

From:

British Council, Hungary - Guidelines for Writers of Reading and Use of English Tests, 2006

## **2 General guidelines**

### **2.1 Text selection**

- 2.1.1 All texts must be authentic.
- 2.1.2 Texts must not be taken from printed material in other examinations or English language teaching materials.
- 2.1.3 The topic of the texts must be accessible to the students' age group.
- 2.1.4 Texts must not be offensive, distressing or violent.
- 2.1.5 Texts must be of a suitable length.
- 2.1.6 Texts must be of a suitable level of difficulty.
- 2.1.7 A text must have a title unless it is used as part of the item.
- 2.1.8 The same text can be used with more than one task. For example, a reading text with different tasks could be used for intermediate and more advanced levels, or a reading text used with intermediate students could be used as part of a Use of English task for more advanced students.

### **2.2 Task selection**

- 2.2.1 Have a clear idea what skill and sub-skill(s) you intend to test and select the task and text/prompts accordingly.
- 2.2.2 The task type must be one which is familiar to the students who are to be tested.
- 2.2.3 Tasks must be accessible to the students' age group.
- 2.2.4 Tasks must not be offensive, distressing or violent.
- 2.2.5 The time allocated for each task must be sufficient for somebody who has the ability being tested to complete the task comfortably within the time limit.
- 2.2.6 Students must be able to see easily how the task relates to the text.
- 2.2.7 No more than one testing technique should be used in each task. Do not switch from multiple-choice to single-word answers in a single task, for example.

### **2.3 Task design**

- 2.3.1 There should be a minimum of five items in a task.
- 2.3.2 Items must follow the text sequence.
- 2.3.3 Items must be spread evenly through the text.
- 2.3.4 It must not be possible to answer any item without reference to the text. This must be checked carefully.
- 2.3.5 In non-sequencing tasks, items must not be interdependent -students should not need one answer in order to find another.
- 2.3.6 Items must not overlap.
- 2.3.7 Two items must not have similar answers.
- 2.3.8 Items must have a complete answer key. All possible good answers and predictable wrong answers should be provided.
- 2.3.9 The items in each task must be numbered sequentially.
- 2.3.10 One item in each task must have an answer provided as an example. The example item, written in italics, should be marked 0 and should precede the other items. If the options to be selected are marked with letters, the answer to the example should be marked with a letter according to its place among the options.
- 2.3.11 The example answer must be provided in the form in which students are expected to write their answers and, where appropriate, it must be hand written.
- 2.3.12 "Find the wrong answer" type items are not acceptable in multiple-choice tasks.
- 2.3.13 Each item must score one point.

### **2.4 Rubrics**

- 2.4.1 Rubrics should be in English. They must be clear, simple and brief. Redundancies must be deleted. Do not use exclamation marks and meta language.
- 2.4.2 Conform to standard rubrics, for example, the ones in this textbook.
- 2.4.3 Indicate clearly what students have to do i.e. what they have to write and where.
- 2.4.4 The rubrics should be in bold.
- 2.4.5 Put the total number of points available for each task (in other words, the number of items) at the end of the task in bold.

## 2.5 Checklist

### Text

- 2.5.1 Is the text type worth testing?
- 2.5.2 Is the text user-friendly in style and acceptable in content?
- 2.5.3 Is the length of text appropriate for your students?
- 2.5.4 Is the level of difficulty appropriate? Do any alterations to the text conform to the Guidelines?

### Task

- 2.5.5 Is the rubric clear, brief and in bold?
- 2.5.6 Has an example been provided for each task?
- 2.5.7 Is there a complete answer key for each task?
- 2.5.8 Is the task type familiar to students?
- 2.5.9 Is the task accessible and acceptable?
- 2.5.10 Is the number of items acceptable?
- 2.5.11 Are the items spread evenly through the text?
- 2.5.12 Are all items properly labelled: questions with numbers, options with letters?
- 2.5.13 Can each question be answered independently?
- 2.5.14 Do items follow the text sequence?
- 2.5.15 Have you provided a full key?
- 2.5.16 Do answer keys reflect the form in which the answer is expected?
- 2.5.17 Does the answer key include alternative answers (if applicable)?

## 2.6 Acknowledgement

The following reference materials have been used in compiling these guidelines:

- Alderson, J. C., Clapham, C., & Wall, D. (1995). *Language Test Construction and Evaluation*. Cambridge Language Teaching Library. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Milanovic, M. (Ed.). (1996). *User's Guide for Examiners*. Council of Europe, CC-LANG, 10.

