

# LEARNING TO ENSURE GOOD TESTING PRACTICE (notes on a workshop)

## Introduction

As language testing and assessment (LTA) keep occupying more prominent place in teaching and learning foreign languages, it has become a necessity for teachers to spend more time now than in the past on assessment, preparing both classroom-based tests to assess learners' progress and preparing learners for taking standardized tests. But how well prepared are teachers themselves to perform these important functions?

This workshop is aimed at those willing to ponder on this and other questions, with its objective to help teachers of English identify their personal needs in LTA training, offer practice to master testing skills necessary in their day-to-day teaching, encourage further reading and reflection.

The key issues to be discussed are:

Assessment = testing (?) OR what is the place of testing among other assessments

Being a teacher = being a(n) assessor / tester (?) OR how teachers's functions shift in assessment-oriented teaching

Good testing practice – how to test fairly in your classroom?

Before doing the tasks of the workshop, let us warm up and see how assessment-wise you are.

## Warm-up quiz

1. **Think and write at least three answers to the questions:** why do we assess?

2. **Match the terms on the left with the definitions on the right.** There is an extra definition. Try to term it yourself.

- |   |            |   |  |
|---|------------|---|--|
| 1 | assessment | A | a measure of strengths and weaknesses  |
| 2 | evaluation | B | a feedback learners provide to their classmates on their work                  |
| 3 | testing    | C | an on-going process of finding out about our learners' progress or performance |
| 4 | .....      | D | a tool of measuring students' skills   |

Write your answers here: 1 – ...; 2 – ...; 3 – ...; 4 – .....

3. **Think and complete the answer to the questions: why use language tests?** Tests have become widely used as they are .....

4. **Match the terms on the left with the definitions on the right.** There is an extra definition. Try to term it yourself.

- |   |                  |   |   |
|---|------------------|---|---|
| 5 | achievement test | A | A test to see what students have learnt so far during the term                |
| 6 | progress test    | B | A test to focus on what students are capable of doing in a foreign language   |
| 7 | proficiency test | C | A test to select the best class for students or put them in different streams |
| 8 | .....            | D | A test to measure what students have learnt on a language course              |

Write your answers here: 5 – ...; 6 – ...; 7 – ...; 8 – .....

Now check your answers with the keys:

**Warm-up question 1: why do we assess?**

- \* to get information about learners' skills development
- \* to provide feedback to learners on their progress (how well they have learnt) + achievement (how much they have learnt)
- \* to provide records for schools
- \* to provide information for parents
- \* to see if learning objectives are being achieved
- \* to let learners know what standards they need to achieve
- \* to get information about learners' strengths and weaknesses in understanding/ using target language structures/vocabulary (help teachers know how to help their learners)

Warm-up question 2: 1 – C; 2 – A; 3 – D; 4 – B – peer assessment/evaluation.

**Note 1:** in many contexts the terms “assessment” and “evaluation” are interchangeable.

**Note 2:** “assessment” is an umbrella term, it encompasses such notions as “teacher's observation/assessment, continuous assessment, informal assessment, self-assessment, alternative assessments: group projects, portfolios, presentations and testing

**Warm-up question 3: why use language tests?**

Tests have become widely used as they are:

- skill oriented – aimed to measure particular or intergrated skills;
- objective – measure skills against certain standards, with keys provided;
- efficient to administer – allow to test large numbers of learners at a time;
- efficient to mark and grade – with the help of keys and rating scales.

**Warm-up question 4: purpose of testing or what are main test types?**

5 – D; 6 – A; 7 – B; 8 – C – placement test

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT** now that you have refreshed your knowledge of LTA main concepts, reflect on the following:

1. Which of the above tests types are YOU mostly concerned with in your day-to-day practice?
2. How would you define “formative assessment” and “summative assessment”?

3. Which of the above assessments can be termed as “assessment OF learning” and “assessment FOR learning”?
4. How do these terms relate to “formal” and “informal” assessments?
5. What types of tests – formal or informal – do YOU have to develop in your work?

Now go through the comments and compare them with your own ideas:

1. Unless you work for a special examination board, you may be mostly concerned with achievement tests.
2. Assessment which is carried out to see what has been learnt, usually at the end of a course or topic is summative. It ‘sums up’ where somebody has got in their learning. Assessment which is used as part of the learning process is formative. It ‘informs’ learning.
3. Assessment OF learning is summative whereas assessment FOR learning is formative.
4. Formal assessment (progress (mid-term) or achievement (end-of-course / year) tests) is used to assess achievements of all learners of the institution at the end of a course/year. This is summative assessment, or assessment for accountability.

