



Updating English Language Teaching Practice

TEST FORMATS

Language

TEST FORMAT	PROS	CONS
<i>Cloze.</i> Blank out every nth word (5 th /6 th) in a reading text. Ss complete the blanks.	Easy to construct (a text and a bottle of liquid corrector)	Can test IQ than language (puzzle element). Can be irritating for ss.
<i>Gap fill.</i> Selected words in a text are blanked out. Ss have to fill in the blanks.	Good for testing different structures; provides clear contexts. Easy to write and mark.	Need to think about possible answers.
<i>Word sequencing.</i> e.g. 'Order the words below to make sentences.'	Excellent for testing structures with problems of word order (e.g. questions)	Can be difficult to mark (some mistakes worse than others). Contains puzzle element)
<i>Editing.</i> Ss correct mistakes	Realistic. Good for testing L1 interference.	Can be too difficult if mistakes are not signaled.
<i>Cued sentences.</i> (from pictures or words.)	Easy to write and mark	Can be mechanical – repeated use of the same structure.
<i>Personalisation.</i> e.g. 'Write five sentences about your family'. <i>Writing short texts.</i> e.g. 'Write a dialogue with these words'.	Easy to write. Good for functions (e.g. <i>likes / dislikes</i>) Tests usage of structures beyond sentence level.	Can be mechanical. Can be difficult to mark (open-ended). Need for clear criteria.
<i>Identifying structures.</i> e.g. tenses / parts of speech.	Tests knowledge of grammatical system and of metalanguage	Does not test usage of structures.
<i>Translation.</i> e.g. 'Translate these sentences into English'.	Tests problems of form and usage caused by L1 interference	Many ss and ts feel that the target language only should be used.
<i>Table completion.</i> e.g. 'Complete the table with these adjectives.'	Good for testing knowledge of irregulars and word-building.	Mechanical – does not test usage.
<i>Sentence transformation.</i> e.g. 'Finish the sentences so that they mean the same.'	Good for testing some structures (e.g. <i>passives / conditionals</i>)	Vary artificial and can test IQ as well as language.
<i>Lexis classification.</i> e.g. 'Match the words with the topics.'	Good for testing lexical sets.	Does not test usage of vocabulary.
<i>Matching sentences halves.</i> (one half of a sentence with the other).	Good for testing some structures: (e.g. <i>conditionals / gerunds and infinitives</i>)	Need numbers and letters to make it easier to mark. e.g. 2 – c
<i>Matching words / definitions</i>	Good for specific words and link with dictionary skills.	Does not involve usage of vocabulary.

Reading and listening

<i>Short answer questions.</i> e.g. 'How tall are elephants?' 'Three meters'.	Easy to write and mark. Very good for checking gist or intensive understanding of texts.	Some writing. Important not to mark for accuracy and to decide what answers are correct. Need to ensure questions do not test ss' knowledge of the world.
<i>Table completion.</i> e.g. 'Complete the table with information.' (age/family etc.)	Easy to construct and mark. Good for checking specific info or data from a text.	Some writing. Need to decide on what answers accepted as correct.
<i>Diagrams/maps/pictures.</i> e.g. 'Label the places on the map'.	Quite realistic, motivating tasks. Good for checking specific info.	Can be difficult to draw pictures. Could involve non-linguistic skills (e.g. <i>map reading</i>)

<i>Listing.</i> e.g. 'List the kinds of food mentioned in the text'.	Realistic. Easy to write and mark. Better for listening than reading.	Tests recognition of words. Does not test understanding or meaning.
--	---	---