## 3 Reading Paper

### 3.1 Text selection

- 3.1.1 Use texts that are authentic and suitable for the selected task type.
- 3.1.2 Select texts whose topic is accessible to the students' age group.
- 3.1.3 Try to select texts that are likely to be interesting for students. Be aware that humorous texts might be enjoyable and easy for you but very difficult for students.
- 3.1.4 Avoid offensive or distressing topics.
- 3.1.5 Avoid well-known novels as text sources.
- 3.1.6 Select texts of suitable length.
- 3.1.7 Do not use more illustrations than necessary. When illustrations are used, they should be clear and photocopiable.
- 3.1.8 Do not use published teaching materials.
- 3.1.9 Do not use texts with content covered in detail in any textbook. You do not want to test knowledge of content, but ability to understand texts.
- 3.1.10 Do not make any changes to the original text. Do not delete words, sentences or paragraphs from the selected body of text. If the text contains any offensive words that you think should be replaced, only change these with great care and always seek the advice of a fellow teacher or a native speaker as to the acceptability of the changes you have made.
- 3.1.11 If the text used is not the beginning part of a longer text, make sure it stands alone and does not contain references to previous parts of the original text.
- 3.1.12 Wherever possible, begin the text with its title or headline.
- 3.1.13 Edit the text layout so that it resembles the original text as closely as possible but make sure this does not make the text too difficult to read (e.g. in gap filling tasks).

### 3.2 Task selection

- 3.2.1 Have a clear idea about the purpose of each reading task, which reading skill is tested in a particular task, and why a particular task type is used.
- 3.2.2 The task should reflect the way in which people usually read the type of text used.
- 3.2.3 Consider applying more difficult texts with easier tasks and vice versa.

### 3.3 Task design

- 3.3.1 There should be a minimum of five items in a task.
- 3.3.2 Do not design in any one task more than 10 items for a passage of approximately 100 words.
- 3.3.3 The wording of the items should be such that it is easy to understand, is below the language level of the text and does not require more reading than the text itself.
- 3.3.4 Provide an example, written in italics and marked with (0), at the beginning of each task. Example answers should be given in a hand-written form where appropriate.
- 3.3.5 Make sure that no item can be answered correctly without reading the text.
- 3.3.6 Make sure that each question can be answered independently; that is, the answer to one question does not depend on the answer to another question (except in sequencing tasks).
- 3.3.7 Make sure that items do not overlap.
- 3.3.8 Make sure there is only one possible answer to each question. If more than one answer is required, this fact must be clearly indicated, and they must count as different items.
- 3.3.9 Avoid questions which demand much imagination.
- 3.3.10 Sequence items in the order they appear in the original text (other than sequencing tasks!).
- 3.3.11 Number items and use letters to mark options.
- 3.3.12 Avoid Yes/No questions and True/False items, because guessing the right answer is easier.
- 3.3.13 Do not delete the first words or beginnings of sentences.
- 3.3.14 In any gap-filling task (e.g. modified cloze, banked cloze, discourse cloze)

- there should be a sentence at the beginning (before the example) for lead-in and a sentence at the end for lead-out, which do not have any items.
- 3.3.15 In a gapped text, where you take out paragraphs, do not take out the first or the last paragraph, in order to leave enough context for comprehension.
- 3.3.16 In gap-filling tasks there should be at least five words between gaps to provide enough context.
- 3.3.17 In banked cloze tasks the items must be numbered in the gaps in brackets, and the options, marked with letters, must be listed in alphabetical order either at the bottom of the page or on the facing page.
- 3.3.18 Provide four options for multiple-choice items. Multiple-choice questions should have only one correct answer and should not offer "either a) or b)" or "both a) and b)" type of answers as an option, because these are tricky.
- 3.3.19 "Not mentioned" must not be used as an optional answer, because this can be misinterpreted. Many things "not mentioned" can still be inferred.
- 3.3.20 In one task, the number of matches must not be more than 10 for intermediate students, and 12 for advanced students. Provide more choices than matches in matching tasks and banked gap-filling tasks (minimum 1, maximum 2 distractors to be provided).
- 3.3.21 Make sure that ambiguous matches are excluded.
- 3.3.22 Make sure that in sequencing tasks there is only one correct order and no more than 6-7 items for intermediate students, or 8-9 items for advanced students. Be careful if using newspaper articles in sequencing tasks: they are rarely in chronological order.
- 3.3.23 Clearly indicate the required length of the answers (maximum 3 words) in open-ended (short-answer) questions.
- 3.3.24 Design tasks with clear and consistent layout. The input text should retain the original format as much as possible. Paragraph texts clearly with indentations.
- 3.3.25 Design one task (including rubric, text, questions, space or boxes for answers) to fit on one page. If this is not possible, the task must be arranged on two facing pages.
- 3.3.26 Provide answer keys reflecting the form in which answers are expected. Give all possible or acceptable answers. Unacceptable answers that are likely to occur should also be indicated. In tasks where the correct answer may be phrased in various ways, the answer key should provide content-related instructions concerning acceptable answers.
- 3.3.27 Weight items equally (1 item - 1 point).

### **3.4 Rubrics**

- 3.4.1 Indicate what type of text students are going to read and/or the text source (preferably both).