

FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSES OF EVALUATION

Why do we test? We may test in order to:

1. *Determine (a) whether our teaching methods and techniques are in fact producing learning and (b) which aspects of these are in need of revision.*
2. *Measure students' achievement against previously established objectives so that they can (a) be moved to the next higher level or, if feasible, to other more suitable groups within the same level; (b) be certified as ready to be graduated from a school or to qualify for professional study or employment; (c) be held at the same level for another period of time; (d) be excluded from the program.*
3. *Provide for ability or interest placement (or grouping) so that students can work with others who are on similar points of the continuum of learning skills for the purpose of mastering an essential component of one of the integrated communication skills, preparing freer dialogues or playlets, or' engaging in other productive instructional activities.*
4. *Offer remedial help to those students who have fallen behind, either because they have moved, been ill, or need a longer period of time in which to acquire a specific body of knowledge.*
5. *Identify difficulties students encounter as they learn the foreign language. (Such an analysis will be helpful in curriculum planning and materials writing.)*
6. *Improve our understanding of how, where, and when bilinguals use certain aspects of the languages they have learned.*
7. *Warn more about the language acquisition process at various age levels in order to recommend either an earlier or later starting point, or more effective instructional measures for a target age group.*

8. *Predict the possible success or failure in language acquisition* of certain individuals.
9. *Assess-for specific purposes-the level of mastery (proficiency)* of individuals who have not had a formal training program.
10. *Diagnose* specific items or areas in which individuals or groups appear to be having difficulty so that remedial instruction can be planned.
11. *Gauge the ability of teachers.* Those who are in need of training should be helped to receive it. On the other hand, those who show outstanding talents in some area (i.e., materials preparation, the presentation of demonstration lessons, group leadership, team-teaching, pupil-teacher interaction) should be encouraged to share their gifts with others.
12. *Provide continuity of instruction* for learners as they move to higher levels within the school or to other schools. More will be said about this facet of teaching and testing in the following chapters.
13. *Set realistic standards* for groups or individuals. By comparing our results with those in similar classes learning under similar conditions, we can judge whether our standards have been set too high or too low or whether our entire curriculum is in need of revision.
14. *Assess the effects of experimentation.* For example, we may wish to determine the advantages or disadvantages of the use of the students' native tongue in foreign language acquisition, or the advantages or disadvantages of always teaching discrete language elements in mini dialogues or mini-situations.

15. *Promote confidence of the community* in the language teaching program. This is essential since a successful program becomes a source of pride to a school or nation. Promoting greater understanding will encourage national political and academic leaders to undertake needed reforms such as stronger school-university cooperation, more objective selection of textbooks, continuous teacher-training at pre-service and in-service levels, more realistic standards for a particular community, changes in placement procedures and, of course, curriculum revision. As we know, a school system is often judged by the success of its foreign language offerings.

(Finocchiaro & Sako, 1983)

Chapter 1 Introduction to language testing (J. B. Heaton)

1.1 Testing and teaching

Both testing and teaching are so closely related that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other.

Tests may be constructed

- (a) as devices for the purpose of **reinforcing learning** and **motivating students**. In this case, the test is geared to **the teaching**.
- (b) as devices for the purpose of **assessing the student's performance** in the language. In this case, the test is geared to **the test**.

Communicative tests will have a more useful effect on learning than mechanical tests of structure.

Compare the effect of the following item types on the teaching of English: (Items 1 and 2 on pp. 5-6 in your course book)

Item 2 has a more beneficial effect on learning.

1.2 Why test?

- (a) evaluating student performance for purposes of comparison or selection
- (b) the classroom test is concerned with evaluation for the purpose of enabling teachers **to increase their own effectiveness** by making adjustments in their teaching **to enable some of their students to benefit more**, not only the average group of students.

A good classroom test helps the teacher to find out areas of difficulty encountered by students. By diagnosing students' weaknesses and difficulties, the teacher can make necessary arrangements in the syllabus to teach better.

A test that aims at measuring students' performance as fairly as possible without setting traps can be effectively used to motivate them.

