

Activity 1 – Introduction: Warm-up

Work in pairs/small groups and discuss the following statements. Think about your personal experience when you were a learner. Put a tick (√) if you agree with the statement or (X) if you disagree.

1. When I was a learner, I used to like language tests. _____
2. Tests have a good effect on teaching. _____
3. Tests motivate learners. _____
4. If there are no tests, learners become lazy. _____
5. Teachers can't write good language tests. It's a job for a testing expert. _____
6. Surprise tests are useful. _____
7. Learners cannot be involved in deciding the content of the test. _____
8. My education sufficiently prepared me for developing tests. _____
9. Tests are necessary. _____
10. Tests are the best way to measure learner progress. _____
11. Learners should always take tests on their own. _____
12. Practice tests are good. _____

Activity 2 – Reasons to Test Learners

Work with a partner to match the tests with their given descriptions below. Write down the name of the test on the lines provided:

ACHIEVEMENT	PLACEMENT	DIAGNOSTIC	PROFICIENCY	PROGRESS
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This test is used to place learners to appropriate levels of instruction within a program of study.

1.....

Teachers use this test to identify learner strengths and weaknesses. This test helps teachers tailor instruction to fit learners' needs.

2.

This test is usually given during a course of study. It provides information about how much the learners have mastered different portions of the curriculum.

3.

Teachers usually give this test at the end of a course of study. It tests learner knowledge of the material that has been covered in the syllabus.

4.

This test does not depend on any particular curriculum or course book. It measures general command of the language, regardless of all prior learning and/or acquisition.

5.

Now work with your partner and, using the above test type definitions, identify the type of test taking place in the following testing situations:

- a. PCC has received an intake of 300 new students. They will sit an English test on the first day of the semester.
- b. A teacher has a new class. In the second lesson she decides to give the class a short test.
- c. A teacher has taught 50 hours of a 100 hour course. He decides to give the class a test.
- d. A class is very near the end of their course. In the penultimate (next to last) lesson they will have a test.

Activity 3 – Test Tasks

Activity 3.1 – Common Test Tasks

The table below illustrates some of the most common tasks used in testing. The table also shows which test tasks are most suitable for testing particular language aspects. Some test tasks are missing from table. Put the missing test tasks in the right column. Check your answers with a partner:

Role-play	Multiple choice questions	Matching	Letter
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READING AND LISTENING	SPEAKING	WRITING	GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY
(1).....	Interview	(3).....	Multiple choice questions
True/false questions	Discussion	Essay	(4).....
Short answer questions	Oral presentation (on a given topic)	Email	Gap filling
Gap filling	Information transfer (e.g. describing a picture)	Report	Editing
Matching	Giving information of personal nature	Notes	
Ordering	(2).....	Summary	
Sentence completion			
Cloze test			

TEST TASKS

In this activity, we will illustrate a number of task types using a short reading text.

The text:

According to new research, 14 per cent of us don't check our change. Each week, we lose \$3.39 from being short-changed or losing coins. That's \$176.28 a year – enough for you and your partner to take a Rock Island tour and have lunch at The Taj.

(Adapted from <http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/test/readingtest.html>)

TASK 1: MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQ's)

Circle the correct answer:

This text will probably make you _____ .

- a) think b) careless c) cry d) scared

TASK 2: TRUE/FALSE

Decide if the following sentence is true or false. Circle the correct answer:

According to the text, most people don't check their change.

True False

TASK 3: GAP-FILL

Fill in the gaps with the missing words:

According to new (1) _____, 14 per cent of us don't check our change. Each week, we (2) _____ \$3.39 from being short-changed or losing coins. That's \$176.28 a year – enough for you and your (3) _____ to take a Rock Island Tour and have lunch at the Taj.

partner research lose earn

TASK 4: SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Answer the following question. Write a short answer:

What does the author suggest could be done with the money we save up?

TASK 5: MATCHING

Match the words with their synonyms. Write the letter on the line provided:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| _____ tour | A. money |
| _____ research | B. sufficient |
| _____ coin | C. journey |
| _____ enough | D. study |

TASK 6: SENTENCE COMPLETION

Complete the sentence:

The author suggests that we could save more money if we _____.

TASK 7: ORDERING

Put the sentences in the correct order. Write the number on the lines provided:

- _____ That's \$176.28 a year – enough for you and your partner to take a Rock Island tour and have lunch at The Taj.
- _____ Each week, we lose \$3.39 from being short-changed or losing coins.
- _____ According to new research, 14 per cent of us don't check our change.

