Professional Development in Assessment Task Design
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Origin of the Guidelines</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reading Processes and Reading Assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Developing tasks for assessing reading: Getting started</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Locating Texts</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Selecting texts: Factors to consider</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Modifying Texts</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Writing Items</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Piloting Tasks</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines for piloting reading and listening tasks</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing reading: References and bibliography</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 3</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 4</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional Development in Assessment Task Design

Guidelines for assessing reading skills in the Certificates in Spoken and Written English

1. Purpose and origin of the guidelines

The following guidelines provide an overview of issues in assessing second language reading and outline the steps involved in developing reading assessment tasks for the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE). They are intended to assist Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) teachers in locating, modifying and creating reading texts and in developing valid and reliable tasks for assessing reading skills. They may be used for developing your own tasks, in task development workshops and in developing tasks for the Assessment Task Bank (ATB).

The guidelines are derived from:

- findings from research into the assessment of reading in a second language, including recent research by the AMEP Research Centre that investigated the difficulty of reading tasks in the CSWE
- information on reading test construction provided in the language testing literature
- feedback provided by AMEP teachers who have attended workshops on assessment task design conducted by the AMEP Research Centre.

1.1 Structure of the guidelines

The guidelines provide:

- a brief overview of issues in second language reading assessment
- advice on locating, selecting and modifying texts for assessing reading
- advice on developing different kinds of items for the assessment of reading
- suggestions for further reading on assessment task design
- a selection of electronic resources where reading texts that can be used or adapted for assessment purposes can be found.

Practical exercises are included that allow you to work through the steps involved in assessment task design and evaluation.
2. Reading processes and reading assessment

2.1 Why is assessing reading difficult?

Since reading is an invisible mental operation that does not produce an overt ‘performance’ in the same way as speaking or writing, we must infer reading processes and reading skills from responses to different kinds of assessment tasks and items based on the text, ranging from multiple choice to open-ended questions. However, these methods may affect the way that students respond to the test questions, and thus make the test invalid as a test of reading. Responses that require extended writing, for example, may make excessive demands on writing skills, thus resulting in ‘muddied’ measurement where the use of one skill interferes with the measurement of another.

CSWE assessments need to demonstrate construct validity, that is, the assessment task should be designed so that it allows learners to demonstrate the reading skills that the task is supposed to be tapping. The key to designing a good reading assessment task is thus to ensure as far as possible that the reader engages with the text in much the same way as they would in real life. Let us look at an example of how this might be done in a reading assessment task.

Exercise 2.1 : Reading versus test-taking

Read Text 2.1, ‘Product recall’. Don’t look at the questions until you have read the text. When you have finished, note down the key information that you have retained. Then read the text again and answer the test questions. Then consider these questions:

1. Did you read the text in the same way when you read it for the second time?
2. What skills did you use to answer the questions?
3. Can you think of any other test questions that would encourage the reader to engage with the text for ‘real life’ purposes?
**Text 2.1: ‘Product Recall’**

Sample of reading passage and test questions (IELTS General Training Module, Reading)

**IMPORTANT NOTICE: PRODUCT RETURN**

Fancy Foods wishes to inform the public that pieces of metal have been found in some jars of Fancy Foods Chicken Curry (Spicy). The batches of the jars involved have numbers from J6617 to J6624. The batch number is printed on the bottom of each jar.

If you have any jars with these batch numbers, please return them (preferably unopened) to the supermarket where you purchased them. You can also return them to the factory (Fancy Foods Retailers, Blacktown). Fancy Foods will pay $10 for each jar returned unopened and $5 for each jar already opened.

No payment will be made for empty jars, which do not need to be returned. However, the Retailing Manager will be interested to hear from people who have consumed chicken curry from any of the above batch numbers. In particular, it will be helpful if they can give information about the place of purchase of the product.

Jars of Fancy Foods Chicken Curry (Coconut) and Fancy Foods Chicken Curry (Mango) have not been affected and do not need to be returned.

**REWARD**

Fancy Foods will pay a reward of $10,000 to $50,000 for information which leads to the conviction of any person found guilty of placing metal pieces in its products. If you have such information, please contact the Customer Relations Manager, Fancy Foods Retailers, Blacktown.

