



**HEATON, John Brian**  
**Writing English Language Tests (New Edition)**  
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The teaching process begins with setting up an instructional goal which will determine the process, since that process is designed with the aim of fulfilling that goal. Testing is the only way to see the efficiency of the process. Additionally, “testing is an aspect of learning that enables learners to grasp what they have missed previously and the teacher to comprehend what can be done in subsequent lessons to improve learning” (Chastain 1988). Therefore, teaching and testing are so closely interrelated that significant teaching process requires effective testing procedure or vice versa. Chastain (1988) considers testing as “the final step in the sequence towards mastery of content and accomplishment of objectives”. Hence, great care should be given in designing testing procedure as a major step of the teaching process. Furthermore, Heaton says that “tests may be constructed primarily as devices to reinforce learning and to motivate the student or primarily as a means of assessing the student’s performance in the language” (p.5). Therefore, tests should not solely be considered as a tool for perceiving learners’ development but also as a tool for motivating students in their self-development.

Throughout *Writing English Language Tests*, the functions of testing as a tool for reinforcement and motivation are highlighted and testing is considered as the provider of efficient teaching process. As a study in the ‘Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers’ series, this book comprises eleven chapters; six of which deal with how to test different skills in language learning and provide examples which will be useful in testing those particular skills. The other five chapters deal with factors that should be taken into account in designing an effective testing procedure, such as scoring tests, types of tests, and interpreting test results.

Before discussing how to test different language skills, in the first chapter, *Introduction to language testing*, Heaton offers a rationale for testing. He discusses the relationship between testing and teaching to highlight the role of testing as a tool for ascertaining the efficiency of the teaching process. In providing different kinds of tests for different language skills, he summarizes the characteristics of the four language skills and offers some test forms for

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assessing each of these skills. He seeks to answer the questions, ‘Why test?’ and ‘What should be tested and to what extent?’

In Chapter 2, *Approaches to language testing*, the author classifies language testing according to four main approaches, listed in chronological order as (i) the essay-translation approach; (ii) the structuralist approach; (iii) the integrative approach; and (iv) the communicative approach. After summarizing the functions of these four approaches, he emphasizes the importance of “maintaining ideas and goals by trying to devise a test which is as valid and reliable as possible – and which has a useful backwash effect on the teaching and learning leading to the test” (p. 24). In brief, the role of teacher as the provider is highlighted as the objective of assessment.

The third chapter, which concerns the scoring of tests, focuses on the difference between *subjective and objective testing*. These two types of testing, which are defined by Hughes (2003) as the distinction between methods of scoring regarding the subjectivity or objectivity of the judgement, are explained in detail with reference to multiple-choice techniques. Heaton illustrates instances of each type of testing by comparing their advantages and disadvantages. However, he focuses only on the multiple-choice test as an example of an objective test and does not refer to other types of objective testing such as matching questions or true-false questions. The components of multiple-item tests - stem, options, and distracters - are explained in detail with reference to their functions. Different examples are presented in describing the different types of each item, for example; the stem as a complete or an incomplete statement, or as a question. He also explains some techniques which might not be found meaningful by the students when applied to a multiple-choice test, such as writing the correct option in blanks, writing the correct letter of the correct option in the blank or in box, and underlying the correct option.

In the following six chapters, different types of test techniques are explained in detail by giving specific examples of each. *Tests of grammar and usage*, *Testing vocabulary*, *Listening comprehension tests*, *Oral production tests*, *Testing reading comprehension* and *Testing the writing skills* are discussed in separate chapters. For each unit, a brief rationale is presented initially to explain why to test each different skill. After that, the different types of tests which may be helpful in assessing that skill are provided. In doing so, the author exemplifies each type of testing and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each, which will guide teachers in deciding which technique to apply. However, most of the items that are presented in these six chapters are based on multiple-choice items in which students are solely expected to recognise the correct answer among distracters. Learning a language does not necessarily mean recognizing correct forms but in producing them in different situations appropriately. Therefore, it would be

better to exemplify recall items which measures the students' ability to apply functional understanding to produce language (Chastain 1988), such as comprehension questions, rewriting, summarizing, etc.

Chapter 10, *Criteria and Types of Tests*, discusses the principles that determine efficient tests. Here, the starting point of an efficient test is regarded as validity, which is "the extent to which the information you collect actually reflects the characteristics or attribute you want to know about" (Genesee and Upshur 1996). After defining different types of validity such as *face*, *content*, *construct*, and *empirical validity*, Heaton clarifies the features of validity and reliability by referring to the distinction between an achievement test and a proficiency test. In distinguishing these two tests, the author asserts that "an achievement test might well exclude factors such as personality while a proficiency test or public examination might consider such factors as important in evaluating oral ability in the target language" (p. 159). Therefore, he claims that the validity of a test should be determined in accordance with the objective of the test. Additionally, in explaining the relationship between reliability and validity, Heaton provides a thorough explanation with reference to the difference between objective and subjective tests. After clarifying the distinction between these two tests, he claims that the high reliability of a test can influence the validity of it in a negative way since "real-life tasks contained productive tests such as the oral interview, role-play, letter writing, etc. may have been given high construct and face validity at the expense of reliability" (p. 164). Therefore, as the author suggests, it is much more difficult to increase the validity of a test known to be reliable. In so doing, "it is essential to devise a valid test first of all and then to establish ways of increasing its reliability" (p 165). After discussing the features of reliability and validity, Heaton explains the importance of discrimination and administration of a test. He focuses on the practicality of a test on behalf of the participants by referring to the importance of setting a suitable length of time and providing clear test instructions. In this chapter, he also mentions the backwash effect and characteristics of different types of tests such as achievement tests, proficiency tests, aptitude tests, and diagnostic tests.

In the last chapter, Heaton deals with *How to interpret test scores*, which is considered the final step in the testing process. Although this final step may affect the whole testing process considerably, the author does not mention the significant role of interpretation. Genesee and Upshur (1996), for instance, discuss the factors affecting test score interpretation by highlighting the relationship between interpretation and test construction. In this chapter, Heaton presents an overview of frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, and dispersion and item analysis. He gives specific examples of each to clarify the functions of differing modes of interpretation. He also highlights the importance of 'moderating' a test since "it is simply impossible

for any single individual to construct good test items without help from another person” (p. 185).

Finally, to arrive at a correct interpretation of language testing, all language teachers should take time to read this book. It attempts to facilitate teachers of English in providing an effective testing process. It also presents detailed guidance on writing, administering, and scoring test questions. In doing so, this book provides various lucid test samples for the different skills of language learning that will guide teachers in planning their testing. Therefore, teachers of English should consider this book as a handbook which presents them with various types of test for assessing different skills. Teachers can easily find types of testing relevant to their teaching procedure, and in doing so, provide a much more effective teaching process for their learners in which the learners are expected not only to fill-in-the blanks accurately, but also to think critically by analysing problems and using different skills to solve those problems.

## REFERENCES

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