Or

Arrange the following words in order to make some age-old advice:

cents the look themselves look dollars after will after the and look

_____.

Activity 3.2 – Pros and Cons of Different Test Tasks

Task Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Multiple-choice questions	Very easy to mark. Good for very large classes. Can be used to test grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening.	Very difficult and time consuming to construct. Wrong options (distracters) can distract better learners. Involves a guessing element.
2. True-False questions	Easy to construct. Mostly used for testing reading and listening. Tests gist or intensive understanding well.	High guessing element: 50% Not recommended for high-stakes tests.
3. Gap-fill	Easy to construct and mark. Can be used to test a variety of areas such as vocabulary, grammar and are very effective at testing listening for specific words/details.	In some cases there may be many possible correct answers. This can be avoided with banked gap-fill (where the list of words is supplied).
4. Short answer questions	Easy to write. Very good for checking any of the four skills, e.g. gist or intensive understanding of texts. Less useful for testing grammar and vocabulary.	Some writing is involved, if the answer is open-ended, making marking more difficult and subjective. It is important to have the answer key with the list of acceptable answers (can be time-consuming). The focus should not be on spelling accuracy. Make sure items do not test knowledge of the world.
5. Matching	Easy to write and mark. Mostly used to test vocabulary, but effective in testing main idea in reading and listening (matching paragraphs with the main idea).	More options need to be provided to avoid doing the last item 'by default'.
6. Sentence completion	An authentic and realistic task. Good for listening for specific information.	For reading it tests knowledge of language.
7. Ordering	Easy to write. Good for stories (listening) and for linking of discourse.	Can be very difficult to mark. If one answer is wrong, others are too. Impractical.

Activity 3.3 – Faulty Items

Work in pairs. Take a look at the following items and identify what the problems are.

Example: Which one of the following is different from the others?

- a) car
- b) aeroplane
- c) truck
- d) train

Comments:

No criteria given; task is unclear.

There could be more than one correct answer (b – flies), (c – not used to transport passengers), (d – uses rails); it is unclear what skill the item is testing.

1. Rearrange the following letters to spell English words:

OELMN NALEP ALBET

Comments:

2. Select the option closest in meaning to the word underlined:

'Is this house worth \$150,000?' 'I think it's a bargain. If I had the money, I'd buy it myself.'

- a) Too expensive
- b) Offered at a price advantageous to the buyer
- c) Negotiable
- d) Luxurious

Comments:

3. Select the correct option:

'I'll do it tomorrow.'

She said _____ tomorrow.

- a) she will do it
- b) she would do it
- c) to do it
- d) she did it

Comments:

4. Complete the following sentence:

He had to pay for the window _____ he broke yesterday.

Comments:

5. Circle the correct option:

The dog walked ____ the road to find his master.

- a) allong
- b) lone
- c) alone

Comments:

6. A person who designs houses is a _____.

- a) plumber
- b) builder
- c) architect
- d) designer

Comments:

7. The following sentences come from a paragraph in a story. Put them in the correct order. Write the number of each in the space on the right. Sentence F comes first.

- A. This was OK for a few days. _____
- B. He simply knew that his life was going to get more difficult. _____
- C. But, perhaps inevitably, things didn't stay this way ... _____
- D. He watched them arrive in their big, noisy car and watched them get out. _____
- E. 'Terrible!' he thought. 'How am I going to put up with them?' _____
- F. Alberto took one look at his new neighbours. 1
- G. For a few days, then, Alberto tried to ignore his new neighbours. _____

Comments:

Activity 3.5 – General Testing Rules

Read the learner complaints below then work with a partner to complete the sentences explaining the problem with the test design in each case:

a.

The instructions just said ‘fill the gaps’ – so I did and got nearly all of the questions wrong because I was only supposed to use one word. A lot of the students did the same as me.

Instructions need

b.

The course was all about listening and speaking and I really liked it – but at the end we had to do a writing test and I didn’t do very well.

The content of the test should

c.

I got the test back from the teacher and I hadn’t done very well. I was the worst in the class. The teacher just wrote ‘ You must work harder’ at the bottom but I was working quite hard.

Feedback should be

Activity 3.6 – Other Ways of Monitoring Progress

Read about other ways of monitoring learner progress (below) then work with your group to answer questions 1 & 2.

