I. Discussion/conversation

This is the most natural thing in the world -- two people having a conversation on a topic of common interest. It can only occur when both parties are relaxed and confident, allowing the activity to become dominant, and its ulterior purpose (a language test) to be temporarily subordinated. The oral test then reaches its highest degree of authenticity by no longer being a test.

One simple rule is not to talk too much -- be prepared to leave short spaces or longer silences for the learner to decide what to say, to think of the words or to summon up the courage to speak.

II. Oral report

The learner prepares and gives an oral presentation lasting from five to ten minutes. He may use notes, overhead projector, blackboard or flipchart diagrams. However in a less formal situation, mini-presentations may be a routine part of the daily teaching schedule and be used for testing purposes at the same time. Each day one learner makes his presentation to the class who are expected to ask questions and discuss the topic at the end.

Variation I: Making a Mini-presentation with limited preparation time:

Learners can be given a short list of topics ten to fifteen minutes before the oral test, and invited to choose one on which to speak for two minutes during the test. Topics should be general, but they should be phrased so as to encourage the learner to express his own opinions on specific aspects.

Variation II: Identifying a topic of personal interest at a previous stage.

Try to identify possible topics in earlier stages of the test. Probing questions can be:

-- What do you do in your spare time?
-- What kind of books do you like reading?
-- What did you do on your last holiday?
-- Do you enjoy traveling? Where to? Why?
-- If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you choose?
-- Have you done different kinds of jobs in the past?
-- Do you ever think of changing your job? What to?

The interview makes a note of these, and later asks the learner to speak for one or two minutes about a topic that has been suggested previously.

III. Learner-learner joint discussion/decision making

A group of two or more learners are tested together, without the participation of an interviewer. The learners have to maintain and direct the discussion entirely on their own. The task usually involves taking information from written documents and coming to a decision or consensus about certain questions through group discussion. Where several documents or sources
are used, these can be read before the discussion begins. These could follow an information exchange task format. Some examples of the type of tasks that can be set are:

- Choosing a suitable educational course for a person with specified interests.
- Choosing a suitable holiday for a particular person or family from brochures.
- Choosing the best bid for a contract from a number of bids.
- Choosing the best candidate for a job from among a number of applicants.
- Deciding which applications for bank loans should be granted, when the total amount of the loans requested exceeds the amount of money available.
- Discussing a proposal for a company (real or imaginary) to launch a new product or enter a new field of operation.

Variation I: Discussing a taped mini-lecture

A group of four listen to a tape, five to ten minutes in length, on a topic of common specific interest. The learners may take notes if they wish, but should not subsequently read or quote from them in large chunks. Then they discuss the main points raised by the tape, collectively taking responsibility for choosing the particular topics to discuss and guiding their discussion accordingly.

Variation 2: Discussing identity from personal possessions

A group of learners are given a number of items of small “personal effects” of the kind a person regularly carries around in pockets, wallet, handbag or briefcase: tickets, business cards, photographs, letters, check stubs, receipts, address book, diary, etc. Their task is to discuss the various items and to try to come to some kind of consensus about the person concerned -- his or her age, job, family status, interests, lifestyle and so on. Good for testing hypothesizing and conjecture.

IV. Role-play

The learner is asked to take on a particular role and to imagine himself in that role in a particular situation. He has to converse with the interviewer in a way that is appropriate to the role and the situation given.

The learner is given a set of instructions, just before the test, that explain in simple language exactly what he is supposed to do. For more confident learners, these instructions may be expressed in terms of the general situation:

Imagine you are a foreign tourist in Britain, and you want to visit Edinburgh. You are talking to a travel agent. Find out how to get there. Make your own decision about how to travel.

Or the instructions may be more specific, to give the learner more direction and to elicit more language from learners:

You are a foreign tourist in Britain. You want to visit Edinburgh, so you go to see a travel agent. After you have explained the situation, ask him how to get to Edinburgh. Ask about the price, the traveling time, comfort, etc., and ask his opinion. Decide how you will travel and explain why.
Role-plays allow learners to ask questions. This skill is often overlooked in oral tests, and it is something that role-plays are good at eliciting. Role-plays should always be done in class if they are to be part of the test.

Topics and situations
- Particular function -- complaining, inquiring, giving directions.
- Particular structures -- narration of accident (past tense); report of theft, break-in (passive); getting information (asking questions)
- Particular topics/ vocabulary -- hotel or flight booking; ordering goods.
- Ability to circumlocute, to make oneself understood despite ignorance of specific vocabulary. The situations chosen for this will be deliberately unfamiliar.

Role-plays may be between teachers and learners or between learners.
- boy and girl meet at party
- journalist + politician
- shop manager + person making complaint about goods
- detective + last person to see deceased alive
- hotel receptionist + tourist
- doctor + patient with a problem

V. Learner-learner description and re-creation
Learner describes a design to another learner who has to reconstruct the design. The first learner is not able to see the design during the description. Describing a design requires command of language of color, dimension, location and sequence in description.

