

## Chapter 9

- Chapter 9 (L&VP): *Suggestions for testing grammar*; Chapter 9: TAI
- Preparing an exam; Evaluating a textbook
- Preparing your Portfolio

Some of the below information was taken from:

**<http://www.oic.id.ucsb.edu/TA/hdbk/index.htm>**

## CONSTRUCTING TESTS

Undoubtedly you will be called upon to **construct or help to construct** a quiz, midterm, or final during your career as a TA. Usually Foreign Language tests that you create will generally be an **OBJECTIVE** test.

**DELIMIT THE CONTENT AND SKILL AREAS TO BE TESTED.** Decide on some way of selecting test items (a sampling scheme) to ensure that your quiz/test is representative of what was covered in class and to ensure that it gives an adequate sampling of student capabilities.

## OBJECTIVE TESTS

Although by definition no test can be truly "objective" (existing as an object of fact, independent of the mind), an objective test refers to a test made up of multiple choice, matching, fill-in, true/false, or short answer items.

**ADVANTAGES:** An objective test allows an instructor to assess a large and potentially representative sample of course material, measure most types of learning, and allow for reliable and efficient test scoring.

**DISADVANTAGES:** An objective test includes a tendency to emphasize only "recognition" skills, the ease with which correct answers can be guessed on many item types, and the inability to measure students' organization and synthesis of material. Suggestions for constructing high quality objective tests are offered below:

### DO'S:

- 1) Write the test items simply and clearly.
- 2) Write clear and unambiguous directions for the test as a whole and for each specific section of the test.
- 3) Assemble items into a test according to some systematic plan, e.g., similar item-types grouped together.
- 4) Devise a system to facilitate scoring the test (e.g., a separate answer sheet and an answer key in the same format).

## **DON'TS:**

- 1) Don't lift a statement verbatim from a textbook.
- 2) Don't provide clues in one item for answers to other items.
- 3) Don't intersperse item-types on the test.
- 4) Avoid writing interdependent items such that the answer to one item is necessary to respond to the next item.
- 5) Avoid items dealing with trivia.
- 6) Avoid trick questions.
- 7) Avoid ambiguity in items.

## **TRUE/FALSE ITEMS**

These items can assess student recognition of facts and definitions. To write good true/false items, we make these suggestions.

- 1) Be sure a statement is unequivocally true or false.
- 2) Avoid specific determiners such as "always" or "never"-they can be dead giveaways for FALSE items.
- 3) Beware of indefinite terms of degree or amount such as "in most cases" and "great".
- 4) Beware of negative statements and double negatives.
- 5) Beware of including more than one item in the same statement, especially if both are not equally true or false.
- 6) Beware of giving clues to an answer by the length of an item.

## **MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS**

This is often the most effective of the objective-type items. Multiple-choice items can measure such things as acquisition of information or vocabulary, application of principles, or evaluation of sample data. Here are some tips to help to ensure high quality in the multiple-choice items.

- 1) The item-stem should clearly formulate a problem.
- 2) As much of the item as possible should be included in the stem.
- 3) Randomize the occurrence of correct responses (i.e., you don't always want "C" to be the right answer).

- 4) Be sure there is only one clearly correct answer (unless you are instructing students to select more than one).
- 5) Make the wording in the response choices (distracters) consistent with the item stem.
- 6) Don't load the stem down with irrelevant material.
- 7) Beware of using answers such as "none of these" or "all of the above".
- 8) Use negatives or double negatives sparingly in the question or stem.
- 9) Beware of using sets of opposite answers unless more than one pair is presented (e.g., go to work, not go to work).
- 10) Beware of providing irrelevant grammatical cues.

## **COMPLETION AND SHORT ANSWER ITEMS**

These are variation of the same thing. They are suitable for testing knowledge of facts (e.g., dates, vocabulary). Numerical problems are short answer items. The following suggestions should aid you in writing effective completion or short answer items.

- 1) Don't leave too many blanks in a statement.
- 2) Put blanks at the end rather than at the beginning of an item.
- 3) Beware of indefinite items (many answers could be correct).
- 4) Omit only key words for completion. Don't test for common words (e.g., Fall quarter BEGINS in September).
- 5) In numerical problems indicate the type of units in which the answer is to be expressed if it doesn't give clues to the answer.

