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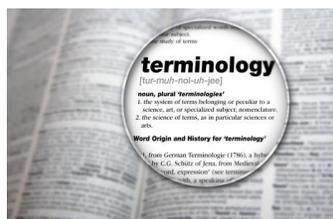


Digest

The **ELTS Digest** aims to be a regular publication, voice, and forum for members and other interested individuals for all things related to English language testing, and those involved in it. The Digest aims to: advocate for and support best practices in English language testing; provide information and informed opinions about current and relevant issues and challenges; and foster a community of practice through the free exchange of respectful public discourse on matters of interest to members and all stakeholders in the international community.

## This Issue

This initial edition is a brief one, and covers two main areas: (1) clarifying and defining some testing terminology that are particularly relevant to the Society and members, and (2) providing some snapshots of testing in the current COVID 19 pandemic situation we find ourselves in (from Japan, Korea, and the USA). Some food for thought quotes conclude this edition.



## Terminology

- **Assessment Literacy**

There are a number of definitions of ‘assessment literacy’ (or the more specific, ‘language assessment literacy’) available. One that is comprehensive (i.e. covering large-scale proficiency testing as well as classroom assessment) yet succinct, is the gloss used by the New Zealand Ministry of Education.

**Assessment literacy** is the possession of knowledge about the basic principles of sound assessment practice, including its terminology, the development and use of assessment methodologies and techniques, and familiarity with standards of quality in assessment.

(source: <https://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-for-learning/Assessment-for-learning-in-practice/Assessment-literacy>)

- **Assessment** - the broadest testing term and category, it covers everything, from a three-hour proficiency test, to classroom quizzes. It is defined as, “an ongoing process of collecting information about a given performance according to systematic and substantively grounded procedures” (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019)\*
- **Testing** refers to specific instruments or procedures used to examine and make judgments about particular English skills or knowledge (including presentations, essays, etc., as well as more traditional tests, both inside or outside the classroom). It typically includes grades/scores reflecting performance. Another definition of test is “a method or procedure for measuring a person’s ability, knowledge or performance in a given domain” (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

- **Proficiency testing**; large-scale tests of English skills like TOEFL, IELTS etc. that have no connections to particular programs or courses of study. Such assessments typically test multiple skills with the same instrument. A proficiency test is also defined as “a test that is not limited to any one course, curriculum, or single skill in the language, it tests overall global ability” (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).
- **Achievement testing** - aka, classroom assessment, including teacher-made tests, tests provided with course books, weekly quizzes, etc. These are (or should be) connected to course learning outcomes that are expected to be achieved. Achievement test is also defined as “an instrument used to determine whether course objectives have been met- and appropriate knowledge and skills acquired- by the end of a given period of instruction” (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019)

\*Source: Abeywickrama, P., & Brown, H. D. (2019). Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices, 3rd Edition. NY: Pearson Longman.

***“When it comes right down to it, a test is a measuring device, no different in principle than a ruler, a weighing scale, or a thermometer. A language test is an instrument for measuring language ability”.***

(Dan Douglas, *Understanding Language Testing*, 2010)

**Terminology Summary:** The ‘T’ in ELTS covers a broad range of assessments from large-scale proficiency testing to the achievement testing that is most relevant to teachers and students in the English language classroom. The promotion of assessment literacy is also an important aim of the Society.



## Pandemic Perspectives

This section presents a collection of views and perspectives on English Language Testing in the age of the COVID 19 worldwide pandemic. Contributors were asked for a few paragraphs describing how things looked from their end of the telescope.

### **Yong-Hoon Lee (Chairman In-Times-In Co. Ltd, South Korea)**

In the Republic of Korea, hiring schedules at public institutions have been pushed back and tests such as for English language certification have been suspended or postponed, resulting in hardship for job seekers. The atmosphere of the test market is generally depressed. The situation is slowly stabilizing with some online at-home tests being offered for a limited period (in case of TOEFL) and others recently being administered again after suspension (in case of TOEIC, IELTS, TEPS). However, due to the challenges of offline testing involving the wearing of masks and gloves, the need for 1.5m of space between desks and the difficulty in

securing test sites, etc., the market exuberance of past years is absent. Tests other than language certification, including employment tests for companies are sometimes being held outdoors, such as in huge football stadiums with the desks set up on the grass.

Due to the cancellation and postponement of tests, test-takers are very anxious about missing out on important opportunities such as finding employment through the open recruitment process at companies or obtaining university scholarships. Even though online at-home tests are available in some cases, it appears that test-takers prefer offline tests that they have experienced and are familiar with. Test administrators are worried about lower profits from the cancellation and postponement of tests, problems relating to establishing online testing systems and security that can arise as they try to improve testing methods, as well as issues concerning fairness.

The government is concerned with preventing a mass outbreak of COVID-19 once testing resumes for major offline tests (e.g. English proficiency tests), as well as with the changes in annual schedules such as for hiring at public institutions following the cancellation and postponement of tests.

Tests such as TOEIC are being administered again after a delay of about two months, but as middle school and high school classrooms have become unavailable for tests, this lack of test sites has meant that test-takers cannot get tested on the dates they want. In places such as Cheju Island, the lack of test sites has led some to fly to the mainland to take tests. However, even if test-takers apply for a postponed test, it will not be possible to get the test results immediately, so they may have problems submitting their job applications to companies that have already begun their hiring process.

The government has published a 'guideline of preventative measures against COVID-19 for tests.' Before the test date, the test administrator is to appoint a person responsible for infection management, who is charged with establishing a line of communication with the relevant authorities. This person is to take immediate measures in case suspected cases of COVID-19 arise and is also charged with establishing an action plan to deal with possible problems. Also, regarding the issue of hiring and testing schedules, etc. being delayed together, the government has decided to alleviate difficulties for job applicants who need to submit English language test results by, among other things, allowing those who have test results for English that are valid, but are about to expire, to submit their test results to the public institution they are planning to apply and if they do, to have their test results recognized regardless of the remaining period of validity for the test results.