1. In each case, who does the assessing – the learner or the teacher?
2. Are all the ideas practical and 'doable'?

Midori:

Every lesson is an opportunity for teachers to assess how well individuals are progressing. If you monitor what learners say and do, you will know if they are making progress.

Adora:

I ask learners to keep a learning diary – they make a few notes after each lesson saying what they thought the aim of the lesson was, what they learned, how much they understood and whether they liked it. I take the diaries in and see how the learners think they are doing.

Osu:

I give learners a list of what we've done in class and next to each thing they have three columns – 'confident', 'ok' and 'need practice'. They tick the appropriate column for each thing and give it back and I get some idea of how they think they are doing.

Activity 4 – Basic Principals of Testing

Activity 4.1 – Principles of Testing

Match the testing principles with their descriptions given below. Write down the name of the principle on the lines provided:

VALIDITY RELIABILITY PRACTICALITY WASHBACK AUTHENTICITY TRANSPARENCY

1. _____

This term refers to having clear, accurate information about testing. Such information should include: what will learners be tested on, what formats will be used, when the test will take place and how much time will be allowed to complete it, and what the grading criteria are. This principle makes learners part of the testing process.

2. _____

This term refers to the consistency of test scores. A test that follows this principle would give similar results if it were given at another time. To ensure this principle, formats, content of the questions and the length of the exam must be consistent. Circumstances in which the test is taken are also important, e.g. (lighting, seating arrangements, acoustics, lack of noise etc.). If there are more teachers marking tests, will they be giving the same mark? If this principle is followed, then the answer is: yes.

3. _____

This term answers the following question: how much does a test measure what it says it measures? We need to test what we teach, how we teach it! A test that follows this principle accurately reflects the syllabus on which it is based, uses formats familiar to the learners, uses content which is relevant and appropriate.

4. _____

This term answers the following question: how much do the test tasks reflect real world situations and contexts, and mirror the types of situations in which learners would use the target language?

5. _____

This term refers to the effect of testing on teaching and learning. It can be both positive and negative. Tests must be part of learning experiences for all involved. 'Teaching to the test' often cannot be avoided, and it is important to ensure that the test is good, in order that this effect becomes a positive one.

6. _____

This term refers to the resources needed to develop, administer and mark a test. These resources are: human resources (test writers, administrators, raters), material resources (rooms, equipment, paper, photocopier), time (for designing, administering, scoring, analysing and giving feedback), and finances.

Activity 4.2 – A Test on Testing

What testing principles are targeted with the following questions? If necessary, refer to the testing principles and related definitions established in Activity 4.1 above.

The first question has been done for you.

Please note: some principles will be used more than once.

1. Does your test match what you have taught?	<i>Validity</i>
2. Do your exam tasks reflect real-life tasks?	
3. Do you have all the resources you need?	
4. Will your test have a positive influence on teaching and learning?	
5. Does your test measure what has been taught?	
6. Are the tasks in your test familiar to your learners?	
7. Do your learners have the necessary information about your test?	
8. Do you have enough time to grade and analyze your test?	
9. If a different teacher were asked to mark the writing section of your test, would s/he give the same mark?	
10. Did you ensure appropriate conditions for taking the test?	
11. If your learners took the test again tomorrow, would they get the same result?	

Activity 5 – Designing Test Tasks (optional activities)

Activity 5.1 – Elements of a Writing Task

Have a look at the sample writing task below:

a).....

b).....

The school you are attending needs to be publicized abroad. The school's principal has asked you to come up with a few ideas.

As a member of the student council, you would like to suggest publishing a brochure that contains important information about the school. Write a letter to the principal informing him about your idea.

c).....

In your letter:

- suggest what to put in a brochure
- describe how the brochure could benefit the school

d).....

f)

e) *Word limit*

You should write between 120 and 150 words.

Dear Sir,

Identify the following elements of a writing task in the task given. An example has been provided for you (e).

- word limit
- genre (type of text)
- context/background
- purpose of writing
- content
- the recipient

What writing sub-skills are being assessed here? (See list on the following page – Activity 5.2.)

Activity 5.2 – Writing: Designing a Writing Task

Based on the model given in the previous activity, design a writing task for your learners. Make sure that your task contains all the necessary elements and that it elicits 2-3 writing sub-skills/functions (see list below).

