Understanding grammar and vocabulary assessment

What every teacher should know

Fiona Barker and Angeliki Salamoura
Who are you?

A. I’m a teacher.
B. I’m a co-ordinator/director of studies.
C. I’m a learner.
D. I’m a parent.
Why are you here?

A. I need evidence of Continuous Professional Development.

B. I want to earn an Open Badge.

C. I want to know more about grammar and vocabulary assessment.

D. Other
Digital Open Badges

What are Open Badges?
A Digital Open Badge shows others what you have accomplished. It can show your skills or interests, or any Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that you have achieved. Open Badges are displayed on social networking profiles, online CVs, job sites and more. Badges contain information about your learning achievements and CPD activities.

Your badges can help employers, organisations, educational institutions and individuals to verify your skills, interests and achievements.

How can I earn an Open Badge?
You can get a badge by attending and participating in events that offer Open Badges. At Cambridge English these include webinars, events and training days. When you have attended the event and fulfilled that badge’s learning objectives, you can claim your badge.

Open Badges from Cambridge English are in Beta. There will be lots of chances to give your feedback about how useful Open Badges are for you.

How do I collect and share Open Badges?

http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/events/open-badges
Understanding grammar and vocabulary assessment

What every teacher should know

Fiona Barker and Angeliki Salamoura

Cambridge English
Our aim today

- key questions
- practical tips

Why am I testing?

Who am I testing?

What am I testing?

How am I scoring?

How am I testing?

How is my test benefiting learners?
Why is assessment of vocabulary and grammar one of the most common forms of testing?
What am I testing?
Which of the following are aspects of grammatical and lexical ability?

A. Reciting rules
B. Ability to provide an accurate translation
C. Ability to select a correct form from several options on a multiple-choice test
D. Ability to use grammar and vocabulary correctly while writing, speaking, reading or listening
E. All of the above
“Assessment of grammatical ability is nothing new. What has changed over time is what teachers have chosen to assess under the title of ‘grammar’.”

(Purpura 2004:3)
What is grammatical and lexical ability?

reciting rules

Past → Now

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Cambridge English
What is grammatical and lexical ability?

Past

- reciting rules

Now

- provide an accurate translation
What is grammatical and lexical ability?

- Past: reciting rules
- Now: provide an accurate translation, select a correct form from several options
What is grammatical and lexical ability?

- **Past**
  - reciting rules
  - provide an accurate translation

- **Now**
  - select a correct form from several options
  - use grammar and vocabulary correctly while writing, speaking, reading or listening

(Cambridge English)
Aspects of grammatical and lexical ability

pronunciation
spelling
morphology
syntax
frequency
register
discourse features

meaning
associations
synonyms
antonyms
collocations
contexts of use
figurative use
Why assess grammar and vocabulary?
Why assess grammar and vocabulary?

**SPEAKING**

- Generation of ideas (conceptualisation)
- Knowledge of grammar
- Knowledge of vocabulary
- Knowledge of sounds
- Articulation
Why assess grammar and vocabulary?

**READING**

- Recognise and understand a word
- Understand the **basic** meaning of a **phrase** or **sentence**
- Understand **implied meaning**
- Understand information **across sentences**
- ... across a **whole text**
- ... across **texts**
Why assess grammar and vocabulary?

READING

- Recognise and understand a word
- Understand the **basic** meaning of a **phrase** or **sentence**
- Understand **implied** meaning
- Understand information across sentences
- ... across a **whole text**
- ... across **texts**

SPEAKING

- Generation of **ideas** (conceptualisation)
- Knowledge of **grammar**
- Knowledge of **vocabulary**
- Knowledge of **sounds**
- Articulation
Careful of negative washback though!
How am I testing?
Directly

A wildlife cameraman

I (0) ..... a living as a freelance wildlife cameraman working all over the world. It is my job to provide the (1) ..... material from which a natural history programme is (2) ..... up. If the lifestyle agrees with you, the travel and the filming can be great. There is fantastic variety: I often do not have the slightest (3) ..... where I am going or what I will see. There is also a certain pleasure in (4) ..... some of the

1  A pure                B plain                C raw               D bare
2  A made                B set                  C taken             D put
3  A idea                B thought              C purpose           D sense
Indirectly

Write an answer in 120–180 words in an appropriate style.

