

Info for ALTs – What is EIKEN?

Eiken (short for 英語能力試験 *eigo noryoku shiken*) is a ‘**Test in Practical English Proficiency**’ administered by Eiken Foundation of Japan and recognized by many universities and other institutions in Japan and worldwide. It is Japan’s most widely-used testing program, and is backed by MEXT (The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology).

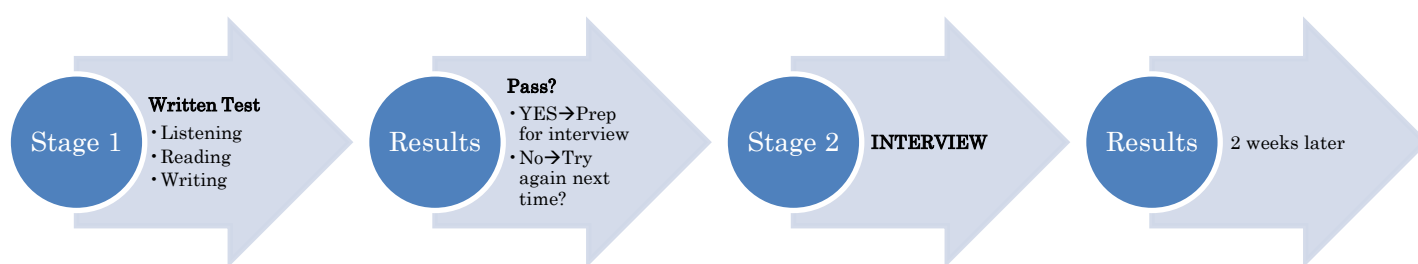
Why do students want it?

Students can use an Eiken grade for admission (eg it might get them a waiver on the English portion of their entrance exam) or course credits at over 2,500 high schools, colleges and universities within Japan. It’s also valid as English proficiency certification at 350 colleges and universities in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and a number of high schools and other educational facilities in Australia.

How is it organised?

There are 7 levels (from lowest to highest: **5, 4, 3, pre-2, 2, pre-1, and 1**). The MEXT benchmark for senior high school is pre-2 or 2, but some (usually English course students) will try for pre-1. We have helped one student prepare for (and pass!) level 1, but that’s very uncommon at high school level.

There are 3 tests a year (summer, fall and winter) which are in 2 parts (for levels 3 and up). First, candidates sit a **written** test, which tests reading, listening and writing. Students who pass the first stage go on to the **interview** test, which they sit one month after the written test. The interview test is the part that ALTs are sometimes asked to help with.



How is the interview conducted?

The interview test lasts from 5 to 8 minutes. For levels 3 to pre-1 there is one examiner.

In these interviews **5 points** are given for the reading passage, **25 points** for Q&A (including narration), and **3 points** for attitude. Attitude means candidates should make a positive effort to express themselves, they should speak clearly, and they should respond naturally to the examiner.

(For level 1, **30 points** are given to ‘short speech’, **30 points** to ‘interaction’, **20 points** to ‘grammar and vocabulary’ and **20 points** to ‘pronunciation’)

Helping students prepare for the interview

Students usually only want to do practice interviews *after* they find out if they passed stage 1, so they only get practice sessions for 1-3 weeks. Some students like to practice after school; others only have time at lunchtime. If they (and you) have time, it's really good for them to practice as much as possible before the test.

Practice materials available:

- The 'Daily 7' series published by Obunsha is what we use for levels pre-2 (blue), 2 (purple) and pre-1 (green).
- There are also some sheets that we have made or adapted with general tips and tips for each level, based on the format of the test and the types of questions asked.
- Eiken website: <http://stepeiken.org> (sample tests, virtual interview walkthrough, etc)

When coaching students, first it's best to go over the format of the test, so that students have an idea what to expect. You should cover:

- 1) The overall format (from knocking on the door to saying goodbye). This is usually explained around p10-16 in the practice books.
- 2) The format of the interview questions for their particular level. For example, in the Pre-2 interview, question 1 is always looking for the answer in the text, question 2 is about picture A, question 3 is about picture B

When doing practice tests, provide students with lots of tips about how to understand and answer questions. We have made tip sheets for this purpose, but if you listen carefully to what students say (and don't say), you can give them more focused advice.