Informal assessment checks progress of a particular group of learners within an on-going process of learning / teaching. It is continuous, classroom-based assessment for learning – formative assessment – which involves teacher observation, oral assessment, feedback and testing as one of the tools.

5. In the course of informal assessment, you may frequently need to develop your own, classroom tests to check your students’ achievements.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT** classroom tests, however, are used not only to *check* but also to *develop* learners’ skills. Consider the place of tests in *teaching* and in *testing as a form of assessment*.

**Teaching** is aimed to teach every individual in your classroom, it is about sparing no time and energy to facilitate and encourage effective learning. Teaching is collaborative. So are test-formatted activities / exercises which are performed individually but checked and commented on collaboratively.

**Testing** is aimed to distinguish individuals who are at or above a particular mastery level of ability from those who are below it, masters from non-masters. The main function of testing is discriminative. To distinguish masters from non-masters, we leave individuals to cope with a test totally by themselves, with no explanation or prompting allowed. But we should ensure that test-takers be clear about *what* and *how* to do the test.

What is it that distinguishes “a task to test” from “a task to teach”? To find this out, do the activity below.

**ACTIVITY 1**

**A Look at the excerpts of tasks (1-8) below. Determine which of them are ‘tasks to teach’ and which are ‘tasks to test’. Mark them as in the example (0).**

**0 task to test**

You are going to hear a conversation between two friends planning to go out for dinner. For questions (1-7), decide whether the statements are true or false and mark them as (T) or (F) in the boxes. There is an example (0) at the beginning.

<b>0</b>	They’re going out on Friday night.	<b>T</b>
1.	They don’t choose the Chinese restaurant because the food is greasy and very spicy.	

1 \_\_\_\_\_

Complete these sentences using the Present Simple or the Present Continuous. Use the verbs given in brackets. Add *never* or *always* if this is also given.

- 1 I..... (use; *never*) my mobile phone if I..... (drive).
- 2 I..... (like; *always*) to get post but I..... (seem; *never*) to have the time to reply. Etc.

2 \_\_\_\_\_

Complete the form below. Write **NO MORE THAN ONE WORD or A NUMBER** for each answer.

**Current Account Overdraft Application Form**

Surname: O’Drew  
 First name(s): .....(11)  
 Current Account no: 39261916  
 Address: 24, Kilverton Drive.....(12)  
 Etc.

3 \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the necessary prepositions.

1. ... the appointed time; 2. ....the appointed day; 3. ... the weekend; 4 ... the early 1990s; 5 ... the occasion of; 6. ... 0 C (warm); 7. write ... pencil; 8. do something ... oneself; etc.

4 \_\_\_\_\_

Read the articles (1-11) and choose an appropriate headline (a-j) for each. There are more articles than headlines. Write your answers in the boxes in the special answer sheet.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (a) ‘Lazy’ doc gets a rap                  | (e) ‘Shoplift slur’ on Doris, 72           |
| (b) BEV HITS ROOF AT NO-GIRLS JOB BAN      | (f) Locked up for taking lad’s ball        |
| (c) Woman wins sex bias case               | (g) Fined for refusing car patient         |
| (d) Pensioner is arrested in ball-back row | (h) ALL-OUT STRIKE                         |
|  | (i) Day the jailbirds came out in sympathy |

5 \_\_\_\_\_

Can you match the PC expressions on the left with their translations on the right?

- |                           |        |
|---------------------------|--------|
| charm-free                | bald   |
| non traditionally ordered | old    |
| chronologically gifted    | tall   |
| cosmetically different    | boring |

6 \_\_\_\_\_

Read the interview with two young designers published in a fashion magazine to find out the most common steps in a designing career. Enter your findings in the chart, then check your charts with your partner/partners.

Designer profile	Alistair	Loise
Previous experience in designing		
Education and qualification		
Awards		

7 \_\_\_\_\_

Choose the best answers, A, B, C or D. Write your answers in boxes 25-27 on your answer sheet.

**25 Many British artists**

- A are engravers or poets.
- B are great but liked only in Britain.
- C do not belong to a school or general trend.
- D are influenced by Picasso or Dali.

8 \_\_\_\_\_

Read a letter to the problem page of a magazine. Write an answer, giving advice.

