

## **Perception of techniques for testing reading**

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### **Abstract**

This study reports the findings of a small-scale study that investigated the use of some techniques for testing reading comprehension of foreign language learners. The study aimed to find out the frequency of the use of the testing techniques and how useful they were perceived both by teachers and learners of English at high schools and university. To do this, a short questionnaire was administered to 32 teachers and 192 learners of English at different schools. The analysis of the data collected indicated that teachers tend to have clear tendencies to use certain techniques more frequently than the others. Frequency of use and perceived effectiveness appeared to have a strong correlation, implying that teachers tend to use those techniques that they believe are useful. However, a further paired samples t-test analysis revealed that less frequently used techniques are perceived more useful than they are actually used. As for students' perception of the effectiveness of these techniques, statistical analysis indicated varying preferences between university and high school students for different types of testing techniques. The results of the study suggest that teachers may need encouragement to try out different techniques and that teachers need to be conscious of their students' preferences in selecting these techniques for testing their students' reading comprehension.

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## Perception of techniques for testing reading

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## Outline of the presentation

- Techniques used for testing reading
- The study
- Findings
- Conclusion

## Categories

- **Textually explicit questions:** just copying the correct answer from the text
- **Textually implicit questions:** combine information across sentences to find the answer
- **Script-base (scriptually implicit) questions:** refer to the background knowledge

(Pearson and Johnson 1978)

## Techniques for testing reading

- The Cloze Test
- Gap Filling
- C-Test
- The Cloze Elide Test
- Multiple Choice Questions
- Summary Test
- The gapped summary
- Dichotomous Items
- Editing Tests
- Question and Answer Tests
- Short-Answer Tests
- Matching Tasks
- Ordering Tasks

**No best method (Alderson 2000)**

## The cloze test

- "...typically constructed by deleting from selected texts every *n*-th word (...usually ...between 5 and 12) and simply requiring the test-taker to restore the word ..." (Alderson 2000: 207).
- **N= 5-11** (Chavez-Oller et al. 1985, Weir 1990),  
**N= 5-7** (McNamara 2000), **N= 5** (Alderson 1979)
- The tester cannot control which words to delete.
- Do not assess *global reading* ability but assess *local-level reading*.
- At least 50 deletions for reliability (Alderson 2000).

## An example of a cloze test constructed by deleting every sixth word. There are no deletions in the first two sentences.

It was almost midnight. John was still awake because he did not have to get up early in the morning. 1) His favourite actor's movie on TV 2) had just finished. The bell rang. 3) He opened the door. It was 4) his flat-mate, Tom. He had forgotten 5) his keys at home in the 6) morning. He seemed too tired to 7) chat with John so he went 8) to bed as soon as possible. 9) John felt lonely and decided to 10) go to bed. He went to the 11) bathroom and brushed his teeth. When 12) he came into his bedroom, he 13) noticed some candies on the table. 14) He ate a few of them. 15) The candies reminded him of his 16) childhood. Since he did not want 17) to sleep, he decided to look 18) at some old photos. He felt 19) sad when he saw his ex-girlfriend 20) Laura in a photo. He remembered 21) the days they had spent together. 22) He checked his watch and went 23) to bed.

### Gap-filling test

- Deletion of words on a rational basis, not based on any system.
- The tester can control the test.
- Does not require extracting information by skimming (Weir 1993).

### An example of a gap filling test which is constructed by deleting ten content words.

It was almost midnight. John was still awake because he did not have to get up 1) early in the morning. His favourite actor's 2) movie on TV had just finished. The 3) bell rang. He opened the door. It was his flat-mate, Tom. He had forgotten his 4) keys at home in the morning. He seemed too tired to chat with John so he went to 5) bed as soon as possible. John felt lonely and decided to go to bed. He went to the 6) bathroom and brushed his 7) teeth. When he came into his bedroom, he noticed some candies on the table. He ate a few of them. The candies reminded him of his childhood. Since he did not want to 8) sleep, he decided to look at some old 9) photos. He felt sad when he saw his ex-girlfriend Laura in a photo. He remembered the days they had spent 10) together. He checked his watch and went to bed.

### C-test

- An alternative integrated approach (Weir 1990, 1993), based upon the same theory of closure or reduced redundancy as the cloze test (Alderson 2000).
- Restoring the second half of every second word.
- More reliable and valid but also more irritating than cloze tests.

