WRITING

Individual Component Checklist

ENGLISH VERSION

ALTE

Association of Language Testers in Europe

INTRODUCTION

This checklist has been designed for use as a practical tool for describing **ONE VERSION** of a particular component of a language test, for the purpose of evaluation or comparison. This checklist is for use only with tests of writing.

General Notes

In this checklist the following terminology is used:

♦   **Component**
One subtest in an examination. Usually an examination is made up of subtests in the different skills, and components are commonly called by the names of skills. This checklist concerns the speaking component of an examination. Components are also often referred to as 'papers'.

♦   **Input**
The material provided by the candidate for use in order to produce an appropriate response. In a test of speaking it may take the form of written, pictorial or oral prompts.

♦   **Item**
Each testing point which is given a separate mark or marks. It may consist of, for example, one gap in a written text, or one multiple choice question with three or four options.

♦   **Response**
The candidate's written or spoken response to a task. The term 'answer' is often used in this context. However, for reasons of precision, it is not used here.

♦   **Rubric**
The instructions given to a candidate on how to respond to a particular input. An example of a rubric for a writing test is: *You have had a very difficult week with a lot of problems at home and at college. Using the information in the diary, write a letter of about 100 words to a friend, telling him / her you have had a bad week.*

♦   **Section**
The parts each component can be subdivided into. Each may be testing a different area of skill of usage.

♦   **Task**
A task is defined precisely as a combination of rubric, input and response. For example, a reading text with several multiple choice items, all of which can be answered by referring to a single rubric, can be classified as a task. If another set of items relates to the same text, but requires a different rubric in order for a response to be produced, then that combination of text, rubric and items constitutes a different task. Thus the same text can for part of the same input for one or more tasks.

The term 'question' which is often used when referring to tasks, whether or not they are presented as grammatical questions, is avoided here because of its ambiguity.

♦   **Text**
In the context of a reading component of an examination, a text is any piece of written language which is used as part of the input to a task.

Please note
Some of the questions in this checklist are to be answered with a couple of words or numbers, and some have boxes to tick 'yes' or 'no'. Others, which involve making some qualitative judgement, ask for an assessment on a scale of 1 – 4, where 1 represents the most negative judgement and 4 the most positive.

Instructions for Individual Questions

A   GENERAL DESCRIPTION

11   **Weighting**
Sometimes one section of a component is given more or less importance than others by weighting it differently from the others – assigning a higher or lower percentage of the total mark to it.

B PRESENTATION AND LAYOUT

7 How realistic is the presentation of the text?
If, for example, a task used in an examination paper is taken from a newspaper article, an attempt may be made to present it in such a way as to make this source clear to the candidate, by means of headlines, setting out the text in columns, etc.

D WRITING TASKS

1 **INPUT**
Most of this part of the checklist operates a the level of tasks. As the number of texts in a test varies widely – some being composed of as few as two or three, while others consist of a large number of very short texts – text numbers have been left out of headings, and it is assumed that these pages will be photocopied when necessary, and text numbers written in.

3 Topic used
The likely extent of topic areas used in tests of spoken language is covered in the 'notions' in **Threshold Level 1990**.

2 **LANGUAGE ABILITY TESTED**

1 **Main focus of testing**
By this it is meant the **main focus** of what is being tested in language terms, although it may also touch on other areas. It is taken as understood that there is a great deal of ambiguity in this area.

3 **LANGUAGE ABILITY TESTED**

3 To what extent can the writing task be described as guided?
A writing task which consists of a composition title and rubric would be classified as unguided (1), while a task which consists of re-arranging paragraphs to form a coherent text, or expanding notes into complete sentences may be considered heavily guided (3 or 4).

4 **EXPECTED RESPONSE**

1 **Length of expected response**
The approximate length of the text the candidate is expected to produce is usually indicated on the paper.

3 Is register important?
This refers to the degree of formality expressed in the text, which is determined by the purpose of writing and the relationship between the writer and intended reader.

4 Target reader
Depending on the degree to which the writing task is contextualised, it may be made more or less clear to the candidate who is seen as the reader of the text produced.

7 To what extent are non-linguistic skills being tested?
This question attempts to gauge the extent to which skills other than language ability are required in order to provide a response. An example of this would be an item which demands some type of mathematical calculation in order to get the correct answer, or an item which involves the candidate reading a map or interpreting an plan or diagram.

8 To what extent is there an overlap with testing another area of linguistic skill?
This question attempts to gauge the extent to which testing one area of language skill also involved the candidate's ability in another area of skill. It is difficult to separate skills completely from one another. For example, it is likely that any test of writing will involve candidates in reading instructions and rubrics.