Things to consider:

- How much time before the test? How often can students meet with you in that time?
- How will you conduct sessions – full practice interviews (from *knock knock* to 'goodbye')? Just the questions? A mixture?
- In the actual test, Ss only *hear* the interview questions.
 - Will you allow Ss to look at the questions while you practice? (At first? Always?)
 - Can Ss study the card (reading and pictures) and/or the questions the night before?
 - Will you not show the questions at all to simulate a real interview?
- For Ss new to Eiken interviews, a 'baby steps' approach can be very helpful.
 - Do you have time to spend one session focusing on each question type?
- To make simulation interviews more 'real', you should do no correction during the interview (though you can give feedback afterwards).

Chris Tebbe's method:

I would meet with the groups several times a week based on their schedules. I always asked them if they wanted to meet again and again and they would always say yes, even getting out of club to do so. I would assign them homework by giving them a copy page from the practice books with everything--text, pictures, and questions. For their homework I would let them look at this copy and then write their answers. They always did their homework because they realized that would help them--the next day we would review the answers. I would go in a row, giving everyone a chance to answer the same question or sometimes, I would let one student answer one question and then go on to the next question and then the next student would answer--of course, whatever works best for you and the students. I would let them look at the practice-book copies when we were together in a class we would go over them together, but when I would work one-on-one with the students, I would do my best to simulate an interview exam, so they couldn't look at the copies then.

Here is a sample plan for the first practice session with a group of students sitting level 2. (It's easier to practice with single students, but sometimes there is not enough time for individual sessions).

- Welcome. Hand out tip sheet. Go over 'Tips for any level'
- Hand out overall format sheet. ALTs read interviewer parts, Ss respond with candidate parts.
- Look at question types – level 2 format sheet.
- (If both ALTs are available, split into two groups)
- Reading aloud: 1) All together. 2) Echo difficult words after ALT. 3) Individually, sentence by sentence.
- Q1: 1) Look at reading and Q1 tips. 2) Ask group. Volunteers can answer.
- Q2: 2) Look at pictures and Q2 tips. 2) Pairs Janken, winner describes to loser. 3) Choose 3 people in the group to describe one box each. 4) Analyse their answers – ways to improve?
- Q3: 1) Ask group. 2) Discuss in pairs. 3) Volunteers answer.
- Q4: 1) Ask group. 2) Discuss in pairs. 3) Volunteers answer.
- Individual practice (depending on time) – 1 S from each group stays for a full interview practice. (Following sessions could spend more time on direct practice, as students get used to the format.)

Possible preparation plan:

- Session 1: Go over overall format and question types. Look over a sample card and discuss ways of answering the questions.
- Session 2: Focus on reading and reading comprehension.
- Session 3: Focus on picture questions
- Session 4: Focus on opinion questions
- Session 5: Whole interview practice (with lots of support, tips and encouragement).
- Session 6 onwards: Move towards 'real' simulation interviews (for example, give fewer chances to see questions or look at card in advance.)

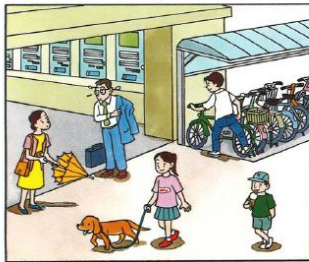
Level overview: Pre-2

- MEXT benchmark for High School graduates.
- Length: 5 mins
- Number of interviewers: 1
- Question types: reading and comprehension, describing people and situations, preference opinion.


Shopping at Stations

Nowadays, many large train stations in Japan have bakeries, bookstores, and other stores inside them. These stores are often small, but people can use them to do their daily shopping. As a result, people find stores at stations very convenient. Shopping at such stores will probably become more popular in the future.

