

Introduction

This package provides a theoretical and practical introduction to the principles and practice of task-based language assessment for the classroom teacher working in secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Why was the package developed?

One of the key principles underpinning the school English language curriculum in Hong Kong is that of task-based language teaching. While this principle is gaining currency within the teaching community, it is still not widely understood how the principle can be used as a basis for assessment. In this package we introduce the features of task-based assessment (TBA) within a school-based curriculum and show how these features can be used to design appropriate assessment tasks.

This overarching aim is supported by the following subsidiary aims:

- **To help teachers distinguish, theoretically and practically, between formative and summative assessment.**

These two types of assessment occur at different stages in the course, and serve different functions. Formative assessment is designed to provide feedback to teachers and learners through on-going evaluation of learners' progress. Summative assessment is designed to determine what learners have learnt over a period of time on the course and how well they have learnt it. It is then used to provide information to learners and other stakeholders for the purposes of reporting, ranking and accountability, etc. Because the functions and outcomes of these two assessment processes are different, the ways in which learner performance are reported will also be different.

- **To help teachers understand the advantages, drawbacks and considerations when using different types of assessment.**

In the package, we also describe and illustrate a range of assessment methods as well as describing their advantages and disadvantages.

- **To introduce and demonstrate with examples the use of formative assessment tasks to enhance the process of learning and teaching.**

Most of the assessments done by classroom teachers will be aimed at improving learner performance rather than reporting on their skills at the end of the course. The focus will therefore be on formative rather than summative assessment, although the latter, of course, is also important.

- **To discuss and examine the issues and practicality in designing and implementing the various forms of assessment tasks, including both group and individual activities, in the secondary English classroom.**

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Although the package introduces key theoretical concepts in assessment in general, and in task-based assessment in particular, the main thrust is practical. To that end, in the body of the package, we set out a step-by-step procedure for developing assessment tasks.

- **To help teachers establish criteria for assessing learner performance which take into account the need for consistency, fairness, transparency and accountability.**

A key principle underpinning this package is the importance of integrating learning and teaching. We show how most teaching tasks can also be used for assessment, the main difference being that assessment tasks must be accompanied by criteria for evaluating learner performance.

- **To help teachers adapt appropriate feedback tools for both oral and written formative assessment tasks.**

The provision of appropriate feedback is fundamental for formative assessment. The nature of the feedback will determine whether or not learners are able to use the assessment to improve their performance.

Having worked through the package systematically, working independently or collaboratively, teachers should be able to develop their own bank of both formative and summative assessment tasks.

What is included in the package?

The package includes the following:

- An introduction to the concepts of task-based language teaching and task-based assessment along with a discussion of the place of task-based assessment within the school-based English Language curriculum
- A discussion of key assessment concepts including: indirect versus direct assessment, norm-referenced versus criterion-referenced assessment, proficiency versus achievement assessment, formative versus summative assessment
- A step-by-step procedure for developing assessment tasks
- Techniques for providing feedback to learners including conferencing, observation, and journaling
- A description of the roles of teachers and learners within the assessment process, with a particular focus on learner self and peer assessment
- An introduction to and rationale for formative assessment along with the provision of techniques for designing / using formative assessment instruments and giving feedback to learners
- A description of the characteristics of summative assessment along with considerations and criteria for designing and evaluating summative assessment tasks
- Four moderated sets of tasks which can be used for summative assessment or can be modified by teachers for their own assessment purposes