5 **MARKING**

1 **What are the criteria for marking?**
Extended writing can be marked according to various criteria, laying a more or less heavy emphasis on mechanical correctness as opposed to the achievement of the task set.

5 How many examiners are involved in each writing component?
As marking compositions or other types of extended writing may be rather subjective, the possibility of unfairness arising from this may be counteracted by having each paper marked independently by two examiners. Where the opinions of the two examiners differ widely on which mark to give, the paper can then be marked a third or even a fourth time.

6 What type of marking is used?
These can characterised as follows:

a) **Examiner marking:** marking carried out by experts, who are often referred to as examiners. They are required to make used of professional judgement in awarding marks.
b) **Clerical marking:** marking carried out by non-experts, who have to deal with letters, numbers or words. They are generally required to exercise only very limited judgement, of a non-expert type.
c) **Computerised marking:** marking carried out by a machine such as an optical mark reader. Multiple choice tests are often marked in this way.

The term 'marking' as it is used here refers to the process of assigning a mark to an item, and not to the way in which the mark is recorded or read. Computerised marking mean that the candidate's response goes directly to the computer for the mark to be assigned, and no human marker is involved.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

NAME OF EXAMINATION

NAME OF COMPONENT

A.   GENERAL DESCRIPTION

		Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Total for Component
1	Name of section (if any)				
2	Number of tasks				
3	Number of items				
4	Suggested time allocated for section				
5	Preparation time allocated (if any)				
6	Total number of marks achievable (as percentage)				**100%**
7	Is percentage of marks available for section indicated to candidate?	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
8	Is percentage of marks available for each task indicated to candidate?	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
9	Is suggested time allocation for each section indicated to candidate?	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
10	Is suggested time allocation for each task indicated to candidate?	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
11	Weighting				**100%**

B   PRESENTATION & LAYOUT

Name of component

1	How is the component presented?	As a separate booklet	As part of a booklet
2	How is the beginning of the component indicated?	by a front page / by a title	by a title page in a booklet

3 What information is given at the beginning of the component?

title of component	☐	candidate name	☐
candidate number	☐	sex of candidate	☐
name of institution	☐	date of examination	☐
total number of marks for component	☐	time allocated	☐
instructions to examiner	☐	instructions to candidate	☐

4 How many pages long is the component? ☐

5 How well is the component spaced out? 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐

6 How much space is allowed for the responses? 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐

7 How realistic is presentation of the text? 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐

8 What size is the booklet? ☐

9 Is colour printing used? Yes ☐ No ☐

10 Are drawings used? Yes ☐ No ☐

11 Are photographs used? Yes ☐ No ☐

C GUIDANCE TO CANDIDATES (INSTRUCTIONS AND RUBRICS)

Name of component

1	How clear are instructions?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
2	How easy to understand are instructions?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
3	How adequate are instructions?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
4	How relevant are instructions?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
5	How consistent are instructions?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
6	How clear are rubrics?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
7	How easy to understand are rubrics?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
8	How adequate are rubrics?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
9	How relevant are rubrics?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐
10	How consistent are rubrics?	1	☐	2	☐	3	☐	4 ☐

D WRITING TASKS

Name of examination

Number of texts in speaking component

1. INPUT

		Task	**Task**	**Task**	**Task**
1	Length of written input (in words)				
2	Is there any other form of input? If so, what?				
	a) drawings	a	a	a	a
	b) photographs	b	b	b	b
	c) maps	c	c	c	c
	d) diagrams	d	d	d	d
	e) tables	e	e	e	e
	f) graphs	f	f	f	f
	g) other (please specify)	g	g	g	g

			Text ___		Text ___		Text ___
3		Topic used in task					
a)	personal identification	a	☐	a	☐	a	☐
b)	house, home and environment	b	☐	b	☐	b	☐
c)	daily life	c	☐	c	☐	c	☐
d)	free time, entertainment	d	☐	d	☐	d	☐
e)	travel	e	☐	e	☐	e	☐
f)	relations with other people	f	☐	f	☐	f	☐
g)	health and bodycare	g	☐	g	☐	g	☐
h)	education	h	☐	h	☐	h	☐
i)	science and scholarship	i	☐	i	☐	i	☐
j)	current affairs	j	☐	j	☐	j	☐
k)	shopping	k	☐	k	☐	k	☐
l)	food and drink	l	☐	l	☐	l	☐
m)	services	m	☐	m	☐	m	☐
n)	places	n	☐	n	☐	n	☐
o)	language	o	☐	o	☐	o	☐
p)	weather	p	☐	p	☐	p	☐
q)	other (please specify)	q	☐	q	☐	q	☐