A



B



and

Questions

- **Reading.** Candidates are given a card with a short passage and two pictures. They have 20 seconds to read the passage, and then they must read it aloud. They are assessed for how naturally they read (not only pronunciation, but using natural intonation and stress showing they understand what they are reading).
- **Q1** usually begins “According to the passage...” Candidates must show their understanding by finding the correct portion of the passage, and adapting it if necessary to give an appropriate answer.
- **Q2** asks the candidate to describe what the people are doing in the first picture. They should aim to give a sentence about each person/pair. Usually they will use present continuous for this (“A woman is ~ing...”). Articles and pronouns are also important here (“A girl is brushing **her** hair. **Another** girl is looking at **herself** in the mirror.”)
- **Q3** asks the candidate to describe the situation for one person in the second picture. This usually calls for cause and effect language, for example, explaining why the person is having trouble doing something. Candidates should give as much information as possible. (Tip: They can use WH-questions to help them think: who is in the picture? What is s/he doing? where is s/he? what is the problem?...)

[At this point candidates turn over the card.]

- **Q4** and **Q5** may begin with phrases like "do you think...?", "do you...?", "do you like...?" They ask candidates to give their opinion. Q4 tends to be about a social issue, Q5 is often about a personal preference.

There is always a common, somewhat related theme for the text, the 2 pictures, and questions 1-4 in Pre-2 (this also works most of the time for Level 2). Even though they cannot see the questions and they can only listen, candidates can expect that question 4 will be related to the theme that they had been working with in the text and the two pictures. Question 5 may be less related to the theme.

Level overview: 2

- MEXT benchmark for High School graduates.
- Length: 6 mins
- Number of interviewers: 1
- Question types: reading and comprehension, describing people and situations, opinion.

Questions

Practical Skills

Today, practical skills such as using computers and speaking foreign languages are regarded as important. As a result, many schools are offering classes for these skills, and learning them gives students more opportunities to find jobs. However, some teachers say that students are losing interest in traditional subjects like math and history. Practical skills are useful, but studying traditional subjects is also important.

Your story should begin with this sentence: One day, Mr. Sato was asked something in English by a customer at his bookstore.

- **Reading.** Candidates are given a card with a short passage and a strip of three pictures. They have 20 seconds to read the passage, and then they must **read it aloud**. They are assessed for how naturally they read (not only pronunciation, but using rhythm, stress, and natural intonation indicating they understand what they are reading).
- **Q1** usually begins “According to the passage...” Candidates must show their understanding by finding the correct portion of the passage, and adapting it if necessary to give an appropriate answer.
- **Q2** asks the candidate to make a story based on a three-panel strip of pictures. They have 20 seconds to prepare. Candidates should use language that illustrates what happened when, what people did and why. This involves using sequential/time language (*then, started to, while...*), cause and effect language (*so, because...*) and verbs about thinking and interacting (*worried, hoped, asked, explained...*).

[At this point candidates turn over the card.]


- **Q3** Usually has a sentence stating an opinion “Some people think...” or a fact “More and more businesses are...”, and then the question “What do you think about that?”
- Candidates should be aware that they can *agree* or *disagree* with an opinion, but should state their feelings/thoughts about a fact (*I think it's good/bad because...*). They should try to extend their answer with an explanation, an example, or some other form of support.
- **Q4** usually asks "do you think...?" Candidates should give their opinion. It tends to be about a social issue, or what people should do. Sometimes it asks for a personal preference.

There is always a common, somewhat related theme for the text, the story pictures, and questions 3 in level 2. Even though they cannot see the questions and they can only listen, candidates can expect that question 3 will be related to the theme that they had been working with in the text and the pictures. Question 4 may be less related to the theme.

Level overview: Pre-1

- International admissions to graduate and undergraduate programs; MEXT benchmark English instructors.
- Length: 7 mins
- Number of interviewers: 1
- Question types: reading and comprehension, describing people and situations, prediction, opinion.

You have **one minute** to prepare.
This is a story about a city-hall employee who was helping organize a local election.
You have **two minutes** to narrate the story.
Your story should begin with the following sentence:
One day, a city-hall employee was holding a meeting with his co-workers.



The comic strip consists of four panels. Panel 1: A man in a suit says, "We should do something." A bar chart titled "Voting Rate for Last Election" shows low turnout for ages 20, 30, and 40. Panel 2: "A month later" shows a man in a suit talking to a group of people at a university. Panel 3: "On election day" shows people at a polling station. Panel 4: "A week later" shows a man in a suit saying, "It's improved a little." A bar chart shows higher turnout for ages 20, 30, and 40.

for

Questions

Candidates are given a card with a strip of four pictures and some instructions. There is no passage to read at this level.

