



Developing an ESL Placement Test for Community College Students

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Introduction

Meeting the educational needs of non-native English speakers is one of the biggest challenges facing community colleges. In addition, retention is a particular concern for students with limited English proficiency.

ETS can help in solving these problems with the development of an ESL placement test designed for community colleges. At present, many schools report dissatisfaction with available ESL placement tests.



Introduction

An ESL placement test that accurately places students into courses with the appropriate degree of challenge can have the following benefits:

- Increased student learning
- Reduced student and faculty frustration
- Increased student retention

Introduction

Based on market research, a new ESL placement test should include the following features:

- Assess listening, reading, and writing skills (speaking was not deemed necessary)
- Place students into ESL courses more accurately than existing placement tests
- Provide scores immediately
- Provide more detailed student score reports
- Can be used to monitor learning gains as well as to indicate readiness to exit ESL programs

Introduction

In creating a new ESL placement test, ETS is able to capitalize on the following existing expertise:

- Developing language proficiency tests that reflect current views of language use in real life (TOEFL, TOEIC)
- Conducting programs of scientific research on the validity of our tests

Development Timeline

Key events in the development of a new ESL placement test include the following:

- Summer 2006 – ESL Placement Product Team created (includes ETS staff from Higher Education, Assessment Development, Statistical Analysis, Research, and other areas)
- October 2006 – Two days of meetings with panel of community college advisors
- January 2007 – Field testing of writing prompts
- April-May 2007 – Pilot testing of ESL placement test at several community colleges nationally
- January 2008 – Projected operational availability

Pilot Testing

In the current pilot testing, we are collecting results from at least 3,600 students. Some of the schools involved in the pilot testing include:

- De Anza College (CA)
- Foothill College (CA)
- Mercer County Community College (NJ)
- Miami Dade College (FL)
- Montgomery College (MD)
- Tarrant County College (TX)

Product Demonstration

Matt Chametzky, the project manager for the ESL placement test, will be demonstrating the pilot version of the product at the demonstration sessions concurrent with the reception at 6 PM today.

ETS ESL Placement Test

The ETS ESL placement test has the following features:

- Is completely Web-based
- Is an adaptive test
- Can discriminate across a wide spectrum of skill levels
- Includes productive writing (an essay component) for students at higher skill levels

ETS ESL Placement Test

The pilot version of the ETS ESL placement test consists of the following sections:

- Reading: 36 questions in 45 minutes
- Grammar: 24 questions in 20 minutes
- Listening: 24 questions in 25 minutes
- Writing: One essay in 25 minutes

When operational, students will receive four subscores as well as a total score. The test structure was determined by ETS assessment developers; test length is based on what is necessary to obtain reliable subscores.

ETS ESL Placement Test

Institutions will be able to set their own cut scores for course placements by matching descriptors from the test to their programs. ETS may assist institutions that request assistance in developing cut scores. In addition, ETS is interested in partnering with schools to carry out validity studies to understand how well the test is functioning.



ETS ESL Placement Test

The following are some screen shots from the pilot version of the ETS ESL placement test, Reading and Grammar sections.

Welcome

Thank you for participating in a pilot program for an English as a Second Language (ESL) Assessment for Educational Testing Service (ETS). Before you begin the test, please read and agree to the following:

Agreement

I understand that the purpose of this pilot is to collect data for the ETS ESL pilot. Data from this pilot will be used for research purposes and in the development of this product concept. Total testing time for the study is approximately 90 minutes. I understand that my participation is voluntary, that my responses will not be released to any institution, and that all pilot results are confidential and remain the property of ETS.

I voluntarily grant permission for my responses to this pilot test to be used for educational purposes such as research, instructional or test preparation material, educational research or informational publications. I understand that my identifying information will not be connected to this material in any way. I understand that withholding permission will not affect my score.

I understand and agree to the above information.

Click Next at the bottom of the page to continue.

Click Next to continue



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NEXT

Background Information

Please provide the following background information. Responses will be used for research and informational purposes only.

Native Language:

Gender:

Click Next at the bottom of the page to continue.

