the important parts of this page is provided at the end of this overview.
4. The candidate will read over the page of instructions and advise the proctor when he or she is ready to begin the test.
5. The proctor will then dial the appropriate telephone number and enter the Test Identification Number on the telephone keypad and will then hand the candidate the telephone.
7. The candidate will state his or her name and take the test, which takes about 12 to 14 minutes.
8. Upon completion of the test, the candidate will be asked some background questions including native language, year born, and gender. These questions are **optional** and candidates are free to answer them if they wish, or decline.
9. The candidate will hang up the phone, be escorted to the elevators by the proctor, and may leave immediately.

### ***What Should Candidates Keep in Mind While Taking the Test?***

The test is graded on the exact words candidates use, as well as the pace, fluency, and pronunciation of those words as combined in phrases and sentences. Accordingly, candidates should:

1. Give quick, smooth responses.
2. Keep in mind that some items have more than one correct answer.
3. Hold the phone in such a way that your speech will be readily and clearly received on the other end (i.e., talk directly into the handset).
4. Speak in a steady and natural voice. Do not shout or yell.
5. Either remain silent or say "I don't know" if you don't know how to respond to a test item.
6. In the last part of the test, keep talking until prompted to move on to the next question.

### ***How Long Is the Test?***

The test itself takes about 14 minutes.

### ***How Is the Test Graded?***

The test is graded by computer. The scoring of tests is based on norms derived from responses collected from a broad range of native English speakers from across North America as well as Britain.

Five scores, which range from a low of 20 to a high of 80, will be reported to each candidate:

1. **Overall Score:** This is the overall score for all components of the test and represents the overall ability to understand spoken English and speak it intelligibly at a native conversational pace on everyday topics. The score is weighted on a combination of the four diagnostic sub-scores (see below).
2. **Sentence Mastery:** This reflects the candidate's ability to understand, recall and produce English phrases and clauses in meaningful sentence structures.
3. **Vocabulary:** This measures the candidate's ability to understand common, every-day words spoken in sentence context and to produce such words as needed.
4. **Fluency:** This is based on the rhythm, phrasing and timing evident in constructing, reading and repeating sentences.
5. **Pronunciation:** This assesses the candidate's ability to produce consonants, vowels and stress in a native-like manner in sentence context.

### ***How Are Candidates Notified of Their Scores?***

The LSS obtains the scores from a password-protected website and mails out the results to each candidate within an average of five work days of the date the exam is taken. The cover letter that accompanies the score sheet will specifically indicate the outcome of the test by providing both the actual test scores and the results of those scores in terms of how they place the candidate in the classification system.

### ***What Are the Scores Required for the Various Classification Levels?***

The ranges of scores for each of the three levels of the Judiciary's classification system are as follows:

Conditional: 44-48  
Journeyman: 49-59  
Master: 60+

Anyone who scores in the range of 20-43 has failed the exam. These individuals will not be eligible to become registered or work as contract interpreters.

### ***Can Test Scores be Appealed?***

No, all scores are final.

### ***How Often Can a Candidate Take and Retake the Test?***

A candidate may take the test no more frequently than once every 12 months. There is no limit to the number of times the test may be retaken.

## SAMPLE SHEET PROVIDED BY PROCTOR

Test Identification Number

**1234 5678**

### **Introduction:**

*Thank you for calling the testing system.*

*Please enter your Test Identification Number on the telephone keypad.*

*Now, please say your name.*

*Now, please follow the instructions for Parts A through F.*

### **Part A: Reading.** *Please read the sentences as you are instructed.*

[In this section, there will be twelve English sentences on the test instructions. The prompt will tell you which ones to read out loud and in what order.]

### **Part B. Repeat:** *Please repeat each sentence that you hear.*

Example: a voice says, "Leave town on the next train."  
and you say, "Leave town on the next train."

[In this section, you will merely repeat out loud the sentences you hear.]

### **Part C. Questions:** Now, please just give a simple answer to the questions.

Example: a voice says, "Would you get water from a bottle or a newspaper?"  
and you say, "'a bottle" or "from a bottle."

[In this section, you will hear a question with two options. You will then answer the question with the option you believe is correct.]

### **Part D. Sentence Builds:** Now, please rearrange the word groups into a sentence.

Example: a voice says, "was reading"..."my mother"..."her favorite magazine"  
and you say, "My mother was reading her favorite magazine."

[In this section, you will hear three phrases which you must then, from memory, put in the correct order to form an appropriate sentence.]

**Part E. Story Retelling:** *You will hear three brief stories. Each story will be spoken once, followed by a beep. When you hear the beep, you have 30 seconds to retell the story in English. Try to retell as much of the story as you can, including the situation, characters, actions and ending. You will hear another beep at the end of the 30 seconds*

**Part F. Open Questions.** *You will hear two questions about family life or personal choices. Each question will be spoken twice, followed by a beep. When you hear the beep, you will have 40 seconds to answer the question. You will hear another beep at the end of the 40 seconds.*

[Note: The questions are not intended to extract information or determine "right" or "wrong" answers. Rather, they are intended to prompt the candidate to speak extemporaneously so that the speech produced can be analyzed according to the four major dimensions being measured.]