- First they must make a **narration** of the pictures. They should use compound (and/but/so/because) and complex sentences, explaining the reasons for events and the motivations of the people. They can use their imaginations to expand the story a little.
- **Q1** asks candidates to use their imagination to put themselves in the place of the character(s) in the story (in this case, they should use phrases like *I would have (said)...*) or to predict what will happen next (*I think she is about to... but he will...*). They should try to make two sentences.
- **Q2** may ask them to analyse something from the story (who is at fault, why someone said something, what he/she should have done...) or it may ask an opinion question on an issue raised by the story (do you think ~ is a good idea?).
- **Q3 and Q4** Will also be opinion questions. Usually Q3 is more closely related to the overall topic than Q4, but there is usually some connection between the theme of the questions. Candidates should explain their ideas giving reasons and examples. Ideal answers often feature complex sentences (eg with relative clauses), and a good command of modals (should/would/could/must...).

Level overview: 1

- International admissions to graduate and undergraduate programs
- Length: 8 mins
- Number of interviewers: 2 (1 Japanese, 1 native English speaker)
- Question types: general conversation, argument/persuasion speech topics, follow-up questions (clarification, opinion...).

1. What role should the United Nations play in international politics?
2. Do the rich have a responsibility to help the poor in society?
3. Is tradition always worth preserving?
4. Should students be asked to evaluate their teachers?
5. "Honesty is the best policy"—in all situations?

Questions

The level 1 interview is completely different to the preceding levels.

- First the candidate makes **conversation** with the interviewers for one minute. They are probably looking for a positive attitude and confidence in answering simple questions and making conversation.
- Next the candidate is given a list of 5 questions. They have 1 minute to **choose** a topic and **prepare** a speech on that topic. The topics vary widely: social issues, education, technology, politics, relationships, art, culture... They are usually in the form of a yes/no question ("Does the media in Japan promote Western values?"), but sometimes an advantage/disadvantage topic is given ("The pros and cons of self-employment").
- After the 1 minute, candidates must then make a 2-minute **speech**. Examiners are listening for not only grammar, vocab, and pronunciation, but how well the candidate forms their argument and links their ideas together. The content and reasoning of the speech is important. Speeches should have a clear structure, with an introduction, a number of points, and a conclusion (like a written essay would).
- Finally the interviewers ask **questions** on the topic and content of the speech. This section lasts for about 4 minutes.

The following pages are information for students.

We usually give them the 'EIKEN tips sheet' with the question types sheet for their level on the other side.

EIKEN TIPS FOR ANY LEVEL:

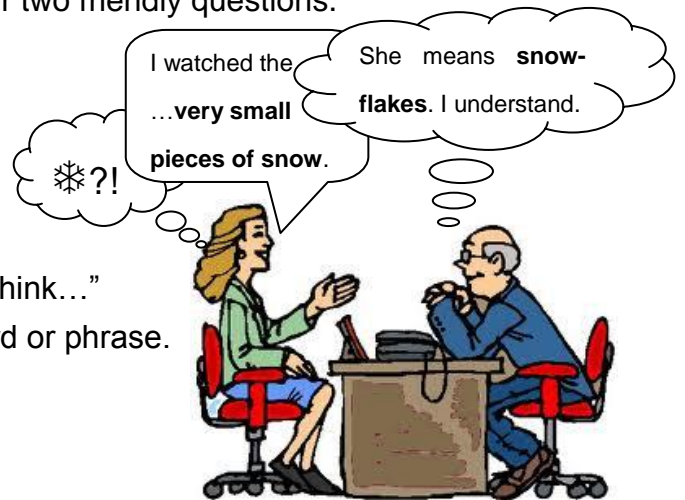
1. 😊↔😊 Attitude is important! Be friendly!

- 👁️ Make eye contact.
- 😊 Smile.
- 🗣️ Answer the examiner... “thanks”, “ok” etc



2. 💡 Don't panic

- At the start, the examiner might ask you one or two friendly questions.
- They are trying to make you feel comfortable.
- Just relax and talk freely.