Click Next to continue



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General Test Information

This test will measure your ability to use the English language in a college setting. The test consists of the following sections:

Section	Number of Questions	Testing Time
Reading	36 question(s)	45 minutes
Grammar	24 question(s)	20 minutes
Listening	24 question(s)	25 minutes

Before each section, you will see directions that explain how to answer the questions in that section. A clock at the bottom of the page will tell you how much time you have remaining in each section.

Tests will be scored, but all results will be anonymous and individual scores will not be released to you or your college. If you do not know the answer, you are encouraged to guess. **If you choose not to answer a question, you will not be able to return to it. An unanswered question will be considered incorrect.**

Click Next at the bottom of the page to continue.

Click Next to continue



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NEXT

Reading Section: Directions

This is the Reading section of the test. In this section, there are two types of questions: vocabulary questions, and reading comprehension questions.

Your **vocabulary knowledge** is measured by testing words or phrases in single sentences. Some of these sentences have pictures and some do not. To answer these questions, you should click on the **one** best answer choice.

For example:

Mr. Meyers is **handsome**.

- late
- nice looking
- tall
- helpful

“Nice looking” is closest in meaning to “handsome” so you should click on “nice looking”.

Click Next at the bottom of the page to continue.

Click Next to continue



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NEXT

You will now begin the Reading Section of the test.

You will have a total of 45 minutes to read three or four passages and answer a total of 36 questions.

Click Next at the bottom of the page to begin the Reading Section.

Click Next to begin the Reading Section



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Listening. Learning. Leading.

Reading Comprehension

The assignment is difficult.

- interesting
- hard
- boring
- late

Click the correct answer, and confirm your selection by clicking on Next

Time remaining
44:55 of 45:00



NEXT

Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven was one of the world's greatest composers. By the time he died in Vienna in 1827, he was already famous for his beautiful music. He was also well known for his unusual behavior. He talked to himself and waved his arms in the air as he walked around town. Sometimes he didn't notice people.

He was completely deaf in his later years, but he still was able to "hear" the music in his head. He could still compose beautiful music. He took the legs off a piano and placed the piano directly on the floor. He sat on the floor so he could feel the vibrations from the piano coming up through the floor.



Reading Comprehension

Beethoven

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All of the following are mentioned as reasons Beethoven was well known EXCEPT

- waving his arms while walking
- composing beautiful music
- singing while he played the piano
- talking to himself as he walked down the street

Click the correct answer, and confirm your selection by clicking on Next

Time remaining
44:12 of 45:00



NEXT

You have reached the end of the Reading Section of the test.

Next you will see the directions for the Grammar Section.

Click Next at the bottom of the page to go to the next section.

Click Next to begin the Reading Section



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NEXT

Grammar Section: Directions

This is the Grammar section of the test. In this section, you will see incomplete sentences. Each incomplete sentence has four answer choices. Only **one** answer choice completes the sentence correctly. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

For example:

John and Maria _____ English at the adult school every Wednesday night.

- study
- to study
- studying
- studies

The first choice is the correct answer. Therefore, you click on the circle in front of the word "study."

If you do not know the answer to a question, try to guess. If you do not answer a question, you cannot go back to it. An unanswered question is marked wrong.

Now click Next to continue.

Click Next to continue



BACK



NEXT

You will now begin the Grammar section of the test.

You will have a total of 20 minutes to answer a total of 24 questions.

Now click Next to begin.

Click Next to begin the Grammar Section



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Grammar

The actors _____ their parts so they will be good when they perform in the play next week.

- practicing
- are practicing
- is practicing
- to practice

Click the correct answer, and confirm your selection by clicking on Next

Time remaining
19:55 of 20:00



NEXT

Grammar

They asked us to go to the school board _____ at ten o'clock.

- meet
- met
- meeting
- meets

Click the correct answer, and confirm your selection by clicking on Next

Time remaining
19:40 of 20:00



NEXT

Summary

ETS can help in meeting the educational needs of non-native English speakers in community colleges through the development of a more valid and reliable ESL placement test. In doing so, we hope to promote increased student learning and retention and greater faculty and student satisfaction with placements in ESL courses.



Questions?

Comments?