The Korea TOEIC Committee has been trying to secure middle school and high school classrooms as test-sites as in the past, but they are experiencing difficulty as many middle schools and high schools are refusing to provide them on account of concerns for student safety. Fees are also being waived, such as for changing TOEFL test dates, due to COVID-19.

Online certification tests such as Duolingo English Test (DET) that require only a webcam and a PC to apply have seen test-takers increase by 270% between January and March this year compared to the same period last year.

We expect that through the end of this year, testing methods will be a mix of online at-home tests and offline tests with stringent anti-infection measures in place. The Covid-19 crisis is likely to lead to a rethink on how to provide a safe, convenient and reasonable test-taking environment such as in the form of online

or video-conferencing tests and the implementation of improved methods. We expect that latecomer market entrants will appear who will offer tests in forms that are different from traditional testing methods.

### **Tetsuya Yasukochi, (High School English Teacher, Japan)**

Covid 19 has been affecting life here tremendously as in other parts of the world. The Japanese government declared a state of emergency on April 8. Although, by the Japanese Constitution, the government cannot forcibly limit people's activities, most people and businesses alike are taking the government advisory very seriously and acting accordingly.

Testing organizations are no exception. Most organizations, including Eiken and IIBC(TOEIC) have canceled or postponed April tests. This is a grave issue considering that many high school students and college students use the results of these tests for their college admissions and job-hunting attempts. The chances are that testing in big venues might not be possible for another two or three months or possibly for a year. However, test centers might be able to open as soon as the virus subsides, taking every precaution possible to ensure the safety of test-takers.

In my personal opinion, mass-testing, which is common in our country, will gradually transform into computer-based testing order to avoid forming vast clusters of people if a situation like this continues for a long time

## **Jim Brosam (President, iTEP, USA )**

For iTEP (International Test of English Proficiency) it was like a line of dominos falling as we watched our public test centers in major markets close one after another: China, Korea, Japan, India, South America, the Middle East. COVID-19 did not stop the international admissions cycle, however, as requests for assistance quickly came in from our admissions partner schools. We made the decision to allow in-home admissions testing. iTEP is fortunate in that many of our professional exams (Hospitality, Business, Aviation, Au Pair) have been delivered for several years now in-home or in-office to our corporate partners. So, we were quickly able to transition our academic tests online.

Our second major challenge was to help our current partner schools' IEP/ESL programs. Many of them were directed to complete the rest of the Spring semester with online instruction. With online teaching comes the need for online assessment and testing. In this scenario, iTEP again was able to provide online, in-home testing, so that placement, assessment, and exit testing could continue within these programs.

In both cases, iTEP faced two major concerns: security and test delivery. Security is always a top priority of iTEP, and one that we continually strive to improve. For in-home testing, iTEP utilizes a mix of both human and tech solutions to monitor test takers and provide secure exams. Test delivery became a challenge in that testing was now moved out of the controlled test center, or computer lab on campus, into test takers' homes all around the world. This new "remote" environment includes all manner of computers and varying Internet connectivity rates of users logging on to take our tests. Here again, with in-country servers, and specialized testing links, we have been able to deliver iTEP exams all around the

world. We will continue to support our partner schools, companies, and test centers during this COVID-19 period by providing iTEP testing as innovatively and flexibly as possible.

## **Moroni Flake (CEO, English 3, USA)**

### **Impact of COVID-19 on English3's ESL testing and teaching**

Lockdowns have essentially eliminated the market for some of our tests, while significantly increasing exposure and usage of other tests. Overall test volume for English3 is down 68%. Our online test for university admissions and online ESL courses have grown significantly over the past two months, while our English Interview for J-1 exchange visitors, which has historically accounted for about 90% of test volume, has essentially been put on hold. We do not yet know how many exchange visitors are delaying plans until the fall or winter semesters, versus how many are cancelling plans to come.

As we look at the growth of our online test for admissions, GATE--Global Academic Test of English (formerly called the E3PT), we have to consider how much of that growth will be short-term. Every indication is that the GATE test will continue to be accepted at the vast majority of new institutions, with a number of institutions planning to actively promote the GATE test for all applicants.

In summary, COVID-19 has had a dramatically negative, short-term impact on English3 and its university partners. While there may be long-term benefits from the increase in universities accepting our tests for admissions, it remains to be seen how quickly J-1 exchange visitors will begin to resume visits.



We wrap up this first edition of the ELTS Digest with some words of wisdom and food for thought. **Best wishes to all with your language testing endeavors!**

**I believe that the greatest challenges language assessment as a field faces are not in the cerebral fields of validity theory . . . , nor in sophisticated statistical or measurement models . . . . Rather, the challenges that we, as language testers, face are in the “real world” arenas where language tests are being used to make decisions about individuals and institutions. (Lyle Bachman, 2014, Ongoing Issues in Language Assessment)**

**Designing communicative, performance-based assessment rubrics continues to challenge assessment experts and classroom teachers alike. (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019, Language Assessment: Principles & Classroom Practices)**

**There is a pressing need for a shift in attitudes towards assessment in language education: a shift that is only beginning to happen. Assessment is an indispensable ingredient in effective teaching and learning. (Anthony Green, Exploring Language Assessment & Testing, 2015)**

This first edition of the **ELTS Digest** was edited and compiled by Eddy White, PhD, ELTS President. **Thanks to all who contributed to this first edition.**