3. 🕒 Avoid long pauses

- A few seconds is ok.
- Use fillers if you need to. “Well,...” “Hmmm, I think...”
- If you can't think of a word, use a different word or phrase.

4. 🗨️ You can ask

- “*Could you please repeat the question?*”
...so don't be afraid to ask!
- ...but you **can't** ask them to speak slowly or explain something.



5. 🗣️ Speak clearly and loudly enough

- The examiner needs to HEAR your wonderful English!

INTERVIEW SCRIPT:

Candidate: *knock knock* May I come in?
Interviewer: Yes, please.
C: Hello!/Good morning!
I: Hello./Good morning. May I have your card please?
C: Here you are.
I: Thank you. Please have a seat.
C: Thank you.
I: My name is _____. May I have your name please?
C: My name is _____.
I: Mr./Ms. _____, this is the _____ grade test, ok?
C: OK.
I: How are you today? / How's the weather? / ...
C: I'm fine thanks. / It's very warm today. / ...
I: Now let's begin the test.
C: OK.

I: Here's your card.
C: Thank you.
I: **(Level 3-2)** First, please read the passage silently for 20 seconds.
(Level pre-1) You have one minute to prepare before you start your narration.
 ...Now please [read the passage aloud.]/[begin your narration.]
C: OK. ... *reads/narrates*
I: Now I'm going to ask you five/four questions.
C: OK. ... *Interviewer asks questions, candidate answers*
I: Well that's all, Mr./Ms. _____. Could I have the card back please?
C: Here you are.
I: Thank you. You may go now.
C: Thank you. Good-bye.

Eiken Step Test, LEVEL pre-2

Read aloud Use stress, rhythm and intonation. Make it sound natural!

Q1 According to the passage, [what/ where/ when/ why/ who/ how...]

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● how can/ in what ways...? ↓ By [動詞]-ing / They [動詞] 	Make the answer fit the question. 注意: Sometimes there are tricky words! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● These _____ (what is “these”?) ● Such _____ (what is “such”?) ● This way _____ (what way?) 注意: Often the answers are in 2 different places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● why are...? ↓ Because.... 	

Q2 Now, please look at the people in picture A. They are doing different things. Tell me as much as you can about what they are doing.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 1</u>: Describe what all 5 people are doing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 2</u>: Use ‘a man’, ‘a woman’, ‘two boys’ etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 3</u>: Use verbs ending in ‘__ing’. Eg: ‘getting’... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use articles (a→another) and pronouns (her/his).
A man is carrying a suitcase, a man and woman are shaking hands, a boy is pointing at some birds, a woman is holding her baby, another woman is waving a flag.			

Q3 Now, please look at [person] in picture B. Please describe the situation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 1</u>: Describe <i>cause and effect</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 2</u>: Use words like ‘because’, ‘so’
She can't take the elevator because it is full of people. Her car is very dirty, so she is going to wash it.	

Q4 4) Do you think.....? ➤ Yes, because...../ No, because.....

Q5 5) Do you like to watch/make/...? ➤ Yes I do, because / No I don't, because
 Are you interested in...? ➤ Yes, I am. I... / No, I'm not. I...

For Q4 and Q5, try to give TWO reasons to support your statement/ opinion.			
There are many kinds of TV news programs. Do you watch news programs on TV?	YES, I watch the news with my family. I sometimes talk about the news with my friends. NO, I often read the news on the internet. I don't need to watch the news on TV.		
Many questions relate to these topics.			
COST <i>It is very expensive to...</i> <i>We can save money by..</i>	ENVIRONMENT <i>It's bad for the environment</i> <i>It wastes water/electricity...</i>	CONVENIENCE <i>It saves a lot of time.</i> <i>It is very convenient for us</i>	HEALTH <i>It is good for our health</i> <i>It is not good for our bodies</i>

If you didn't hear/understand (or want more time!), ask smoothly:
Could you please repeat the question?

Eiken Step Test, LEVEL 2

Read aloud Use stress and intonation. Make it sound natural!

Q1 According to the passage, [what/ where/ when/ why/ who/ how...]