You have seen this announcement in an international magazine.

MY FAVOURITE TEACHER

Tell us about a favourite teacher of yours and say what you remember about him or her. We will publish the most interesting article next month. Write your article.

---

My Favourite Teacher

I can remember my favourite teacher very well indeed. She was my primary school teacher and because it was a small, village primary school, she had to teach us all the lessons, maths, reading, writing, singing, art and so on.

Her name was Mrs Horvat and I think she had taught at that school for years. She knew all the children and even their parents as well. She was quiet old but full of energy and her lessons were always interesting.

She was also very kind and cheerful. The lessons always started laughing and I felt really well during her classes. We never got boring and she made all interesting for us. Sometimes, we went out for an excursion, like to a museum or zoo. That was great!

I think I will always remember her.
What type of response does each of these tasks elicit?

TASK A

TASK B

TASK C
Extended production

Limited production

Selected response

Cambridge English
How to evaluate test items

**Stem** Maria hasn’t seen her ........... 2 years.
How to evaluate test items

Stem
Maria hasn’t seen her ............ 2 years.

Response
a. during
b. since
c. till
d. for
How to evaluate test items

**Stem**
Maria hasn’t seen her .......... 2 years.

**Response**
- a. during
- b. since
- c. till
- d. for

**Distractors**
How to evaluate test items

*Stem*  
Maria hasn’t seen her ........ 2 years.

*Response*  
a. during
b. since

c. till  
d. **for**

**Distractors**

**Key**

Cambridge English
Evaluating a test item

How well does this item test grammatical or lexical knowledge?

A: Does your computer have a modem?
B: Yes, ________ .
   a. they have           c. it does
   b. it is              d. they do
Evaluating a test item

A: Does your computer have a modem?
B: Yes, ________ .
   a. they have      c. it does
   b. it is          d. they do

An improvement?

Mike: Does your computer have a webcam?
Jenny: Yes, it ______ .
   a. is       c. does
   b. has      d. have
Tips 1: general guidelines
Tips 1: general guidelines

- No tricky questions
Tips 1: general guidelines

- No tricky questions
- Short stems only (maximum two lines)
Tips 1: general guidelines

- No tricky questions
- Short stems only (maximum two lines)
- Do not test language based on prescriptive grammar
  - ‘With whom did you go?’ vs. ‘Who did you go with?’
Tips 1: general guidelines

• No tricky questions

• Short stems only (maximum two lines)

• Do not test language based on prescriptive grammar
  o ‘With whom did you go?’ vs. ‘Who did you go with?’

• Provide an example of a correctly answered item
Evaluating a test item

Emily: Do you want some bread?
Josh: Yes, ________ some.

a. I love  c. I’ll hate
b. I’d love  d. I hate
**Evaluating a test item**

Emily: Do you want some bread?
Josh: Yes, ________ some.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. I love</th>
<th>c. I’ll hate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. I’d love</td>
<td>d. I hate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do not test both grammar and vocabulary in the same question.
Evaluating a test item

Emily: Do you want some bread?
Josh: Yes, ________ some.

a. I love  c. I’ll hate
b. I’d love  d. I hate

An improvement?

