
What's the best way of testing Business English?

How do we decide on a good test?

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Outline

- A Test
 - Why test?
 - Defining of terms
 - Test construct?
 - What is a good test?
 - What is Business English?
 - Standards
 - What sort of test?
 - Which test?
 - Questions and discussion
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A Test

Bear in mind, there is no perfect test!

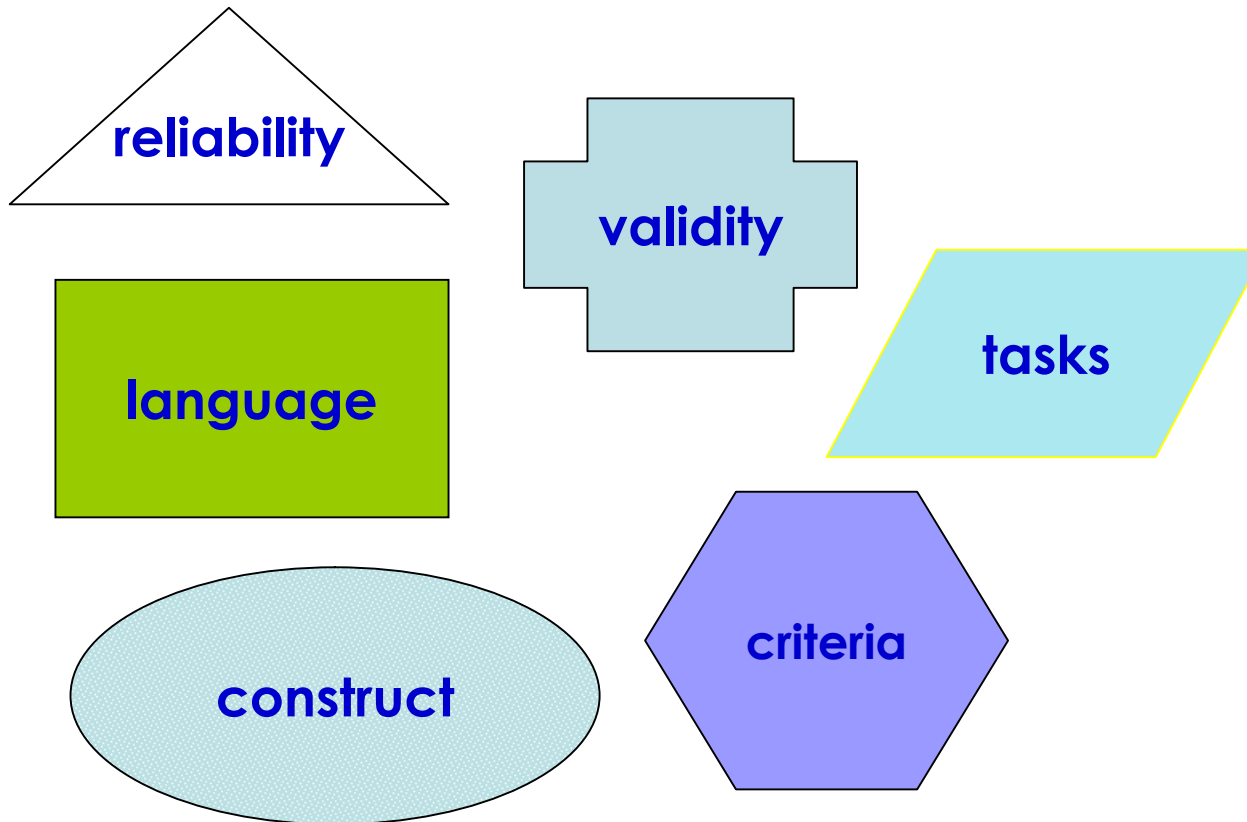
- time
- order
- points and grades
- “right” or “wrong”?
- content or language?
- marking criteria
- answers?
-

**What is being tested?
Ability or Knowledge?**

Why Test (Anyway)? Because ...