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ...how do people...? ↓ By [動詞]-ing / They [動詞] 	Make the answer fit the question. 注意: Sometimes there are tricky words! ➤ These _____ (what is “these”?) ➤ Such _____ (what is “such”?) ➤ This way _____ (what way?) 注意: Often the answers are in 2 different places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ...why do people...? ↓ Because.... 	

Q2 Now please look at the picture and describe the situation. You have 20 seconds to prepare. Your story should begin with the sentence on the card. ... Please begin.

● <u>Rule 1</u> : Describe everything in each box.	● <u>Rule 2</u> : Use their names	● <u>Rule 3</u> : Pay attention to the bubbles.
● <u>Rule 4</u> : Read the arrows out loud.	● <u>Rule 5</u> : Use the same tense as the main sentence.	● <u>Rule 6</u> : Explain their feeling <i>He was happy, angry, upset, confused, surprised...</i>
He told her “ “. He said to her He suggested that they should ...asked, explained, invited, promised...	He thought [that], He thought [about] He had an idea that he should He wanted to ...wondered [about], worried, imagined,	

Q3 & Q4

3) Some people say.... What do you think about that? Some people [V].... What do you think about that?	➤ I agree/disagree, because... ➤ I think it's good/bad, because...
4) Do you think...?	➤ Yes I do, because ➤ No I don't, because

Try to give TWO reasons to support your opinion.

People say everyone should have a car. What do you think about that?	I disagree because it is very expensive to drive a car. Also, it's not so good for the environment It may be convenient, but walking is healthier.
---	--

Many questions relate to these topics.

COST	ENVIRONMENT	CONVENIENCE	HEALTH
<i>It is very expensive to...</i>	<i>It's bad for the environment</i>	<i>It saves a lot of time</i>	<i>It is good for our health</i>
<i>We can save money by...</i>	<i>It wastes water/electricity</i>	<i>It's very convenient for us</i>	<i>It is not good for our bodies</i>

If you didn't hear/understand (or want more time!), ask smoothly:

Could you please repeat the question?

Eiken Step Test, LEVEL pre-1

Narration You have 1 minute to prepare. This is a story about [TOPIC]. You have two minutes to narrate the story. Your story should begin with the following sentence: ...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 1</u>: Describe each step carefully. (You can use your imagination!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 2</u>: Use articles and pronouns correctly. <i>A woman → the woman / she</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 3</u>: Pay attention to the bubbles.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 4</u>: Use the time clues. <i>A few days later, ...</i> <i>At 5.30pm...</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 5</u>: link the steps. <i>Although she was... at first, she soon became...</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 6</u>: Explain feelings. <i>He was happy, angry, upset, confused, surprised...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <u>Rule 7</u>: Use a variety of verbs: <i>told, said, suggested, asked, explained, invited, promised, agreed, refused...</i> <i>thought, had an idea that, wanted to, wondered [about], worried, imagined, dreamed of</i> 		

Q1 Imagine...

What would you have thought/said/done?	➤ <i>I would have... and/but/so/because...</i>
What do you think will happen next?	➤ <i>I think ___ will... and/but/so/because...</i>
Try to give TWO ideas in your answer.	

Q2-4

Who is at fault? What do you think about ...? Should...? Do you think...? Which is better...? Do you agree? How...? / What is the most...? /...	➤ <i>I think ___ is at fault, because</i> ➤ <i>I approve/disapprove of ___, because</i> ➤ <i>Yes/No, because</i> ➤ <i>I think ___ is better, because</i> ➤ <i>Yes I do/No I don't, because</i> ➤ <i>I think... because</i>
Try to give TWO reasons to support your opinion. (explanation, example, extra info...)	
Eg. Should elementary children have their own cell-phones?	<i>No. Children are much too young to use cell-phones responsibly. Phone charges can be much more than parents expect.</i>

Many questions relate to these topics.

COST	ENVIRONMENT	CONVENIENCE	HEALTH
<i>It is very expensive to...</i>	<i>It's bad for the environment</i>	<i>It saves a lot of time.</i>	<i>It is good for our health</i>
<i>We can save money by..</i>	<i>It wastes water/electricity...</i>	<i>It is very convenient for us</i>	<i>It is not good for our bodies</i>

If you didn't hear/understand (or want more time!), ask smoothly:

Could you please repeat the question?