Emily: Do you want some bread?
Josh: Yes, I ________ some.

a. could love  c. will love
b. would love  d. am loving
Tips 2: keys and distractors
Tips 2: keys and distractors

• Include ONLY ONE key or correct answer
Tips 2: keys and distractors

• Include ONLY ONE key or correct answer

• Make all distractors equally plausible and ‘attractive’
Tips 2: keys and distractors

- Include ONLY ONE key or correct answer
- Make all distractors equally plausible and ‘attractive’
- Do not use distractors that test something the students haven’t yet learned
Evaluating a test item

The man ________ to his 2:00 class.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. didn’t go</td>
<td>c. didn’t went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. don’t go</td>
<td>d. don’t went</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluating a test item

The man ________ to his 2:00 class.

a. didn’t go  
b. don’t go  
c. didn’t went  
d. don’t went

Distractors should be UNGRAMMATICAL when placed in the stem, but they should be GRAMMATICAL when considered in isolation.
Evaluating a test item

The man ________ to his 2:00 class.

a. didn’t go  c. didn’t went
b. don’t go    d. don’t went

An improvement?

The man didn’t ________ to his 2:00 class.

a. go  c. went
b. goes  d. gone
Tips 3: response format
Tips 3: response format

• Keys and distractors should be more or less of equal length
Tips 3: response format

• Keys and distractors should be more or less of equal length
• If all choices are of different length, order them from shortest to longest or longest to shortest
Tips 3: response format

• Keys and distractors should be more or less of equal length
• If all choices are of different length, order them from shortest to longest or longest to shortest
• Do not repeat the same word in the response if it can be put in the stem, e.g.:

\[
\text{Joan went to school ________.}
\]

a. at 8 in the morning c. at 8 of the morning
b. at 8 on the morning d. at 8 at the morning
How am I scoring?
Scoring

How can you score the task types we discussed?

• a selected response item?
  • True/False?
  • Multiple Choice Question?
Scoring

Incorrect answer
• 0 marks

Correct answer
• 1 mark
Scoring

How can you score the task types we discussed?

• a selected response item?
• a limited production item?
  • Sentence Completion?
Scoring: limited production task

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

Joan was in favour of visiting the museum.

IDEA
Joan thought it would be ______________________ to the museum.
Scoring: limited production task

Joan was in favour of visiting the museum.

**IDEA**

Joan thought it would be _a good idea to go_ to the museum.
Scoring: limited production task

Joan was in favour of visiting the museum.

**IDEA**

Joan thought it would be _a good idea | to go_ to the museum.

Scalar scoring – 0 or 1 or 2 marks can be awarded.
Scoring

How can you score the task types we discussed?

• a selected response item?
• a limited production item?
• an extended production task?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B2</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Communicative Achievement</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.</td>
<td>Uses the conventions of the communicative task effectively to hold the target reader’s attention and communicate straightforward and complex ideas, as appropriate.</td>
<td>Text is well organised and coherent, using a variety of cohesive devices and organisational patterns to generally good effect.</td>
<td>Uses a range of vocabulary, including less common lexis, appropriately. Uses a range of simple and complex grammatical forms with control and flexibility. Occasional errors may be present but do not impede communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.</td>
<td>Uses the conventions of the communicative task to hold the target reader’s attention and communicate straightforward ideas.</td>
<td>Text is generally well organised and coherent, using a variety of linking words and cohesive devices.</td>
<td>Uses a range of everyday vocabulary appropriately, with occasional inappropriate use of less common lexis. Uses a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms with a good degree of control. Errors do not impede communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.</td>
<td>Uses the conventions of the communicative task in generally appropriate ways to communicate straightforward ideas.</td>
<td>Text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices.</td>
<td>Uses everyday vocabulary generally appropriately, while occasionally overusing certain lexis. Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.

Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.

Performance below Band 1.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Communicative Achievement</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Performance below Band 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uses a range of everyday vocabulary appropriately, with occasional inappropriate use of less common lexis.

Uses a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms with a good degree of control.

Errors do not impede communication.
I am thinking it will be a good idea to film the English class with our teacher, who is Mrs. Roberts. Most students love Mrs. Roberts and we enjoy this class. Everyone will see that it is fun. They will want to join the class.

The restaurant where we are having the schools' students are happy to come to have good food in. This school's garden of the school and the sports field is a lot of trees and grass and flowers and good for relax.

