

# Task-based assessment in the business English / ESP classroom



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Task-based assessment is a popular technique in BE and ESP classrooms – it focuses on performance rather than just language, and enables trainers to make informed judgements about a person's ability to do a job. This session will be in two parts. First we will discuss what we mean by task-based assessment, looking at issues like authenticity, validity and rating scales. We will then look at a practical checklist which you can use or adapt to your own teaching contexts.

# Describe yourself in the chat box please

- How do you describe yourself? Teacher, trainer, lecturer, consultant, coach ...?
- Do you work mostly in university, in-company, language school, ... ?

# What is a task?

The more confidently we can answer *yes* to each of these questions the more task-like the activity:

- a) Does the activity engage learners' interest?
- b) Is there a primary focus on meaning?
- c) Is there an outcome?
- d) Is success judged in terms of outcome?
- e) Is completion a priority?
- f) Does the activity relate to real world activities?

Why use tasks to assess?



“little is known about how global proficiency levels relate to task or job performance, and even less about how linguistic abilities relate to task or job performance”

Long 2014:335



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-wearing-white-hard-hat-holding-2-way-radio-1078879/>

“discrete-point tests  
of linguistic  
knowledge reveal  
little or nothing about  
the ability to perform  
real-world tasks”

Long 2014:336

# High stakes assessment

Lots of high stakes tests use task-based assessment:

- IELTS (International English Language Testing System)
- ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) - Aviation
- OET (Occupational English Test) - Healthcare



# Task-based assessment in the classroom



Is this VTS  
operator able  
to handle  
complex  
situations in  
English?



Can I send Mr Chen to Germany next week to do a sales presentation? Is his English good enough?

# Validity



Does the test measure what it is supposed to measure?

- Can we infer from the test result that the „real-world“ task will be completed successfully? (construct validity)
- Does it look like it is testing what it is supposed to test? (face validity)

# Rating scales

“A rating scale is typically a series of hierarchical levels, with each level providing a proficiency descriptor against which learner performance is measured.”

- Holistic scales require the rater to make a global, holistic judgment about a performance, so that there is no counting or ‘tallying’ of particular features or errors.
- An analytic scale requires the enumeration of specific features in a performance, such as the number of errors.



## Example rating scale

Level of Ability	Description
0	No evidence of knowledge of relevant vocabulary
1	Evidence of a limited range of specific vocabulary, often inappropriately applied
2	Moderate range of specific vocabulary, sometimes inappropriately applied
3	Extensive range of specific vocabulary, usually applied appropriately
4	Complete range of relevant vocabulary, applied appropriately

Doc 9835  
AN/453



## **Manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements**

Approved by the Secretary General  
and published under his authority

Second Edition — 2010

International Civil Aviation Organization

“The ICAO Proficiency Rating Scale—a product of collaborative compromise between aviation professionals, applied linguists, and politicians—specifies descriptors for six levels of proficiency in each of the areas of pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interaction.”

Lynn Moder & Halleck 2012:139

# Aviation English - ICAO Pronunciation

## Pre operational 3

Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation **and frequently** interfere with ease of understanding.

## Operational 4

Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation **but only sometimes** interfere with ease of understanding.

# Aviation English - ICAO Structure

## Pre operational 3

Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns associated with predictable situations are not always well controlled. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.

## Operational 4

Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are used creatively and are usually well controlled. Errors may occur, particularly in unusual or unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.



# Authenticity

“Genuineness is a characteristic of the passage itself and is an absolute quality. Authenticity is a characteristic of the relationship between the passage and the reader and it has to do with appropriate response.”

Widdowson 1978:80

# Authenticity - written communication



emails (easily the most common)

technical reports / test results

progress reports / updates

technical specifications

agendas / minutes / action notes

checklists

schedules

contracts

handbooks / manuals / software  
guidelines

briefing notes

# Input from domain experts



“a number of studies have shown significant divergence in judgements between the language experts who traditionally assess performance on LSP tests and those with experience of the relevant professional context”

Elder et al 2012: 409

<https://pixabay.com/photos/nurse-newborn-baby-care-birth-748186/>

# Presentations



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-holding-microphone-standing-in-front-of-crowd-1708912/>

Write down some typical criteria you might use to assess a presentation.

# Presentations – possible criteria



- Aims
- Structure
- Content
- Delivery
- Visual aids
- Rapport with the audience
- Question handling
- Timing

# Domain expert comment

‘As mentioned, this presentation sometimes also works as a project document so it has to be a bit in detail ... this document will also be used by the team members in the future to look at the details they need.’

# Domain expert comment

‘Such a detailed product workshop presentation is something desired by the team members. It's not a sales presentation where you have only a few texts, erm, more pictures. Sometimes you have no other source of information. You always go back to the project folder and look at the PowerPoint.’



# Meetings



Write down some typical criteria you might use to assess someone's ability to chair a meeting.



# Meeting skills

- Preparation
- Technical skills
- Management skills (roles, turntaking ...)
- Dealing with distractions
- Taking minutes

# Virtual meeting skills

- Preparation
- Technical skills
- Management skills (roles, turntaking ...)
- Dealing with distractions
- Taking minutes



<https://pixabay.com/photos/business-businessman-chair-computer-1839191/>

# Maritime industry – radio operator



You as the responsible officer have to send a corresponding message based on this situation.

Name of the vessel: MV Hondo/V9KY

Position: 18 56.67 S 103 04.91 E

Persons on board: 15, one person badly burnt

Cargo: 6,000 TEU, among them containers with IMO Class 1 goods



# Challenges

- Access to the target discourse community
- Understanding professional practice
- Separating the language content from the subject knowledge
- Measuring task difficulty

# Measuring task difficulty

- Task outcomes
- Self-reporting
- Time taken
- Observations (peers and teachers)

Trainer is not the expert

# Checklist

- Is it a real-world task?
- Is it practical? Can I do it in the classroom?
- Is it doable? (I.e. can the learners handle the task, or is it too difficult?)
- Do I have domain expert input?
- Is success based on the outcome?
- What criteria will be used to judge? (Language / Task)

# Post task evaluation

- Was the language used in the task similar to the real world?
- Was the task successful in predicting performance?



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**32<sup>nd</sup>** IATEFL BESIG  
Annual Conference

# BACK TO BASICS

**Berlin Adlershof**  
**11-13 October 2019**

Register online by 01 October 2019  
[besig.iatefl.org](https://besig.iatefl.org)