**B Discuss the distinctness of ‘tasks to teach’ and ‘tasks to test’. Sum up your findings in the grid below as in the example (0).**

‘Tasks to teach’	‘Tasks to test’
(0) In task (1) the tense forms to fill in the gaps are specified.	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

**The key:** “Tasks to teach”: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8. “Tasks to test”: 2, 4, 7. **What distinguishes “tasks to teach” from “tasks to test” is the clarity of the rubric. Now proceed to explore its necessary properties.**

**ACTIVITY 2**

**A Analyse the rubrics to tasks (1-5) below paying attention to what information each of them contains. Which of the rubrics provides the most / least complete information for a test-taker? Would you extend / shorten some of the rubrics? Give your reasons.**

**1**

Choose the correct answer.

**2**

You will hear a recorded message on the employment hotline for Mail, UK. For questions 1-8, complete the notes about the type of job on offer.

**3**

For questions 1-15, read the text below and decide which word best fits each space.

**4**

You are going to read some information about restaurants in Edinburgh. For questions 21-35, choose from the restaurants (A-E). Some may be chosen more than once. When more than one answer is required, these may be given in any order. There is an example at the beginning (0).

**5**

You are going to hear a radio interview with a woman who is talking about her life. First you will have 30 seconds to study the questions below. Then you will hear the text twice. While listening, answer the questions (1-9) in a maximum of FOUR words. There is one example (0) at the beginning. After the second listening, you will have 30 seconds to finalise your answers. Start studying the questions now.

**B Complete the statements below:**

A rubric to a task to test should explain .....  
 A proper rubric suggests that a test task should contain .....

**C Think of the answer to the question: why is rubric important?**

**D Go back to ACTIVITY 1 and suggest ways to turn “tasks to teach” into “tasks to test”.**

**COMMENTS**

**A Rubric 1** is too concise giving no information as to WHAT should be done (reading? listening?), HOW (circle? underline? delete?), etc. This rubric can only precede a “task to teach”. This rubric is the least complete of all.

**Rubric 2** seems to provide all necessary information.

**Rubric 3** is not complete enough although it might be quite clear for test-wise students.

**Rubrics 4 and 5** are rather lengthy as they precede quite complex tasks. However, the rubrics could be shortened, especially rubric 5.

**B A rubric to “a task to test” should explain:**

- 1 what to do (write, read, listen, etc.);

- 2 what should be done on a test task (match, fill in the gaps, choose the best answer, etc.);
- 3 how many questions there are (1-15) and how many options there are to match (A-F);
- 4 how to mark the answers (an example);
- 5 what kind of text they are going to read / listen to (this requirement is optional);
- 6 where the answers should be put (next to the questions, below in the grid, on an answer sheet, etc.);
- 7 how many extra texts / headings / words there are (in matching test tasks);
- 8 how many words should be used (in Short Answer Questions);
- 9 how many points may be scored.

A proper rubric suggests that a test task should contain:

- 1 a rubric itself;
- 2 an example;
- 3 input (text, table, questions);
- 4 answer grid / sheet;
- 5 key;
- 6 score;
- 7 **NB:** test task should be properly laid out (font, highlighting, spaces, etc.)

### C Why is rubric important?

Instructions given to students on how to do test are an important aspect of **validity**.

The **wordings** of the rubric should be chosen very carefully, especially at lower levels.

Rubric makes all arrangements to enable the student to give attention to **content** of the test.

If the rubric is poor, you will not be able to tell from the test whether students have learnt the required **skill** or not.

### D Go back to ACTIVITY 1 and suggest ways to turn “tasks to teach” into “tasks to test”.

Tasks 1, 3 and 5 should undergo major alterations: contemporary tests are primarily focused on contextual use of language, so the input in most cases should be larger than sentences or phrases. In classroom tests, however, phrase-sentence focus may be made use of.

The rubric of task 1 then should look like: *Complete the text below with the proper forms of the verbs in brackets (1-N). Add never or always if this is also given. Write your answers on a separate answer sheet / on the lines below. There is an example at the beginning (0).*

The rubric to task 3 which focuses on the use of prepositions could be altered like this: *Complete the blanks (1-N) in the text below with the prepositions. Put the answers in the grid / on the lines / on a separate answer sheet. There is an example at the beginning (0).*

To acquire the properties of a “task to test”, task 5 should be altered in its layout. After this it could look like this:

*Match the PC expressions (1-4) with their translations (A-F). There are two extra translations than you need. Write your answers in the grid below.*

1 charm-free	A bald
2 non traditionally ordered	B outdated
3 chronologically gifted	C tall
4 cosmetically different	D boring
	E ugly
	F old

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

**Note:** if it is obvious how to mark answers in a test task, there is no need to provide an example.

Rubric of task 6 could be altered in two ways – with or without indicating the text type (interview) and the source (a fashion magazine). *Read the interview with two young designers published in a fashion magazine/ Read the text below. Complete the chart with no more than THREE words. There is an example (0) at the beginning. Write your answers in the grid / on the lines / on a separate answer sheet.*

Rubric of task 8 should be completed with the task itself (WHAT problem should advice be concerned with) and the number of words the letter should contain.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT** a rubric is said to be an important aspect of **validity**. Given that a test / test task is valid if it measures what it is intended to measure and reflects what and how has been taught, think of the most important aspects of validity for classroom testing.