I think that if people see this film they will want to come to have our daily life.
Useful resources
English Vocabulary Profile

- Free online resource based on research into vocabulary learning
- Shows which words and phrases – and individual meanings of each word – are typically mastered at six levels of the CEFR
- Valuable tool for decision-making around what to teach and how to assess
About the English Vocabulary Profile

Welcome to the pilot version of the full six-level English Vocabulary Profile. This version covers levels A1-C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for British and American English.

If you have any comments, questions or requests, the EVP team would love to hear from you! Get in touch now.

- What is the English Vocabulary Profile (EVP)?
- Why is the EVP important to me?
- How has the EVP been created?
- What does an EVP entry include?
- How can I work with the EVP?

What is the English Vocabulary Profile?

The EVP shows, in both British and American English, which words and phrases learners around the world know at each level - A1 to C2 - of the CEFR. Rather than providing a syllabus of the vocabulary that learners should know, the EVP project verifies what they do know at each level. CEFR levels are assigned not just to the words themselves, but to each individual meaning of these words. So, for instance, the word degree is assigned level A2 for the sense TEMPERATURE, B1 for QUALIFICATION, B2 for AMOUNT and C2 for the phrase a/some degree of (sth). The capitalized guidewords help the user to navigate longer entries, and phrases are listed separately within an entry.

Find out more about the CEFR.
moon /mʌn/  

**NOUN**

the moon

- the round object which moves in the sky around the Earth and can be seen at night

**Dictionary example:**

We gazed at the moon.

**Learner example:**

There is a big window [and] from it I can see mountains, the sky, the moon and the sun.

**be over the moon** INFORMAL

- to be very pleased about something

**Dictionary example:**

She was over the moon about her results.

**Learner example:**

It’s very kind of you to let me use things in your flat. I’m over the moon!
# English Grammar Profile

## English Grammar Profile Online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SuperCategory</th>
<th>SubCategory</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Can-do statement</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADJECTIVES</td>
<td>combining</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>COMBINING TWO ADJECTIVES WITH 'AND' Can use 'and' to join a limited range of common adjectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJECTIVES</td>
<td>combining</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>COMBINING TWO ADJECTIVES WITH 'BUT' Can use 'but' to join a limited range of common adjectives, after 'be'.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJECTIVES</td>
<td>combining</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>COMBINING BEFORE THE NOUN Can use a comma to combine two adjectives used before the noun, following the usual order of adjective types.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJECTIVES</td>
<td>combining</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>COMBINING COMPARATIVE ADJECTIVES WITH 'AND' Can use 'and' to join a limited range of comparative adjectives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJECTIVES</td>
<td>combining</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>COMBINING MORE THAN TWO ADJECTIVES Can use 'and' to join more than two adjectives, after 'be'.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJECTIVES</td>
<td>combining</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>COMBINING THE SAME COMPARATIVE ADJECTIVE WITH 'AND' Can use 'and' to repeat a comparative adjective to indicate change over time, usually after 'become' or get</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJECTIVES</td>
<td>combining</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>COMPOUND ADJECTIVES Can use a limited range of compound adjectives (good-looking, well-known)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Enabling skills
Summary

Enabling skills

Washback

Cambridge English
Summary

- Enabling skills
- Washback
- Range of tasks & responses
Summary

- Enabling skills
- Washback
- Range of tasks & responses
- Well-constructed test items
Summary

- Enabling skills
- Scoring & resources
- Well-constructed test items
- Range of tasks & responses
- Washback

Cambridge English
Further information
Teaching English

Free resources for teachers
- Sample papers, handbooks, lesson plans and teacher guides

Teaching Qualifications
- For new and experienced teachers

Teaching Framework
- Helps you assess which stage you are at in your professional development and work out where you want to get to next

Webinars
- About our exams and teaching

www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english
Examining English - the complete set

www.cambridgeenglish.org/silt
Further information

Using digital tools to enrich your learners’ vocabulary
24 and 26 April

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Keep up to date with what’s new via the Cambridge English Language Assessment website:
www.cambridgeenglish.org

For information on Cambridge English webinars for teachers:
www.cambridgeenglish.org/webinars