### An example of a C-test which is constructed by deleting the second half of every second word.

It was almost midnight. John was still awake because he did not have to get up early in the morning. His favourite actor's movie on TV had just finished. The bell rang. He opened the door. It was his flat-mate, Tom. He had forgotten his keys at home in the morning. He seemed too tired to chat with John so he went to bed as soon as possible. John felt lonely and decided to go to bed. He went to the bathroom and brushed his teeth. When he came into his bedroom, he noticed some candies on the table. He ate a few of them. The candies reminded him of his childhood. Since he did not want to sleep, he decided to look at some of photos. He felt sad when he saw his ex-girlfriend Laura in a photo. He remembered the days they had spent together. He checked his watch and went to bed.

### The cloze elide test

- The tester inserts words and the test-taker is asked to find the words that do not belong to the text.
- Seen as puzzles rather than language tests (Weir 1993).
- Likely to be used, not for comprehension, but for a measure of comprehension.

### An example of a cloze elide test which is constructed by inserting five words.

It was almost midnight. John was still awake because ~~so~~ he did not have to get up early in the morning. His favourite actor's movie on TV had just finished. The bell rang. He opened the door. It was his flat-mate friend, ~~Tom~~. He had forgotten his keys at home in the morning. He seemed too very tired to ~~chat~~ with John so he went to bed as soon as possible. John felt lonely and decided to go to bed. He went to the bathroom and brushed his teeth. When after he came into ~~his~~ bedroom, he noticed some candies on the table. He ate a few of them. The candies reminded him of his childhood. Since he did not want to sleep, he decided to look at some old photos. He felt sad when he saw his ex-girlfriend Laura in a photo picture. He remembered ~~the~~ days they had spent together. He checked his watch and went to bed.

### Multiple-choice question

- Consists "...of a stem and a number of options (usually four), from which the testee has to select the right one" (Ur 1996: 38).
- Time-consuming to prepare, but easy to evaluate, also a machine-markable technique.
- Marking them is totally objective (Weir 1990).

### An example of a multiple choice question

(After a text on memory)

Memorising is easier when the material to be learned is

- ←..... question
- a) in a foreign language ←..... distractor
- b) already partly known ←..... the correct answer
- c) unfamiliar but easy ←..... distractor
- d) of no special interest ←..... distractor

(Alderson et al. 1995: 50)

### Summary tests

- *the free-recall test (immediate-recall test)*: after reading the test writing down everything that can be remembered.
- *the summary test*: summarising the main ideas of the text which was read beforehand.
- usually scored according to Meyer's (1975) *recall scoring protocol*, where the text is divided into idea units and the relationship between these idea units is examined.
- Whether testing the writing or the reading skill.
- Ask the test-takers to write the summary in L1 or present a number of summaries and ask them to select the best summary.

### An example of the summary test

"You are writing a brief account of the eruption of Mount St Helens for an encyclopaedia. Summarise in less than 100 words the events leading up to the actual eruption on May 18."

(A real life summary task from International English Language Testing System Specimen Materials in Alderson 2000: 235).

### The gapped summary

- Introduced to overcome the problems of Summary Tests (Alderson 2000).
- Readers restore the missing words in the summary without referring to the original text.
- Does not test the writing ability.

### An example of the gapped summary test

Complete the summary of events below leading up to the eruption of Mount St. Helens. Choose NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from the passage for each answer.

In 1979 the Geological Survey warned the local population to expect a violent eruption before the end of the century. The forecast was soon proved accurate. At the end of March there were tremors and clouds formed above the mountain. This was followed by a lull, but in early May the top of the mountain rose by 500 feet. People were evacuated from around the mountain. Finally, on May 18th at 8.32 Mount St. Helens exploded.

(Adapted from International English Language Testing System in Alderson 2000: 240)

### Dichotomous items (True-false technique)

- Whether the given statement is true or false
- The ease of construction makes this technique popular.
- Easy to design and score (Ur 1996).
- Also machine-markable (Alderson 2000).
- A 50% possibility of guessing the right answer.
- Add one more statement such as 'not given' However, such statements actually tend to test the ability of inferring meaning rather than comprehension.
- Ask them firstly to state whether the statements are true or false, and secondly to correct the false ones.

### An example of dichotomous items

(After reading an article about a young actor.)

Are the sentences 'Right' (A) or 'Wrong' (B)? If there is not enough information to answer 'Right' or 'Wrong', choose 'Doesn't say' (C).

- A lot of people want to photograph Brendan.  
A Right      B Wrong      C Doesn't say
- Brendan would like to be a film writer.  
A Right      B Wrong      C Doesn't say

(Adapted from Key English Test in Alderson 2000: 223)

### Editing tests

- Identify the errors and correct them.
- Similar to proof-reading tasks in real life (Alderson 2000).
- Criticised since they provide wrong information (Sezer 2002).