- \* **Content validity** of a test accurately reflects the syllabus on which it is based. A test should reflect all areas to be assessed in suitable proportion, with no bias towards test items that are easiest to write or towards test material that happens to be available.
- \* We can talk about **validity of scoring** if weighting of tasks, grading criteria and time allotment have been considered and well-grounded by a teacher-tester.
- \* A test / test task possesses **face validity** if it **looks** a good and reasonable way of assessing students (does it really look to be measuring what it claims to measure? does it contain language errors / misprints? is its layout user-friendly? are the tasks too trivial / too difficult?) On the whole, face validity is about the trust or mistrust the test / test task deserves.

Before learning to design valid tests, a testing teacher should be able to evaluate ready-made test tasks. To learn this, do the following activity.



ACTIVITY 3

Match the excerpts of tasks (A–F) with task types (1–7). Identify the skill checked. There are more task types than excerpts. Mark your answers as in the example (0).

0	Multiple choice questions	C	grammar
1	Essay		
2	Error correction		
3	Banked gap-filling		
4	Cloze		
5	Short answer questions		
6	Word formation		
7	Matching headings to parts of text		

A

Fill in the gaps (1-7) in the passage with the words in the box. There are two extra words that you don't need. There is an example (0). Write your answers in the grid below the text.

blizzards, freezing, frost, icy, melts, sleet, slush, thaws, thunderstorms

My first experience of real winter was when I went to Northern Canada. I was used to the sort of (0) ... that falls in London, which quickly turns into brown (1) ... with all people walking on it. In fact, most of the time I was in London, it didn't really snow properly, it was almost (2) ... etc.

B

You are going to .... two girls – Rachida, 22, heiress, and Roz, 27, Corporal in the army – talking about their wardrobes. Answer the questions (1-9) in a maximum of THREE words. There is one example (0) at the beginning.

What is your wardrobe worth?

- 0 Who are Rachida's favourite designers?  
\_\_\_\_\_Valentino, Dolce & Gabbana\_\_\_\_\_
- 1 How much does Rachida pay for a dress?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 What is Rachida's favourite piece of clothes?  
\_\_\_\_\_

C

Fill in the gaps in sentences (1-20) with one of (A-C). Write the letter next to each sentence as in example (0).

0.	When I pass my driving test I ...drive a car without your help. A can            B am able to            C will be able to	C
1	He was very strong; he ... ski all day and dance all night. A could            B was able to            C could / was able to	

D

Read the text below and think of the word which best fits each space. Use only one word in each space.

WHAT CAR? WHAT COLOUR?

Be careful about the colour of car (1)\_\_\_\_\_ you buy. Experts (2)\_\_\_\_\_ said that the value of a second-hand car can vary (3)\_\_\_\_\_ up to 10% just because of its colour. It seems that today nobody wants white cars. In fact, white is (4)\_\_\_\_\_ unpopular that it 5)\_\_\_\_\_reduce the value of the car by thousands of euros when the owner decides to sell (6)\_\_\_\_\_.

E

Reading Passage 3 has seven paragraphs A – G. Choose the most suitable headings for paragraphs A – G from the list of headings below. Write the appropriate number i-ix in boxes 28 – 33 on your answer sheet. The first one has been done for you as an example. There are more headings than paragraphs, so you will not use them all.

Paragraph Headings

- i A Tragic Ending
- ii A Life of Revolution
- iii Being Different
- iv Contradictory Behaviour, etc.

F

The following comment was printed recently in a local newspaper:

The crime rate in our area is far too high and extreme measures need to be taken to reduce it.

Now your teacher has asked you to write a composition on this subject, stating whether you agree or disagree with the comment and expressing your own opinions.

Write your .....

The key:

0	Multiple choice questions	C	grammar writing
1	Essay	F	–
2	Error correction	–	vocabulary
3	Banked gap-filling	A	structure, collocations,
4	Cloze	D	idioms, phrasal verbs
5	Short answer questions	B	listening / reading for specific information
6	Word formation	–	–
7	Matching headings to parts of text	E	text organisation, discourse markers

(to be continued)

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