Variation 1: Map-reading/ The Treasure Hunt
One learner describes to another a pre-determined route along a map. The second learner has to follow the route along his own unmarked map either tracing it with his finger, or drawing it in pencil. Street maps of real or imaginary towns can be used.

VI Form-filling
The learner and interviewer work together to fill in a form. The questions usually concern the learner’s personal details, professional situation or language needs. Either interviewer or learner can fill in the form. However, if the learner fills in the form, he/she will likely feel that writing is being evaluated also. Alternatively, the learner can be given 10 - 15 minutes to fill in the form before the oral discussion, when the interviewer used the completed form as the basis for an interview-type test. In this way, the form filling serves to elicit information that the interviewer can use. I can be an authentic form or one designed for the purposes of the test.

Variation: Using a questionnaire
The questionnaire asks for personal tastes or preferences such as food, music, TV programs, holidays, etc.

VII Making appropriate responses.
The learner receives a number of short, unrelated situations that might occur in everyday life. These situations may be given to the learner in writing or orally. The learner imagines himself in
the given situation and must imagine an appropriate response. The situations are designed to require an answer of one or two sentences. They are designed to elicit functional language—to ask for information, to apologize, or to refuse an invitation politely. There should be a number of correct answers.

**VIII. Using a picture or picture story**
The learner looks at a picture or a sequence of pictures. The interviewer asks the learner to describe the picture or to tell the story in sequence. A picture or cartoon story usually consists of from four to twelve drawing telling a story which is simple but allows the learner to add his own interpretation about the people or events. Pictures can be exploited at two levels: description of people, objects and events.

**Variation 1: Ordering pictures to create a picture story.**
The learner is given a small number of separate pictures or photos, and invited to put them in order and to tell the story based on that order. There should not be one correct order. The aim is to give the learner more scope for the learner's creativity and imagination by giving him more control over the events he is describing.

**Variation 2: Vocabulary naming from pictures**
As a simple test of vocabulary, learners are shown a series of pictures one by one and asked to identify certain objects by name. For assessment purposes this can form part of an assessment based on the number of items correctly named.

**Variation 3: Generating different times and tenses**
Each picture in a series has either the day, date or time marked in one corner (small clock faces can conveniently be used for the time). This allows direct control over the tenses to be generated, and permits the elicitation of any desired tense forms quickly and with some degree of continuity.

**IX Giving instruction/ descriptions**
The learner describes with some detail an everyday procedure. Learners may be given a list of between five and seven topics to choose from and a few minutes' preparation time.

- How do you make a good cup of tea or coffee?
- Describe how to prepare a favorite dish.
- Give instructions for using a public pay-phone.
- Describe how you celebrate New Year's Eve.

The advantage of these is that they require the student to talk in at least 6-8 sentences.

**Variation 1: Expressing personal opinions and attitudes at length**
Learners are invited to choose a discursive topic to speak on at a few minutes' notice. These would usually be topics of current interest on which all might be assumed to have an opinion. The learner explains his position and gives reasons to support his position. Afterwards, the interviewer may ask questions to clarify a point or to explore further the arguments presented.

- How much can governments do to relieve unemployment?
- What would be your first act as President?
- Should more money be spent on Aids research?
- Why do women receive less money than men in many professions?

XI Precis or retell story or text from aural stimulus
The learner hears a short passage or story on a recorded tape. He is asked to retell the passage or to summarize it. It is the quality, rather than the quantity of the retelling that is important. Also he should use his own words rather than to try to recall the exact wording of the passage. This technique exercises the short-term storage and recall of information. Texts should be relatively short -- six to ten sentences - clearly too long to be memorized completely so that the task requires comprehension-processing-production. As a mixed skill test, you would not use it if you were trying to test speaking only. However, in the real world speaking rarely used without listening. Using a taped message standardizes the presentation.

Variation 1: Discussing the context
As a follow-up, the learner is invited to speculate about the context of the situation heard on the tape. Who is talking to whom, when and where? Is the language formal or informal? What went before and what might come next? Where does this passage come from -- a play, a novel, a documentary program, a personal reminiscence?

Variation 2: Passing on the message
In this variation, a live interlocutor gives the learner a message that he/she must pass on to the interviewer. The message may be short:

Please tell Susan that there is no class this afternoon; ask her if she would pass that information along to her classmates.

Or there may be a number of specific details:

Please tell Susan that I will not be able to teach class tomorrow afternoon at 4:00 because I have a doctor's appointment at 4:30. Ask her if she can teach for me? She can phone me any time this afternoon on extension 6876 to check the details.

Or it can be a short joke, riddle or story.

XII, Retelling a story from written stimulus
The learner reads a passage or a series of passages and is asked to retell each one in his own words immediately afterwards. There is no fixed time for the reading stage, and the text is taken back after the learner reads it. In this case, the recall is immediate. Or there may be an intervening task before the retelling starts. This format involves reading/speaking which is different from listening/speaking in that the learner may re-read phrases or sentences and refer back to check references.