WRITING – Sub-skills to be tested:

- stating facts
- giving and asking for information, suggestions, advice and explanation
- giving instructions
- describing (e.g. people, places, things)
- narrating current/past/future activities
- comparing and contrasting (e.g. people, places, things)
- requesting
- apologising
- complaining
- expressing gratitude and giving reasons
- writing and replying to invitations
- giving arguments
- analysing
- hypothesising

Write your task here:

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Activity 5.3 – Speaking

Below is a list of speaking sub-skills. In your group, identify which speaking task (below – mini presentation, role-play, interview etc.) would be most suitable for testing each sub-skill.

SPEAKING – Sub-skills to be tested:

- giving and asking for information
- expressing opinion, attitude, reason, need, gratitude and apology
- giving and asking for advice, directions, recommendations, and instructions
- making and responding to requests and invitations
- describing objects, pictures, people and places
- narrating and sequencing events
- explaining cause and effect processes
- comparing and contrasting
- persuading, justifying, commenting and discussing
- identifying and stating a problem; suggesting course of action
- hypothesising and speculating
- using cohesive devices and connectives
- using appropriate register and degree of formality

SPEAKING TASKS:

Mini presentation on a given topic

Teacher asks a learner to talk about a certain topic for a set time, e.g. one or two minutes.

Describing a picture

Teacher gives a learner time to study a picture and then asks him/her to describe it. This is followed by several questions about the particular picture.

Role-play

A learner plays one of the roles in an interaction. It can be Learner-Learner, or Teacher-Learner.

Information gap

One learner has half of the information required to complete the task and the other has the other half (or pairs of learners). The two (groups) need to exchange information to complete the task.

Discussion

In pairs or groups learners are asked to discuss a topic, make plans, etc.

Interview

Teacher asks a learner a series of questions.

Compare these two speaking test tasks (mini presentations). Which one is better designed?

TASK 1

Talk about the following topic for about 1 minute:

Friends

TASK 2

Talk about the following topic for about 1 minute:

Friends

- how important they are to you
- what you usually do with friends
- what your best friend is like

Now work with a partner and develop a speaking task for your learners. Make sure your instructions are brief, clear and help your learners understand what they need to do.

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Now assess your colleagues' ability to do your speaking task.. Before you do that, look at the **assessment criteria** below, and briefly discuss them with your partner:

- Was 'the candidate' able to respond appropriately, within the time given?
- Were candidate's ideas and opinions well structured and organized?
- Was s/he fluent and able to keep a flow of language?
- Did s/he use a range of grammar structures e.g. correct tenses, word order etc.?
- Did s/he use a range of vocabulary?
- Was s/he pronunciation accurate?
- Was 'the candidate's' expression varied (as opposed to monotone)?

How did your colleagues perform? Was your test well designed?

Activity 5.4 – Reading

Read the text and work with your group to design an appropriate test targeting at least 3 of the following reading sub-skills. Your test should include 4 -5 items/questions (For test task types, refer to Course Book Activities 3.1 and 3.2 above).

READING – Sub-skills to be tested:

- finding the main idea
- locating specific details
- understanding explicitly/implicitly stated information
- guessing meaning of unfamiliar words from context
- identifying structure, content, sequence of events and procedures
- following instructions
- identifying ideas in the text, and relationships between them, e.g. probability, solution, cause, effect
- identifying, locating, distinguishing and comparing facts, evidence, opinions, implications, definitions and hypotheses
- drawing logical inferences

Assess the quality of another group's test using the following criteria:

Reading Task Assessment Criteria:

- How clear were the instructions?
- Can the questions be answered without reading the text?
- What does the item test? Specific information, main idea, etc.? (See list of sub-skills provided in the table above.
- Was enough space provided for the answer?
- Could there be more than one answer?
- Is the answer key provided?
- Are the questions too difficult/too easy?

Assignment (optional – for existing teachers and/or student teachers on practicum)

Your assignment is to try out a new idea/activity from this module with one of your classes. You should then reflect on your lesson. Use the following guidelines for your assignment.