### Examples of editing tests

Editing tests consist of passages in which errors have been introduced, which the candidate has to identify. These errors can be in multiple-choice format, or can be more open, for example by asking candidates to identify one error per line of text and to write the correction opposite the line. The nature of the error will determine to a large extent whether the item is testing the ability to read, or a more restricted linguistic ability.

- 1) errors introduced
- 2) be
- 3) identify
- 4) large
- 5) a
- 6) a
- 7) a

Editing tests consist of passages in which errors have been introduced, which the candidate has to identify. These errors can be in multiple-choice format, or can be more open, by asking candidates to identify one error per line of text and to write the correction opposite the line. The nature of the error will determine to a large extent whether the item is testing the ability to read, or a more restricted linguistic ability.

(Adapted from Alderson 2000: 224)

### Question and answer tests

- Check the comprehension
- In *open-ended questions*, test-takers are asked to write down every detail related with the question.
- The marking process in *closed questions* is easier since there are fewer possible correct answers.
- grammatical mistakes: take into account or ignore.

### Examples of question and answer tests

#### Open-ended question

- Where did Frances & Michael meet for the first time? Describe Michael's feelings at that time.

#### Closed question

- What does Michael do when something bad happens?

### Short-answer tests

- Draw conclusions & answer, not just responding 'yes' / 'no'.
- Extremely useful for testing comprehension (Weir 1993).
- Tests the ability to identify referents (Hudges 2003).
- A semi-objective alternative to MCQs (Alderson 1996, 2000).
- One needs to understand the text to write the right answer (compare with open-ended questions) (Cohen 1998).
- "The best short-answer questions are those with a unique correct response" (Hudges 2003: 144).

### An example of a short answer test

There was a time when Marketa disliked her mother-in-law. That was when she and Karel were living with her in-laws (her father-in-law was still alive) and Marketa was exposed daily to the woman's resentment and touchiness. They couldn't bear it for long and moved out. Their motto at the time was 'as far from Mama as possible'. They had gone to live in a town at the other end of the country and thus could see Karel's parents only once a year.

(Kundera 1996: 37)

**Question:** What is the relationship between Marketa & Karel?

**Expected answer:** husband and wife

(Alderson 2000: 227)

### Matching

- Two sets of stimuli to be matched against each other
- Each item acts as a distractor except one.
- Give more alternatives than the matching task requires since there is only one final choice, (Alderson 2000: 219).

### An example of a matching task

*You are going to read a magazine article about computerised patients. Choose from the list (A-H) the sentence which best summarises each part (1-6) of the article. There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use. There is an example at the beginning (0).*

- A It is now possible to show patients what will happen to them during surgery.
- B The amount of information meant that it was impossible to send quickly.
- C Very realistic images will help prevent errors during surgery.
- D A donated body made it all possible.
- E Doctors are now looking for more bodies to put on computer.
- F The ease with which the disk can be used means it is very popular.
- G The tiniest details were put on camera for the computer image.
- H Movement of the body image will aid surgery.

(Evans & Dooley 1998: 43)

### Ordering tasks

- Putting the scrambled words, sentences, paragraphs or texts into correct order.
- They test the ability to detect cohesion, overall text organisation or complex grammar (Alderson 2000).
- Accept all sensible orders.
- Marked according to *Weighted Marking Protocol* (Razi 2005).

### The ordering task

**Put the scrambled sentences into the correct order that they happen.**

- (.....) John ate some candies.
- (.....) John felt sad.
- (.....) Tom went to bed and John felt lonely.
- (.....) John watched his favourite actor's movie on TV.
- (.....) John remembered his childhood.
- (.....) The bell rang and Tom came home.
- (.....) John looked at photos.
- (.....) John brushed his teeth.

## The study

- **Aim:** to find out the frequency of the use of the testing techniques and how useful they were perceived
- **Setting:** Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University & English Medium School
- **Participants:** 32 teachers & 190 students
- **Instrument:** 2 versions of the questionnaire for testing reading techniques
- **Procedure for data collection:** administered to the teachers & students and completed in 10 minutes.
- **Procedure for data analysis:** descriptive statistics and T-Test on SPSS.