## **MATCHING ITEMS**

This is a variation of the multiple-choice item. Matching items are efficient for measuring associations of names, dates, etc. In addition, these items can be used to label charts, maps, and the like. Matching items are best when these guidelines are followed.

- 1) Possible answers are homogeneous in nature (i.e., all choices are names, dates, body parts, etc.).
- 2) The number of answer choices exceeds the number of problems.

- 3) Sets of answers are kept short. Make more matching items rather than one items with 400 answers.
- 4) Answers are put in a logical order (chronological, alphabetical (if one exists)).
- 5) Directions specify whether answers may be used more than once and specify the basis for matching.

Questions that you write should assess whether or not students CAN DO what you expect them to be able to do after an instructional sequence. For a more detailed description of item-types and techniques for writing items, see A. G. Wesman's article, "Writing the Test Item" (Thorndike, R. L. (Ed.) Educational Measurement, 1971, pp. 81-130.

## **GRADING OBJECTIVE TESTS**

- **PREPARE AN ANSWER KEY.** If you design the answer key to follow the format of the students' answer sheets, the grading process will be much faster. If the test is based on your class objectives, you can also refer students to lecture notes and readings relevant to a given question on the answer key.
- **DETERMINE IF THERE IS MORE THAN ONE CORRECT RESPONSE FOR ANY OF YOUR QUESTIONS.** Decide, in advance, if certain incorrect answers merit partial credit.
- **DECIDE, IN ADVANCE, THE POINT-VALUE OF EACH QUESTION.** Ideally, you should give students this information on the test itself.
- **DISTRIBUTE CORRECTED TESTS IN CLASS OR ASK STUDENTS TO DROP BY YOUR OFFICE TO PICK THEM UP.** Don't leave corrected exams out in the hall near your office. Your "A" student may be delighted, but it's important to consider the feelings of those students who do poorly as well. (It is illegal to post test scores along with names, or even with R numbers.)

# TEXTBOOK EVALUATION FORM

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

AUTHOR(S): \_\_\_\_\_

DATE / EDITION: \_\_\_\_\_ PUBLISHER: \_\_\_\_\_

Please place a check (✓) next to all components available in this textbook package. Place an X next to those components you feel are essential to your FL program, even if those components are not included with this textbook package. (You will need to go online.)

_____ Teacher's edition of TB	_____ Instructor's resource manual
_____ Student workbook	_____ Student lab manual
_____ Student audio CD(s)	_____ Interactive CD-Rom
_____ Video cassette(s)	_____ Instructor's video guide
_____ Test bank	_____ Transparency set
_____ Web site: _____	_____ Other (please specify)

For each of the statements on the following pages, please assign a numerical score. Please use the space below each item to include comments, if you wish. At the end of the evaluation, you will also be required to provide short answers for three additional questions. Space is provided for a total score for each of the 7 categories, as well as a total score for the textbook as a whole.

**SCORING:** 4 = excellent                      1 = poor  
                  3 = good                              0 = unacceptable / non-existent  
                  2 = adequate

## A. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The textbook is clearly laid out.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Both teacher and students can easily find things using the index or table of contents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Lessons / chapters are of appropriate length and number.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Page layout is clear – there is neither too much information per page, nor too many items per page.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Maps are clear and accurate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Appendices are accurate and easy to use.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The book is attractive.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The size of the book is appropriate.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. The book appears durable.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL for PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

**B. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. The textbook integrates the Communicative Method.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The textbook has clearly stated goals for proficiency.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. The textbook provides a clear explanation of its theoretical / methodological orientation (i.e. Natural Approach, Communicative Language Learning, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. The content of the textbook is consistent with the stated theoretical / methodological objectives.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL for THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**

**C. AUDIENCE**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. The content of the textbook is age appropriate.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The content and layout of the textbook will appeal to students.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Topics would appeal to students in high school / college / etc. (i.e. students can identify with characters, readings, culture, etc.).

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. The text would be enjoyable for students and teachers to use.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL for AUDIENCE**

**D. FOUR SKILLS**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Activities in the textbook are balanced among the four skills.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. An adequate number of skill-building activities is provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Each of the four skills is treated in every chapter.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. There is a logical / gradual development of the four skills throughout the textbook.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Skill-building activities are process-oriented (i.e. activities are accompanied by preview and follow-up activities).

