

The Hows of Creating Measurable and Meaningful Speaking Assessments

Assessing speaking skills in both small and large classes remains an elusive challenge for many teachers because of the complexity of the speech act itself. In many classes, oral testing (if done at all) is sometimes reduced to simple one-dimensional interviews

Thus, if we view speaking as a multidimensional / multifaceted process, then we can begin to break down the components and analyze them more effectively. Since the speech act is almost never linear (i.e., speech is often not very organized from one point to the next), our assessment process must take this into account. Furthermore, communicative competence is made of various elements that should be considered in the assessment process including:

- linguistic competence: grammar, pronunciation
- sociolinguistic competence: language appropriate for the situation
- discourse competence: logical order
- functional competence: accomplishing the assigned task
- strategic competence: questions, circumlocution
- non-verbal competence: gestures, gaze, proxemics

Because of the multi-faceted nature of speaking, a multi-dimensional approach to assessing students' skills can be taken in the form of alternative, on-going assessment, which is discussed in this presentation:

- classroom participation
- pronunciation tasks
- weekly digital voice journals using Google Voice and digital voice recorders
- language flashcards
- the use of audio/video content

Purpose of Presentation

- Understand the nature of communication
- Discuss the principles of effective assessment
- Describe real-world examples of ongoing alternative assessment portfolios including learning-styles checklist, digital voice journals, fieldwork, role-plays, and simulations

Communicative Competence

- Knowing *how*, *when*, and *why* to say *what* to *whom* in *what manner*

Testing versus Assessment

- Evaluation of a single event versus studying the process of learning and growth over time
- Students make decisions about their goals, study, and progress

Traditional Language Testing

- Tries to logically evaluate a limited number of dimensions and gives students the feeling that there are only certain dimensions of communication.
- Follows the "one chance, that's it" mentality which does not mirror the real world.
- Relies on decontextualized tasks not related to authentic production.