A well-constructed classroom test provides students with **an opportunity to show their ability to perform certain tasks** in the language. If necessary **feedback on their performance** is given to students after the test is evaluated, the students are able to **learn from their weaknesses**. Thus a good test can be used as a valuable teaching device.

1.3 What should be tested and to what standard?

The development of modern linguistics has shown teachers and testers the importance of analyzing the language being tested.

The language skills and patterns of linguistic behavior including non-verbal/non-linguistic skills such as gestures, eye-movements, etc. are so complex that it may seem impossible to separate them for any kind of assessment. In communication **context** is an important factor. A person always speaks and communicates in a particular situation at a particular time. Without this kind of **context**, language may lose much of its meaning.

Before a test is constructed, what **standards** are demanded of the learners should be set. After a certain period of instruction, the teacher or the tester should specify according to the objectives in the syllabus what the learners are expected to do in the test.

1.4 Testing the language skills

Four major language skills are often broadly defined as listening and reading as passive or receptive skills, and speaking and writing as active or productive skills.

When English is taught for general purposes, these skills should be carefully integrated and used to perform as many genuinely communicative tasks as possible. In this case, it is important for the test writer to design test items which appear directly relevant to the ability to use the language for real-life communication, especially in oral interaction. Thus, the questions test the ability to understand and respond appropriately to polite requests, advice, instructions, etc. instead of reading aloud or telling stories.

Ways of assessing performance in major language skills:

- (a) **Listening (auditory) comprehension:** short utterances, dialogs, talks and lectures are given to the students
- (b) **Speaking ability:** usually in the form of an interview, a picture description, role play, and a problem-solving task involving pair or group work
- (c) **Reading comprehension:** question are set to test the students' ability to understand the gist of a text and to extract key information on specific points in the text
- (d) **Writing ability:** usually in the form of letters, reports, memos, messages, instructions, and accounts of past events, etc.

1.5 Testing language areas

Tests have sections on

- Grammar and usage
- Vocabulary (meaning, word formation, collocations)
- Phonology (phonemes, stress and intonation)

Study examples in your course book (pp. 9-10)

1.6 Language skills and language elements

In testing students' ability which language skills and language elements we should concentrate on depends the level of students and the kind of syllabus we follow.

1.7 Recognition and production

We can test students' **recognition** of correct words or forms of language by giving multiple-choice test items.

Choose the correct answer and write A, B, C or D.

I have been standing here half an hour.

A. since B. during C. while D. for

We can test students' **production** by omitting four choices and asking the students to produce the correct word for the blank.

Complete the blank with the correct word.

I have been standing here half an hour.

Study other examples in your course book (pp. 11-12)

1.8 Problems of sampling

Before starting to write any test items, the test writer should prepare a table of specifications showing aspects of skills being tested and giving a comprehensive coverage of the specific language elements to be included according to the syllabus followed. For example, for constructing a grammar test, weighting might be like the following:

The contrast between the past continuous and past tenses (40 %),
articles (15 %),
time prepositions (15 %)
wish and *hope* (10 %)

concord (subject-verb agreement) (10 %)
the infinitive of purpose (10 %)

Examine items in your course book (p. 13) for communicative testing.

greeting people (5 %), describing places (15 %),
talking about the future (20 %), etc.

A classroom test should be closely related to the points covered in class and the weighting of the items should depend on the length of time spent on teaching those points in class.

1.9 Avoiding traps for students

A good test should **never** be constructed in such a way as to **trap** the students into giving an incorrect answer. Care should be taken to avoid trapping students by including grammatical and vocabulary items that have never been taught.

Study sample items in your course book (p. 14).

Chapter 2 Approaches to language testing (J. B. Heaton)

- 2.1 Background
- 2.2 The essay-translation approach
- 2.3 The structuralist approach
- 2.4 The integrative approach
- 2.5 The communicative approach

Chapter 3 Objective testing (J. B. Heaton)

- 3.1 Subjective and objective testing
- 3.2 Objective tests
- 3.3 Multiple-choice items: general
- 3.4 Multiple-choice items: the stem/the correct option/
the distractors