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Strategies for building skills in speaking, reading, writing and listening are

included in the text.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL for FOUR SKILLS**

**E. STRUCTURES**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. The amount of grammar taught in each chapter / lesson is reasonable.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The sequencing of grammar is logical.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. The sequencing of grammar provides for recycling / review.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Grammatical structures presented in text are accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Examples of grammatical structures are contextualized.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Explanations of grammatical structures are clear.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Varied, sequenced practice (mechanical, meaningful, communicative) is provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL for STRUCTURES**

**F. VOCABULARY**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Vocabulary reflects frequency / usefulness and is not dated.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. A variety of culturally specific words is presented (i.e. formal vs. informal, words used in different TL speaking cultures, etc.).

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Vocabulary is presented in reasonable amounts per lesson / chapter.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Presentation of vocabulary is contextualized.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. The sequencing of vocabulary is logical.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. The sequencing of vocabulary provides for recycling / review.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. There is a good fit between the structures and vocabulary presented in each lesson / chapter.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Varied, sequenced practice (mechanical, meaningful, communicative) is provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL for VOCABULARY**

**G. CULTURE**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. All cultures / countries of the TL speaking world are represented.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Both “big C” and “little c” culture are represented.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Culture is integrated into a variety of activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Culture is integrated into lesson / chapter themes.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Up-do-date realia, maps, illustrations and texts are provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL for CULTURE**

My overall impression of this textbook is...

The major STRENGTHS of this textbook are...

The major WEAKNESSES of this textbook are...

\_\_\_\_\_ / 172 points = TOTAL SCORE

# TEACHING PORTFOLIO

- (1) Title Page
- (2) Table of Contents
- (3) Executive summary (written in the first person...the portfolio is personal and the writing should reflect that). It should also be accurate and it should go beyond superficial analysis.

**A.** Make sure you are able to describe your teaching/work responsibilities:

- a) What do you teach? What other work responsibilities do you fulfill professionally?
- b) Whom do you teach?
- c) Where do you teach?
- d) Under what circumstances?
- e) How often do you teach/work?
- f) How much responsibility do you have for your teaching?
- g) Other considerations?

**B. Philosophy.** As professional educators, we must examine the implicit and explicit assumptions we hold about teaching. This allows us to reflect on what we believe about the teaching and learning process. You should discuss: what are your beliefs about how people learn; what are your beliefs about your role as an educator; your beliefs about your discipline; why and how do you think your discipline is important?

**C. Commentary** linked to each supporting appendix containing material such as syllabi, student course critiques, student work samples, your samples activities, etc.

## (4) Tabbed Appendices with Supporting Documents

- (a) instructional units (lessons, activities);
- (b) a textbook evaluation;
- (c) research project for this class;
- (d) textbook evaluation completed in this class;
- (e) student-evaluations if you have any;
- (f) Classroom observation (peer or supervisor)

## EVALUATING YOUR TEACHING

As many TAs have already discovered, it is generally desirable to obtain some form of student input regarding their teaching and the course they are instructing **while that course is still in progress**. Such feedback can be used to make **changes** while a section is still going on and may be used in conjunction with end-of-term evaluation to plan for the next semester.

You can gather **MID-SEMESTER FEEDBACK** by distributing a short questionnaire to your students around midterms. The intent of mid-semester feedback is to provide you with information reflecting student opinion about specific aspects of your section, e.g., clarity of presentation, relevance of material, willingness to respond to questions. These brief surveys can also provide some global reactions to the course in general. By reviewing these questionnaires right away, you may be able to make changes that will affect the students from whom the feedback was obtained.

Another very different way to evaluate your success as a TA is to be videotaped while teaching. You can then gain a new perspective on your in-class performance by viewing your tape. By viewing your tape, you will be able to gain a "student's eye" view of your teaching and, at best, after receiving feedback (from your supervisor) on your tape you may be able to make changes in your teaching strategies.

**Anonymous feedback for the instructor!**

**10pts**

Write down the most interesting aspect of xxx that you learned in this class. Explain what it is, why you thought it was interesting.

Amount of homework? (circle one)

Way too much      a lot, but doable      perfect      could be more      not enough at all

How did you like the book/articles that we read for this class?

How did you like the materials provided on-line? (syllabus, lessons, homework, links)

Write down topics that you wish were covered or covered more in detail in class.

Any other comments?