## Teachers' use of testing techniques

| TECHNIQUES              | N  | Mean   | SD     |
|-------------------------|----|--------|--------|
| 1. TRUE FALSE           | 32 | 4,4063 | ,7976  |
| 2. QUESTION ANSWER      | 32 | 4,2812 | ,9583  |
| 3. SHORT ANSWER         | 31 | 4,1290 | ,8848  |
| 4. ORDERING             | 32 | 4,0625 | ,7594  |
| 5. MATCHING             | 32 | 4,0313 | 1,1212 |
| 6. MULTIPLE CHOICE TEST | 32 | 4,0000 | ,9158  |
| 7. GAP FILLING          | 32 | 3,8125 | 1,0298 |
| 8. EDITING              | 32 | 3,3125 | 1,0607 |
| 9. GAPPED SUMMARY       | 32 | 3,1875 | 1,4242 |
| 10. CLOZE ELIDE         | 32 | 3,0625 | 1,0758 |
| 11. SUMMARY             | 30 | 3,0000 | 1,3391 |
| 12. CLOZE               | 31 | 2,3871 | 1,0856 |
| 13. C TEST              | 31 | 2,2581 | 1,2102 |

## Teachers' perception of testing techniques

| TECHNIQUES             | N  | Mean   | SD     |
|------------------------|----|--------|--------|
| 1. ORDERING            | 32 | 4,4688 | ,6214  |
| 2. MATCHING            | 32 | 4,3125 | ,6445  |
| 3. QUESTION AND ANSWER | 32 | 4,2813 | ,8514  |
| 4. TRUE FALSE          | 32 | 4,2500 | ,8424  |
| 5. EDITING             | 31 | 4,0323 | ,7521  |
| 6. GAP FILLING         | 32 | 4,0000 | ,8424  |
| 7. MULTIPLE CHOICE     | 32 | 4,0000 | ,9504  |
| 8. GAPPED SUMMARY      | 32 | 3,9688 | ,9667  |
| 9. SHORT ANSWER        | 32 | 3,8438 | 1,0809 |
| 10. CLOZE ELIDE        | 32 | 3,6583 | 1,1248 |
| 11. SUMMARY            | 31 | 3,4516 | 1,3125 |
| 12. CLOZE              | 31 | 3,0645 | ,9286  |
| 13. C TEST             | 32 | 2,7812 | 1,2111 |

## Pearson Correlation: Relationship between frequency of use of techniques and perceived effectiveness

|                     |                     |      |
|---------------------|---------------------|------|
| CLOZE               | Pearson Correlation | ,583 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,001 |
| GAP FILLING         | Pearson Correlation | ,595 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,000 |
| C TEST              | Pearson Correlation | ,778 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,000 |
| CLOZE ELIDE         | Pearson Correlation | ,472 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,006 |
| SUMMARY             | Pearson Correlation | ,503 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,005 |
| GAPPED SUMMARY      | Pearson Correlation | ,403 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,022 |
| QUESTION AND ANSWER | Pearson Correlation | ,770 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,000 |
| SHORT ANSWER        | Pearson Correlation | ,605 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,000 |
| MATCHING            | Pearson Correlation | ,477 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,006 |

## Pearson Correlation: Relationship between frequency of use of techniques and perceived effectiveness

|                 |                     |      |
|-----------------|---------------------|------|
| MULTIPLE CHOICE | Pearson Correlation | ,334 |
|                 | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,062 |
| TRUE FALSE      | Pearson Correlation | ,276 |
|                 | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,126 |
| EDITING         | Pearson Correlation | ,296 |
|                 | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,106 |
| ORDERING        | Pearson Correlation | ,278 |
|                 | Sig. (2-tailed)     | ,124 |

## PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST: MEAN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN USE OF FREQUENCY AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS

| FREQUENCY vs USEFULNESS | Mean | N      | Std. Deviation | Paired Differences | t      | df     | Sig. (2-tailed) |      |
|-------------------------|------|--------|----------------|--------------------|--------|--------|-----------------|------|
| CLOZE (12)              | F    | 2,4333 | 30             | 1,0726             | -.6333 | -3,739 | 29              | ,001 |
|                         | E    | 3,0667 | 30             | ,9444              |        |        |                 |      |
| C TEST (13)             | F    | 2,2581 | 31             | 1,2102             | -.5484 | -3,770 | 30              | ,001 |
|                         | E    | 2,8065 | 31             | 1,2225             |        |        |                 |      |
| CLOZE ELIDE (10)        | F    | 3,0625 | 32             | 1,0758             | -.5938 | -2,967 | 31              | ,006 |
|                         | E    | 3,6563 | 32             | 1,1248             |        |        |                 |      |
| GAPPED SUMMARY (9)      | F    | 3,1875 | 32             | 1,4242             | -.7813 | -3,246 | 31              | ,003 |
|                         | E    | 3,9688 | 32             | ,9667              |        |        |                 |      |
| EDITING (8)             | F    | 3,3871 | 31             | ,9892              | -.6452 | -3,420 | 30              | ,002 |
|                         | E    | 4,0323 | 31             | ,7521              |        |        |                 |      |
| ORDERING (4)            | F    | 4,0625 | 32             | ,7594              | -.4063 | -2,746 | 31              | ,010 |
|                         | E    | 4,4688 | 32             | ,6214              |        |        |                 |      |

**PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST: MEAN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN USE OF FREQUENCY AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS**

| FREQUENCY vs USEFULNESS |   | Mean   | N  | SD     | Paired Diff. | t      | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------------------------|---|--------|----|--------|--------------|--------|----|-----------------|
| GAP FILLING (7)         | F | 3,8125 | 32 | 1,0298 | -,1875       | -1,235 | 31 | ,226            |
|                         | U | 4,0000 | 32 | ,8424  |              |        |    |                 |
| MULTIPLE C.T. (6)       | F | 4,0000 | 32 | ,9158  | ,0000        | ,000   | 31 | 1,000           |
|                         | U | 4,0000 | 32 | ,9504  |              |        |    |                 |
| SUMMARY (11)            | F | 3,0000 | 30 | 1,3391 | -,4667       | -1,919 | 29 | ,065            |
|                         | U | 3,4667 | 30 | 1,3322 |              |        |    |                 |
| TRUE FALSE (1)          | F | 4,4063 | 32 | ,7976  | ,1563        | ,895   | 31 | ,378            |
|                         | U | 4,2500 | 32 | ,8424  |              |        |    |                 |
| QUESTION ANSWER (2)     | F | 4,2813 | 32 | ,9583  | ,0000        | ,000   | 31 | 1,000           |
|                         | U | 4,2813 | 32 | ,8514  |              |        |    |                 |
| SHORT ANSWER (3)        | F | 4,1290 | 31 | ,8648  | ,2903        | 1,793  | 30 | ,083            |
|                         | U | 3,8387 | 31 | 1,0984 |              |        |    |                 |
| MATCHING (5)            | F | 4,0313 | 32 | 1,1212 | -,2813       | -1,605 | 31 | ,119            |
|                         | U | 4,3125 | 32 | ,6445  |              |        |    |                 |

Independent Samples Test: Mean differences between the perception of effectiveness by teachers and students

| TECHNIQUES           | t     | df  | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference |
|----------------------|-------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|
| CLOZE                | 2,144 | 224 | ,033            | ,5107           |
| GAP FILLING          | 1,635 | 227 | ,103            | ,3096           |
| C TEST               | ,713  | 229 | ,476            | ,1632           |
| C ELIDE              | 1,501 | 227 | ,135            | ,3415           |
| MULTIPLE CHOICE TEST | 1,965 | 228 | ,051            | ,4040           |
| SUMMARY              | ,400  | 227 | ,689            | ,1082           |
| GAPPED SUMMARY       | 3,608 | 226 | ,000            | ,7851           |
| TRUE FALSE           | 1,616 | 227 | ,107            | ,3109           |
| EDITING              | 1,652 | 225 | ,100            | ,3384           |
| QUESTION ANSWER      | 2,120 | 228 | ,035            | ,4530           |
| SHORT ANSWER         | ,734  | 229 | ,464            | ,1503           |
| MATCHING             | 3,225 | 229 | ,001            | ,6140           |
| ORDERING             | 3,387 | 225 | ,001            | ,6688           |

**Discussion**

- Teachers tend to have clear tendencies to use certain techniques more frequently than the others.
- Frequency of use and perceived effectiveness appeared to have a strong correlation, implying that teachers tend to use those techniques that they believe are useful.
- Paired samples t-test analysis revealed that less frequently used techniques are perceived more useful than they are actually used.

**Conclusion**

- Teachers may need encouragement to try out different techniques, especially those perceived more effective than actually used. To do this teachers may need further in-service training as they may not feel comfortable to use such techniques. However, more qualitative research is needed to better explain why teachers should tend to show such a tendency.

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**Thanks for your participation**



## Participants

| GENDER                | Teachers  |           |           | Students   |           |            |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
|                       | Female    | Male      | Total     | Female     | Male      | Total      |
| English Medium School | 14        | 2         | 16        | 42         | 11        | 53         |
| University            | 8         | 8         | 16        | 93         | 44        | 137        |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>22</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>32</b> | <b>135</b> | <b>55</b> | <b>190</b> |

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