Updating English Language Teaching Practice

<i>True, false, don't know.</i> e.g. <i>Mark the sentences T/F or don't know: Lions are cats.'</i>	Easy to write. Quite realistic. Tests gist or intensive understanding well.	High guessing element: 50% for T/F, 33% for T/F/don't know.
<i>Multiple choice.</i> e.g. <i>'Choose the correct answer: John goes out. A)sometimes B)rarely C)never.'</i>	Very easy to mark thus good for very large classes. Good for checking gist or intensive understanding.	Very difficult to construct. Wrong options (distracters) can distract better students. Guessing element.
<i>Sequencing (texts/pictures).</i> e.g. <i>'Listen and put the paragraphs in order.'</i>	Easy to construct. Good for stories (listening) and for linking of discourse.	Very difficult to mark. If one answer is wrong, others are too. Impractical unless marking scheme is adapted.
<i>Text completion.</i> e.g. <i>'Listen and complete the information about the film.'</i>	Quite realistic. Good for listening for specific info.	For reading, it tests knowledge of language. (see <i>cloze</i> and <i>gap fill</i>)
<i>Problem solving.</i> e.g. <i>'From the following info, work out the people's names.'</i>	Realistic and good fun. Tests global understanding.	Can test general IQ not ability to read or listen.
<i>Word attack.</i> e.g. <i>'Work out the meaning of these words from the text.'</i>	Tests ability to infer meaning from context (for reading)	Not suitable for listening (when it can work as a vocabulary test).
<i>Identify topic (text/paragraph).</i> e.g. <i>'Match the title with the text'</i>	Good for gist reading. Easy to construct and mark.	Need to think of suitable answers when questions are open (e.g. <i>giving titles to texts</i>).
<i>Linking.</i> e.g. <i>'What does the underlines word refer to? – It arrived late.'</i>	Good for testing intensive understanding / linking within text. (cohesion)	Need to underline words and give line numbers to make task easier to do and mark.
<i>Identify linking words in a text.</i> e.g. <i>after/next, etc.</i>	Good for working out how a text holds together. (cohesion)	Can be more a test of word recognition than of understanding.
<i>Discrepancies.</i> e.g. <i>Read the text then list the differences</i>	Realistic, integrative test of both reading and listening.	Difficult to see if problems are due to listening or reading.

Writing

<i>Essay questions.</i> e.g. <i>Write about a day when everything went wrong.'</i>	Very easy to set. Better for higher levels.	Very unrealistic and often tests imagination or content knowledge. Difficult and time consuming. Needs a marking criteria.
<i>Guided writing.</i> Using pictures, notes, diagrams (giving ss some input of info)	More realistic than essays, because input can create reason for communication. Gives ss help, thus good for lower levels. Easier to mark than free writing.	Input can be a test of reading – if ss do not understand input this will affect their writing.
<i>Punctuation.</i> (punctuating texts)	Good for testing specific knowledge of punctuation.	Restricted and not easy to mark – punctuation can be subjective (related to style)
<i>Summary.</i> e.g. <i>'Read the text and summarise it in 20 lines.'</i>	A realistic, integrative task. Tests both reading and writing.	Difficult to mark. (What is important in a text can be subjective).
<i>Note taking.</i> e.g. <i>Read the text and write notes.'</i>	A realistic and useful task for ss to practice.	Can be difficult to mark unless it is guided.
<i>Dictation.</i> e.g. <i>'Listen and write down the text'</i>	Realistic. A good integrative test of listening and writing. (spelling)	Very difficult to mark, unless a very clear scheme is established.
<i>Combined.</i> e.g. <i>'Read the letter and write a reply.'</i>	Realistic and very good for writing.	Difficult to mark – to distinguish between problems in reading or writing.

Speaking

<i>Free interviews.</i> (chat to ss in groups or as individuals).	Realistic and can reduce stress for ss.	Very difficult to rate performance (personality factor – shy / outgoing) Need to maintain conversation at same time as rating.
---	---	--



Updating English Language Teaching Practice

<i>Picture description</i> (using photo or drawing)	Gives tester time to listen and ss something concrete.	Artificial task and there is no interaction.
<i>Information transfer</i> (Information gap through notes or pictures)	Realistic – need for communication. Tests key interactive strategies.	Can be problems when one student is a lot weaker than the other (doesn't work)
<i>Oral presentations</i> . Ss prepare and give short talks.	Realistic and gives tester time to assess performance.	No interaction and can have a high stress factor – not suitable for younger ss.