1. Where appropriate, make up materials for the new idea/activity you will be trying out, focusing on the particular language points and learning outcomes you are aiming for.
2. Write your whole lesson plan, including your new idea/activity on the lesson plan document, then teach the lesson. After the lesson, write a reflection including: i. What went well? Why?; ii. What didn't go well? Why?; and iii. What changes will I make next time?
3. Attach your lesson plan (including list of materials used) and your reflection.
4. Submit your assignment by handing/emailing it to your trainer. The deadline for completion of this assignment is

Glossary

Concept	Definition
item	The part of a test to which a learner has to respond
genre	A style of expressing yourself in writing; a recognized category of writing that shares a common form, purpose or content
cloze tests	A variation of a gap-fill task, where, for example, every fifth word in a paragraph is deleted. In a traditional gap-fill, words are deleted randomly. In a cloze test, it could be every sixth word, or every seventh word, etc.
editing tasks	Tasks in which test takers are required either to identify and correct the errors in a sentence or to correct identified errors in underlined words or phrases
high-stakes test	A test with important consequences for the test taker. Passing has important benefits, such as a secondary school diploma, a scholarship, or a license to practice a profession. Failing has important disadvantages, such as being forced to take remedial classes until the test can be passed, not being allowed to drive a car, or not being able to find employment. (Source: Wikipedia)

Recommended Reading

- **Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers**, Michael O'Malley & Lorraine Valdez-Pierce, Longman, 1996
- **Activities, Games & Assessment Strategies for the Foreign Language Classroom**, Amy Buttner, Eye on Education, 2007
- **Language Testing in Practice**, Lyle Bachman & Adrian Palmer, Oxford, 1996
- **Practical Language Testing**, Glenn Fulcher, Hodder Education, 2010
- **Testing for Language Teachers**, Arthur Hughes, Cambridge, 2003
- **Language Testing**, Tim McNamara, Oxford, 2000

- <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/evaluating-speaking-ielts-speaking-test> – this article contains criteria for evaluating a speaking test
- <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/testing-assessment> – this article lists reasons for testing and offers some alternatives to testing)

Additional Material

Activity 3.3 – Faulty Items – Answer Sheet

Key: LEMON, PLANE, TABLE

- 1. The item may be testing spelling, but is also testing intelligence (spatial), ability to do anagrams. With this task it may be more important to make the mental leap rather than to be able to spell. The task does not specify that you need to use all 5 letters, so words with 3 or 4 letters need to be marked as correct (e.g. PALE, NAP, BAT).*
- 2. The correct answer 'b' is immediately identifiable because it is so much longer than the other options; it looks like a dictionary definition; what does 'closest in meaning' mean?*
- 3. Answers 'a' and 'b' are both acceptable; more than one correct option*
- 4. The sentence works equally well with or without the deleted word (THAT); always tell learners whether the gap is to be filled by one or by more than one word, or if there is an option to leave it empty*
- 5. This item has only 3 options, making it statistically more 'guessable'. Option 'a' would be correct if it weren't for the typing error, making it incorrect*
- 6. Make sure that all options are grammatically correct when placed in the stem (unless you are testing grammar). In this case, determiner 'a' makes it impossible to fit the correct option 'c' into the stem.*
- 7. There are at least two ways of ordering this paragraph: 6, 4, 7, 2, 3, 1, 5. Another possible order is 6, 3, 7, 2, 4, 1, 5. Marking these items may present another difficulty. What if the learner makes a mistake early in the sequence, but then orders everything else correctly? Should this person get the same mark as someone who has all the ordering wrong? An option is to mark wholly right or wholly wrong, but then the task involving a lot of effort in designing and answering, and it carries only one mark (making it impractical).*

Activity 3.4 – Guidelines for Developing Tasks for Reading and Listening Tests – Answer Sheet

Instructions should be clear, precise and simple. They should not be more complex than the test itself. Remember: you don't test the understanding of instructions. If they have to be complex or long, a valid option is to give them in mother tongue.

Where possible, give a clear example before the start of the test, showing learners/candidates what needs to be done and how.

Questions/tasks should not give unfair advantage to individuals with special subject knowledge or background knowledge.

Test tasks should be as similar as possible to the real-world communicative use of language.

In multiple-choice items, there should be only one correct answer.

In multiple-choice items, the options should be of equal length and of similar difficulty

In multiple-choice items, make sure that there are no 'obviously wrong' options. All options need to be 'possible', but only one correct.

In matching items there should always be more answers than questions, to prevent candidates from being able to answer the last question by process of elimination.

For Reading and Listening comprehension tests - it should not be possible to answer reading or listening questions correctly without the written or spoken text.

Questions must follow the text sequence and must be spread evenly throughout the text (i.e. not focusing on just one or two paragraphs of the text)

Avoid humorous questions: they may cause learners to either not take the exam seriously or become confused.

Write questions that measure what learners know, not what they do not know.