- I have to (or want to).
 - learners expect or want tests.
 - tests keep the class occupied.
 - I can find out what learners know.
 - I can find out what learners can do
 - tests assess knowledge and ability.
 - tests improve teaching.
 - tests can set or measure standards.
 - ...
-

Defining of Terms



Construct validity



syllabus-based, theory-based, ...

English for Business Purposes or Business English?

- skills vs. content
 - discourse structure vs. vocabulary and grammar
 - heterogeneous vs. homogenous groups
 - English vs. commerce
 - areas of work
 - material
 - text types vs. content
 - pre-and in-service learners
-

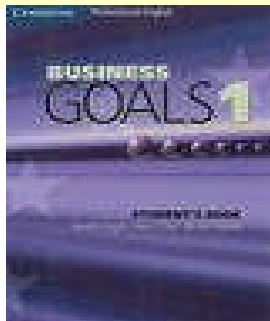
Conflicting constructs?

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment

Council of Europe 2001



Instruction-driven



Testing Theory in a Nutshell

- **Quality standards**
- Fairness

Quality Standards for Tests

- **Validity**
- **Objectivity**
- **Reliability**
- Administrative practicability

Quality Standards for Tests:

- Validity
- Objectivity
- Reliability

Are we testing the right things?

This question can only be answered if we define

- what we want to test,
- which testing methods we want to apply,
- how language competence and testing can be combined.



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Does the test work in real life?

- communicative tests

How is this defined?

- learning objectives

Which testing methods?

- mock exams
-

Quality Criteria for Tests

- Validity
- **Objectivity**
- Reliability

Is the test result influenced by the method of evaluation?

None of the following should occur:

- a) Marks based on personal sympathy or antipathy
- b) Slips and errors in calculation

As much as possible should be systematic and automatic! Marking criteria must be

- clearly defined
 - exact
 - easy to use
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Systematic marking

- closed test forms with computer marking

Marking by examiners

- published marking criteria for productive skills

Application of criteria

- examiner training
-

Quality Criteria for Tests

- Validity
- Objectivity
- **Reliability**

Would the test results be the same if the test were taken under the same or similar conditions?

Would two candidates with the same level of language competence get the same results or do other factors like personality, general knowledge, nerves, fear of risk-taking or learning experience play a part?

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Test editing

- expert evaluation

Pre-testing

- replacement of tasks that don't work

Further checks

- statistical evaluation after the test is carried out
-

Standards:

- Applying the quality standards
- **Fairness**

All the quality standards have been applied – the learning objectives are defined, the marking is objective and external factors play no part in the results.

Everything okay?

Remember:

- The candidates are not guinea pigs.
 - Publication of the test procedure
 - Reduction of stress
 - Procedure for appeals
-

Features of tests

How much of these do we need?

(construct) validity
reliability
authenticity
interactiveness
impact
practica(bi)lity

Bachman & Palmer: Language Testing in Practice, OUP, 1996

Features of tests

What do you look for?

accessibility

price

transparency

appeals procedure

speed

sample material

What sort of test?

- Home-made
- End-of term
- Purpose-built
- National
- International
- ...

Types of Tests

proficiency

norm-referenced

fixed-point

formative

direct

performance

objective

guided

analytic

achievement

criterion-referenced

continuous

summative

indirect

knowledge

subjective

impression

holistic

Language tests are often

Achievement tests

testing how successful learning has been

Proficiency tests

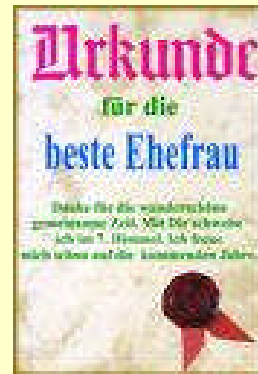
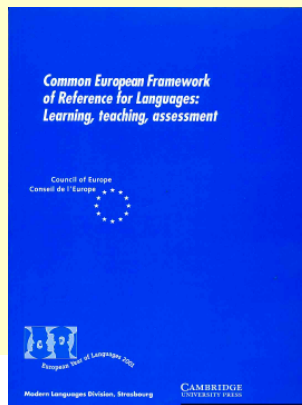
assessing future performance

What makes a test useful for test-takers?

