

PTE Academic Lesson Plan Ideas: Test Taking Strategies

Lesson 7 – Respond to a situation

Time allocated: 120 minutes

Step 1: Introduce the Question Type

This is a long-answer question type that assesses speaking skills, and requires test takers to understand and respond to a situation.

PTE Academic - Candidate Name

1104861

Listen to and read a description of a situation. You will have 10 seconds to think about your answer. Then you will hear a beep. You will have 40 seconds to answer the question. Please answer as completely as you can.

You are doing a group project for a class. The other members of your group have asked you to prepare the slides for the presentation. You are willing to do the slides but need them to give you all the information that you have to include before the weekend. What would you say to them?

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The clip will start in 15 seconds.

Ready

End Exam

Step 2: Present the Question Type Strategies

Strategy 1

Fully understand the situation and the task's purpose.

Strategy 2

Identify and use relevant functional language effectively and choose an appropriate language register that matches the context.

Strategy 3

Maintain fluency while managing time efficiently, ensuring the response is clear and within the time limit.

Step 3: Explain and Practice Each Strategy

Strategy 1

For this question type, test takers need to listen to and read a prompt describing an academic situation and then provide a spoken response describing what they would say in that situation.

Encourage your students to make full use of their preparation time, both while listening to and reading the prompt, as well as the 10 seconds available before they respond. To deliver a well-structured and complete answer, they should clearly identify:

Situation: Sets the stage by outlining the context and provides essential background information for the listener.

Action: Details the specific steps the speaker should take to address the situation effectively. Consider practicing with this sample prompt:

You are doing a group project for a class. The other members of your group have asked you to prepare the slides for the presentation. You are willing to do the slides, but need them to give you all the information that you have to include before the weekend. What would you say to them?

To practice this strategy, ask your class to do the following activities:

- Provide students with the sample prompt above
- Students use different colored highlighters (either on paper or digitally) to distinguish between the Situation (context/background) and Action (response/solution)
- Ask them to annotate the key details in the margin
- Pairs compare and discuss their highlights before open-class feedback

Alternatively, consider this activity to stretch students to think critically and independently about response structure.

- Provide a partial sample prompt with either the Situation or Action missing
- Students infer and complete the missing part based on logical reasoning and the context
- Have students compare their answers in pairs and discuss their reasoning
- Follow up with open-class feedback

Situation: You are working on a group project and your teammates have asked you to prepare the presentation slides. You are willing to do this, but need them to provide the necessary information before the weekend to ensure you have enough time to complete it.

Action: You need to request the necessary information from the group.

To reinforce this learning, display and play Question 1 and ask students to describe what the Situation is and what Action is needed.

You have to do a research project on the migratory habits of birds with a partner in your environmental studies course. You know your classmate is a really reliable student and you have some good ideas about the topic. You call him to ask if he would be your partner. What do you say to him?

Situation: You need to do the project on the migratory habits of birds in your environmental studies course. The project requires working with a partner, and you are interested in collaborating with a classmate known for being a reliable student. You have some interesting ideas about the topic of the project.

Action: You need to invite your classmate to be your partner on this project.

Strategy 2

Appropriate language use is key to delivering a clear, coherent, and effective response.

Depending on the Situation and Action required, students will need to perform specific functions, such as requesting information, making suggestions, or other communicative tasks. It is essential that the language they use aligns with the

function and context of the situation. For example, exponents like "Could you please..." and "Would it be possible to..." serve the function of requesting information, while exponents like "Perhaps we could consider..." or "How about we..." are used for making suggestions.

Choosing the correct language register is vital for ensuring that the response is suitable for the context. The term "register" refers to the level of formality, tone, and style of language used in communication, and it must be adapted based on who you are speaking to and the nature of the situation. In academic contexts, for example, a more formal and professional tone is often required when speaking to a lecturer, and responses should reflect that. Conversely, in casual settings, such as interacting with classmates, a less formal tone may be acceptable.

To practise this strategy, ask your class to do the following activities:

If your focus is on functional language:

- Provide students with a mix of exponents that could be used for different functions
- Ask students to categorize the exponents into function groups, such as:
 - Experiencing an issue: I'm having trouble with... / I think there's a problem with...
 - Suggesting: How about we try...? / Why don't we just...?
 - Asking for a favor: Hey, could you help me out with...? / Would you mind giving me a hand with...?
 - Asking for an opinion: What do you think about...? / Do you reckon this will work?
 - Apologizing: Sorry about that! / My bad, I didn't mean to...
 - Expressing a complaint: This isn't working for me. / I'm not happy with how this turned out.
- Once they have sorted the exponents, have students practice using the exponents in context by creating short dialogues with a partner

If your focus is on register:

- Provide students with a mix of formal and informal exponents that serve the same function
- Ask students to match the formal (F) exponents with their informal (IF) counterparts, such as:
 - Experiencing an issue: (F) I'm experiencing a difficulty with... / (IF) I'm having trouble with...
 - Suggesting: (F) Can I propose that we...? / (IF) How about we try...?
 - Asking for a favor: (F) Would it be possible for you to assist me with...? / (IF) Hey, could you help me out with...?
 - Asking for an opinion: (F) I would like to hear your thoughts on... / (IF) What do you think about...?
 - Apologizing: (F) I sincerely apologize for the inconvenience. / (IF) Sorry about that!
 - Expressing a complaint: (F) I would like to raise a concern regarding... / (IF) This isn't working for me.
- Once they have sorted the phrases, get students to role-play scenarios where they would use both versions, such as apologizing to a professor versus a classmate

To reinforce this learning, play the sample response to Question 1. Ask students to analyze the response by identifying the register, function and the specific functional exponents used. Encourage them to explain why the language is appropriate for the given context and how it matches the tone of the situation. Afterwards discuss their findings as a class and highlight key language choices that reflect the register and function.