1. INPUT

	Task				
4	Text type used in input				
a)	Letters	a ☐	a ☐	a ☐	a ☐
b)	Notes, messages, memos	b ☐	b ☐	b ☐	b ☐
c)	Advertisements	c ☐	c ☐	c ☐	c ☐
d)	Programmes	d ☐	d ☐	d ☐	d ☐
e)	Forms	e ☐	e ☐	e ☐	e ☐
f)	Excerpts from books or articles	f ☐	f ☐	f ☐	f ☐
g)	Other	g ☐	g ☐	g ☐	g ☐
	_____				
5	Do text types				
	a) vary from paper to paper	a ☐	a ☐	a ☐	a ☐
	b) always follow the same pattern	b ☐	b ☐	b ☐	b ☐

2 LANGUAGE ABILITY TESTED

1

Task
Main focus of testing

a)	describing	a	☐	a	☐	a	☐	a	☐
b)	reporting events	b	☐	b	☐	b	☐	b	☐
c)	requesting information	c	☐	c	☐	c	☐	c	☐
d)	responding to requests for info / explaining	d	☐	d	☐	d	☐	d	☐
e)	giving examples	e	☐	e	☐	e	☐	e	☐
f)	agreeing or disagreeing	f	☐	f	☐	f	☐	f	☐
g)	expressing opinions / preferences	g	☐	g	☐	g	☐	g	☐
h)	giving instructions	h	☐	h	☐	h	☐	h	☐
i)	making suggestions	i	☐	i	☐	i	☐	i	☐
j)	persuading	j	☐	j	☐	j	☐	j	☐
k)	complaining	k	☐	k	☐	k	☐	k	☐
l)	apologising	l	☐	l	☐	l	☐	l	☐
m)	expressing possibility	m	☐	m	☐	m	☐	m	☐
n)	expressing purpose	n	☐	n	☐	n	☐	n	☐
o)	comparing and contrasting	o	☐	o	☐	o	☐	o	☐
p)	classifying	p	☐	p	☐	p	☐	p	☐
q)	summing up	q	☐	q	☐	q	☐	q	☐
r)	appropriate social exchange	r	☐	r	☐	r	☐	r	☐
s)	other (please specify)	s	☐	s	☐	s	☐	s	☐

2 LANGUAGE ABILITY TESTED

2   Task type used

a) free composition	a ☐	a ☐	a ☐	a ☐
b) written task with text input	b ☐	b ☐	b ☐	b ☐
c) summary	c ☐	c ☐	c ☐	c ☐
d) expansion of notes	d ☐	d ☐	d ☐	d ☐
e) other (please specify)	e ☐	e ☐	e ☐	e ☐

☐

3 INSTRUCTIONS

1	How clear is it what kind of written response is expected?	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐
2	How clear is it what length of response is expected	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐
3	To what extent can the writing task be described as guided?	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐

4 EXPECTED RESPONSE

		Task				
1	Length of expected repines (in words)					

2   Text type candidate is expected to produce

a) descriptive composition	a	a	a	a	a
b) narrative composition	b	b	b	b	b
c) discursive composition	c	c	c	c	c
d) letter / note	d	d	d	d	d
e) article	e	e	e	e	e
f) review	f	f	f	f	f
g) report	g	g	g	g	g
h) summary	h	h	h	h	h
i) other (please specify)	i	i	i	i	i

3   Is register important?

Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No	No	No	No	No

4 EXPECTED RESPONSE

Task

4 Target reader
  a) examiner only
  b) friend or relative
  c) colleague
  d) general public
  e) other (please specify)

	Task				
a					
b					
c					
d					
e					

  f) not indicated
  g) not clear

f					
g					

5 To what extent is specialist knowledge assumed?

1					
2					
3					
4					

6 To what extent is cultural knowledge assumed?

1					
2					
3					
4					

7 To what extent are non-linguistic skills being tested?

1					
2					
3					
4					

8 To what extent is there an overlap with testing another are of linguistic skill?

1					
2					
3					
4					

5   MARKING

Task

1   What are the criteria for marking?

a) grammatical accuracy	a	a	a	a	a
b) range of structure and vocabulary	b	b	b	b	b
c) stress and intonation	c	c	c	c	c
d) pronunciation	d	d	d	d	d
e) fluency	e	e	e	e	e
f) register	f	f	f	f	f
g) task achievement	g	g	g	g	g
h) other (please specify)	h	h	h	h	h

2   Are marking criteria indicated to the candidate on the examination paper?   Yes / No

3   How many marks does each task carry?

4   Is the number of marks available indicated to the candidate on the examination paper?   Yes / No

5   How many examiners mark each writing component?

a) one
b) two or more

6   What type of marking is used

a) examiner marking
b) clerical marking
c) computerised marking