A speaking rubric for elementary students: free, in K–2, 3–5 and 6–8

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A free speaking rubric for elementary students: volume and clarity, pace, expression, staying on topic, and listening. Accent and home language are never scored.

A speaking rubric for elementary students should score what listeners can follow: volume and clarity, pace, expression, staying on topic, and listening and responding. Peabody Teach's free speaking rubric scores exactly those five, in three grade bands, and never scores an accent, a dialect or a home language. In grades 3–5 and 6–8, staying on topic counts twice. You can print any band, print it as an "I can" checklist for students, copy it into Google Docs, or open it in the rubric maker to change a cell. Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

This post walks through what each band says, why the rubric is written the way it is, and how the reading aloud rubric works beside it. Both were written for Peabody, not copied from a district or a publisher, and neither carries standards codes.

The bands at a glance

- Levels · K–2: Wow! / Yes / Not yet · 3–5: Exceeds / Meets / Approaching / Beginning · 6–8: Exceeds / Meets / Approaching / Beginning
- Points · K–2: None by default · 3–5: 4 to 1 · 6–8: 4 to 1
- Rows · K–2: Loud and clear, Just right speed, My voice shows feeling, On topic, Listen and answer · 3–5: Volume and clarity, Pace, Expression, Staying on topic (×2), Listening and responding · 6–8: Volume and clarity, Pace and pausing, Expression and register, Focus and support (×2), Listening and responding
- Most points · K–2: Not scored · 3–5: 24 · 6–8: 24

What "clear" means here

The rubric's own line to students says it best: "Clear does not mean a certain accent. It means we can follow your words and ideas." Every row is about whether a listener can follow, not about how a child should sound. A student who speaks with an accent, in a dialect, or who is learning English can earn the top cell in every row.

Grades 3–5: five rows, staying on topic counts twice

Volume and clarity. Exceeds is heard everywhere in the room with every word easy to follow. Meets is heard by most listeners. Approaching is sometimes too quiet or mumbled, so listeners miss parts. Nothing in the row asks for a particular way of saying a word.

Pace. The top cell is a steady pace "with pauses that help listeners take in each idea." Below

that come a few rushed or slow parts, then a pace that is often too fast or too slow to follow.

Expression. Exceeds changes tone and stress to show meaning and keep listeners interested. Meets uses some expression that fits the words. Approaching stays flat.

Staying on topic (counts twice). This is the row that carries the most weight, because it is about the ideas. Exceeds: every point is on topic, "with details and examples that help listeners understand." Meets stays on topic with a few details. Approaching drifts off topic at times, and Beginning is mostly off topic.

Listening and responding. Speaking is half of a conversation, so the rubric scores the listening too. The top cell listens closely, then answers or adds on with a response that connects to what was said. Approaching responds, but not to what was said.

What changes in 6–8

The middle school band asks the same five things of an older speaker, with more control and more purpose.

- Volume and clarity asks a student to project and articulate clearly "even with new or technical words."
- Pace and pausing tops out at varying pace on purpose and pausing to stress key points.
- Expression and register is new: adjusting tone and formality to fit the audience and purpose, with precise words. A class talk and a chat with a friend call for different language, and the rubric scores the choice to fit the situation.
- Focus and support (counts twice) asks for a main idea supported "with precise reasons and evidence."
- Listening and responding asks a student to paraphrase a speaker's point, then build on it, question it, or link it to another idea.

What changes in K–2

The youngest band uses three levels, no points by default, and cells short enough to read aloud to a child. "Loud and clear" runs from "Everyone in the room can hear and follow my words" to "My voice is too quiet to hear yet." "My voice shows feeling" tops out at a voice that goes "up, down, happy or sad to match my words." "Listen and answer" asks a child to answer a friend's question with a full sentence, and the middle level is answering with help.

"Not yet" says where a child is now, not that they failed. If your school needs a number, open the band in the rubric maker and use its points switch.

The reading aloud rubric as a companion

Speaking a child's own ideas and reading someone else's words aloud are different jobs, so Peabody has a separate reading aloud rubric. It scores accuracy, phrasing, expression, pace

and volume. In grades 3–5, phrasing and expression count twice as one row; in 6–8, expression and interpretation counts twice. Like the speaking rubric, it never scores accent, dialect or home language, and its page says it plainly: "A word said with an accent is read correctly."

- Use the speaking rubric for: Morning meeting shares, show-and-tell, book talks, short speeches · Use the reading aloud rubric for: Partner reading, readers theater, a poem or a part read to the class
- Use the speaking rubric for: A student's own ideas, and listening to others · Use the reading aloud rubric for: Someone else's words, read accurately and with expression

The speaking rubric's page suggests using it for oral language checks across the year, with the same rows each time to show growth: score a share in the fall and another in the spring on the same five rows, and compare.

How to use it this week

1. Print the "I can" checklist for your band before the first talk. In 3–5 it is five lines, such as "I can stay on my topic and share details that fit."
2. Read the "what to say" lines aloud. The rubric page has four, including "Speak so the person farthest away can hear you" and "Slow down, and take a breath between ideas."
3. Practice in pairs on one row. The page suggests partners score each other on a single row before the real talk. One row is easier to listen for than five.
4. Score the full rubric yourself. Partners give feedback; you give the score.
5. Change a cell if you need to. "Open in the maker" under any band loads it into the rubric maker, where you can reword a cell, change a weight or switch to a single-point rubric.

Nervous speakers can warm up by reading one of Peabody's free stories for kids aloud to a partner. There is also a presentation rubric for longer talks with a visual.

Questions

What should a speaking rubric for elementary students include?

Volume and clarity, pace, expression, staying on topic, and listening and responding. Peabody's speaking rubric scores those five in every band, and staying on topic counts twice in grades 3–5. In 6–8 the rows ask for register and evidence as well.

Does the speaking rubric score accent?

No. The rubric scores whether listeners can follow a student's words and ideas, never an accent, dialect or home language. The reading aloud rubric follows the same rule.

Is there a speaking rubric for kindergarten?

Yes. The K–2 band has five rows in a child's words, three levels (Wow! / Yes / Not yet) and no points by default. You can read it aloud to the class before a share.

Is it free?

Yes. The speaking rubric, the reading aloud rubric and the rubric maker need no sign-in and show no ads, and Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/speaking-rubric-for-elementary-students