Play the sample answer for Question 1:

Sample answer: *Hi, how are you? You know that research project on the migratory habits of birds we have for our environmental studies course? I want to get a good mark on the project and I was wondering if you'd like to be my partner. I have some really good ideas about how we can research the topic and I think we would make a great team. What do you think?*

For example, in Question 1, the situation is informal, speaking with a classmate. The sample answer uses phrases from these categories:

- Asking for an opinion/favor: "I was wondering if..." / "What do you think?"
- Trying to convince others of your idea: "I think we would..." / "I have some really good..."

Strategy 3

In this question type, students will have 40 seconds to respond to a situation. While this may seem like a short amount of time, reassure them that it is more than enough to provide an effective answer, as long as their response is smooth and delivered naturally. Encourage students to speak at a natural pace, with appropriate phrasing and minimal hesitation. It is essential that students focus on thinking in English during their response and avoid translating from their native language, as this can lead to slower, more hesitant speech that sounds unnatural. The goal is for students to express their ideas clearly and confidently, without overthinking individual words or phrases.

Consider practising with these sample prompts:

Sample prompt 1: *You have applied for a summer job as a research assistant to your professor. You have not heard if your application was successful and need to check with your professor so that you can organize accommodation for the summer if necessary. You want to leave a phone message for your professor. What would you say?*

Sample prompt 2: *You booked a meeting room at the library from 2 pm to 3 pm to work on a group project. Now it's just after 2 pm and your classmates will arrive soon, but some other students are sitting in the meeting room. What would you say to them?*

To practice this strategy, ask your class to do the following activities:

- Pair students up and provide them with a sample prompt. Assign Roles
- Student A reads the prompt aloud to Student B. Ensure that Student B has a written copy of the prompt, just like in the test, so they can refer to it during preparation
- Preparation time: Student B has 10 seconds to prepare their response
- Student A acts as the timer, ensuring the 10 seconds and the subsequent 40-second response time are properly followed
- Response time: Student B has 40 seconds to deliver their response smoothly. Student A should listen carefully and time the 40-second window
- After the response, encourage Student A to provide feedback on the fluency, clarity, and naturalness of student B's response. They should also discuss any areas that might need improvement
- Switch roles and repeat the process, allowing both students to practice speaking and timing each other

Sample answer 1: *Hello. This is Karl Ford. I wonder if you've had time to give any more thought to my application to be your research assistant this summer. I'm still very keen and I was wondering if there's been an update because I'll need to arrange accommodation if it goes ahead.*

Sample answer 2: *Hi excuse me. I've booked this room from 2 pm. My friends are on their way. They'll be here soon and we're going to need the room for our group project. We'll be out by 3 though if you want to come back later. Sorry about that.*

Step 4: Respond to a Respond to a Situation Question

Explain to your students that they will now respond to a test question simulating the test conditions. They will have 10 seconds to read the prompt and think about the answer, and then 40 seconds to respond to the situation. Remind them of the three strategies covered in the lesson and ask them to apply these strategies.

Seat your students at separate workstations or position them in a way that they will not interfere with or disrupt others while speaking. Show or read the instructions and play the audio for Question 2. Ask students to record their responses on personal recording devices, such as computers or mobile phones.

Step 5: Provide Feedback

Ask your students if they were able to use the strategies. Which one was the most difficult to apply? Which one do they think was the most useful?

If students have recorded their answers, ask students to evaluate their responses in pairs or groups.

Provide the sample response in audio files [L7_Respond_to_a_situation_2_Response_C1]. Ask students to decide whether it is a weak or strong response. Then provide the explanation for Question 2.

Question 1

You will hear and read a description of a situation. You will have 10 seconds to think about your answer. Then you will have 40 seconds to answer the question. Please answer as completely as you can.

You have to do a research project on the migratory habits of birds with a partner in your environmental studies course. You know your classmate is a really reliable student and you have some good ideas about the topic. You call him to ask if he would be your partner. What do you say to him?

Question 1: Transcript

Hi, how are you? You know that research project on the migratory habits of birds we have for our environmental studies course? I want to get a good mark on the project and I was wondering if you'd like to be my partner. I have some really good ideas about how we can research the topic and I think we would make a great team. What do you think?

Question 1: Explanations

Audio L7_Respond_to_a_situation_1_Response_C1]

Response deals with the situation effectively. Successfully accomplishes the primary communication goal with full consideration of the context given in the prompt. Communicates with ease, flexibility, and precision throughout the response. The response is situationally appropriate and fully developed, expanding beyond the prompt language to provide a persuasive response.

Question 2:

You will hear and read a description of a situation. You will have 10 seconds to think about your answer. Then you will have 40 seconds to answer the question. Please answer as completely as you can.

You are having problems with your laptop and you need it to do an assignment for your course. Your friend is good with computers and you are hoping to take your laptop to her apartment so she can fix it. You want to leave a phone message for her. What would you say?

Question 2: Transcript

Hi, it's Meg. I've got big problems with my laptop and I don't know what to do. It's not working and I've got an assignment due. You're so good with computers. Would you possibly be able to take a look at it if I bring it over to your place?

Question 2: Explanations

Audio L7_Respond_to_a_situation_2_Response_C1]

The response effectively addresses the situation and achieves the primary communication goal. It demonstrates a high level of clarity and precision, appropriately considering the context provided in the prompt. The speaker communicates naturally and confidently, maintaining a conversational tone. The response is both contextually appropriate and well-developed, going beyond the basic prompt to make a persuasive and clear request. The speaker successfully conveys urgency and the need for help while also respecting the listener's expertise.