Will it give them an assessment they can **use** in future?

Will it be a true statement of their **competence**?

Will the **experience** be beneficial to them?





Manual

for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Pilot Version Nov. 2003 / Final Version 2009

The *Manual* describes 4 main steps in quality assurance

1. **Familiarising** all concerned with the instruments of the CEFR
2. **Specification** of competences and Quality assurance procedure
3. **Standardisation** of test procedure
4. **Empirical Validation** of test items

It can be assumed that proof of quality assurance will become necessary for all foreign language examinations in the future if these claim to be related to the Common European Framework of Reference and the competence levels and wish to continue to exist and be recognised in a European context!

What test?

- Cambridge ESOL
 - LCCI
 - telc
 - Trinity
 - City & Guilds
 - TOEIC
 - ...
-

What test?

- ...an ideal English language exam if you are preparing for a career in business. There are three different levels of ...
 - ... qualifications can help you reach your goals. So whether you are looking to break into marketing, improve your general business knowledge or learn a new language, ...international recognition plus clear and meaningful descriptions of language skills for candidates, employers and institutions in all countries ...
 - ... an examination for the world of work... available at 4 levels corresponding to the Common European Framework of Reference... assessed through an interview with an ...examiner
 - ...a qualification specifically developed for candidates who need to use spoken English in the workplace.
 - ... an English language test designed specifically to measure the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment.
-

Features of **good language tests**

- Sample material
 - Transparency
 - Type of test
 - Availability
-

Some examples

- Relating the Trinity College London GESE and ISE examinations to the **Common European Framework of Reference** : Spiros Papageorgiou 2007
- The **Research Notes** are quarterly publications reporting on matters relating to research, test development and validation within Cambridge ESOL.
- Here you will find everything for the preparation of the telc examinations. Please choose the language you need the preparation material for first. In the telc shop you can order compendiums of **learning objectives, model tests and CD's** for the respective examinations easily and comfortably online.



Features of **communicative language tests**

- Language for intercultural communication
 - Evaluation of relevant skills
 - Realistic roles of candidates
 - Authentic texts, communicative roles and communicative tasks
-

Intercultural factors

Cultural bias of Anglo-American language examinations:



Topics like holidays, weekends / physical activities, sports / friendship with animals / music / concept of 'solitude' / concept of 'peace' / humour / sense of time / family relations / business relations

relate to a **Western way of life**.

Phrases like "Are you happy to do that"? / "Is that alright"?

may **confuse candidates** of non-Western cultural background.



...

Examples – Good or Less So?

- What is being tested here?
- Is this the best way of doing it?

Example 1

1. before you relax, you have to...
 2. questions about your ... Where you are from, etc.
 1. to read-antonym
 2. the money you pay for a ride
 3. 100 years – a ...
 4. quite good - ...
-



Example 2

Give the past tense forms of the following verbs:

go, see, give, be, want, have, eat, sleep

Example 3

Use gerunds with or without different verbs or adjectives and prepositions to comment on Eddie's actions.

Example: After school, Eddie was unemployed.

Being unemployed may not be such a good idea. / I'd enjoy being unemployed to Hollywood too.

1. First Eddie wrote some applications for jobs.
2. Then Eddie worked at the door of a nightclub.
3. Eddie was often late for work.

...

Example 4

Think about what you did at work yesterday.
Write a short paragraph (five to seven sentences)
about some of the things you did.

Discussion

- When was the last time you took a test yourself?
 - Was it a positive experience?
 - What would have helped?

 - Have you ever written a test yourself?
 - Did you encounter any problems?

 - Which was the last test you recommended?
 - Why did you choose that one?
 - Would you recommend it again?
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Questions, comments, suggestions?

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