**Questions 4 – 8**

*Answer the questions below.*

*Choose NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER from the text for each answer.*

*Write your answers in boxes 4-8 on your answer sheet.*

4. What has been found in some Fancy Foods products?

5. Where can you find the batch number on the jars?

6. How much will you receive for an opened jar of contaminated Chicken Curry?

7. If you have eaten Chicken Curry from a jar with one of the batch numbers listed, whom should you contact?

8. What is the maximum reward Fancy Foods is offering for information about who contaminated their product?
### 2.2 Text types

The starting point for assessing reading in the CSWE is to be able to specify the kinds of reading texts that learners should be able to read at each Certificate level for each Learning Outcome. The following table summarizes the CSWE Learning Outcomes involving reading skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Reading Texts</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preliminary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Demonstrate recognition of the alphabet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Demonstrate recognition of numbers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>Recognise common visual symbols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>Recognise common signs with text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>Complete a simplified form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Read simple words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Read simple sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certificate I</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Complete a short form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a written information text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a short written description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of short written instructions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a written recount</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certificate II</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a short written information text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of written instructions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of an informal written text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a written story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a written information report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a written opinion text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certificate III</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a complex written information text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of complex written instructions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I1</td>
<td>Locate news and current affairs articles in media publications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a news article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I3</td>
<td>Interpret visual texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J1</td>
<td>Critically read an opinion text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J2</td>
<td>Interpret an advertisement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K1</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a biography/autobiography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K2</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of a narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise 2.2 Reading texts

Look at the following list of reading texts, adapted from Weir (1993). Then match them to the CSWE Learning Outcomes above by writing a number against the LO.

1. Cereal packet
2. Traffic sign
3. Leaflet
4. Brochure
5. TV guide
6. Advertisement
7. Personal letter
8. Postcard
9. Application form
10. Instructions for appliance
11. Timetable
12. Map of the city
13. Newspaper editorial
14. Magazine feature
15. Book (non-fiction)
16. Personal email
17. Electricity bill
18. Diary
19. Recipe
20. Sports report
21. Book (fiction)
22. Anecdote
23. Dictionary entry
24. Computer manual
25. Encyclopaedia entry
2.3 Purposes for reading

Current views of reading emphasize that it is an interactive process (that is, it combines the simultaneous exercise of rapid and automatised word-recognition skills with the activation of linguistic and background knowledge). Reading is also purposeful: people engage with written texts for a particular purpose and often bring with them expectations about the content of a text.

Grabe and Stoller (2002:13) outline the following purposes for reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. Reading to search for information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is one of the most common purposes for reading 1, looking in the newspaper to find out what time a film starts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>b. Reading to skim quickly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This involves quickly getting a sense of the main idea and the text structure 2, quickly sampling parts of a text to see if a particular name or place is mentioned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>c. Reading to learn from texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This type of reading occurs in academic and professional contexts. It requires extracting detailed information from the text and is likely to take more time than other kinds of reading, remembering concepts and details and relating them to existing knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>d. Reading to integrate information, write or critique texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This type of reading requires the reader to evaluate the relevance of information in the text to their purpose. It may also involve reading to write where the reader selects information in order to analyse or comment on it and reading to critique texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>e. Reading for general comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This refers to the ability to understand and interpret information in a text (Grabe and Stoller 2002: 17). This is the most basic purpose for reading. However, Grabe and Stoller note that the rapid automatic processing of text that is carried out by fluent readers requires a range of quite complex abilities, and may be even more difficult for second language learners than reading to learn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise 2.3

Look at the list of reading texts again and against each one write a letter corresponding to one of the purposes described by Grabe and Stoller.

2.4 Reading skills

Although there is considerable debate concerning the extent to which separate ‘reading skills’ (such as identifying main ideas, distinguishing fact from opinion etc) can be identified, test writers commonly use a list of skills as the basis for designing tests of reading. For example, Weir (2005: 90) distinguishes between expeditious (fast and efficient) reading and careful reading.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global level</th>
<th>Local level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Careful reading</strong></td>
<td><strong>Expeditious reading</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing accurate comprehension of explicitly stated main ideas and supporting details. Making propositional inferences.</td>
<td>Skimming quickly to establish discourse topic and main ideas; or structure of text, or relevance to needs. Search reading to locate quickly and understand information relevant to predetermined needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identifying lexis</strong></td>
<td>Scanning to locate specific points of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding syntax</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exercise 2.4**

Are all of the reading skills that are assessed in the CSWE covered in Weir’s classification?
3. Developing tasks for assessing reading: Getting started

3.1 Steps in assessment planning

**Step 1: Decide which Learning Outcome(s) you are going to create a task for**

Look at the list of Learning Outcomes in Part 2 and select the Learning Outcome you want to assess. For example, you may need a new assessment task for:

Certificate III Module I, LO2: Demonstrate understanding of a newspaper article.

**Step 2: Refresh yourself with the assessment criteria, conditions of assessment and evidence guide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certificate III in Spoken and Written English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Outcome 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Demonstrate understanding of headline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Identify topic of article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Demonstrate understanding of main information in article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Demonstrate understanding of details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Identify people/organisations referred to in article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Demonstrate understanding of information given by sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners may use a dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners read an answer questions on print or online news articles, for example,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This task may be conducted in conjunction with <strong>CSWE III I3: Interpret visual texts</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note, in particular, if there are certain questions that are compulsory for the LO in questions. For example, in assessing this LO there needs to be one question relating to the headline, one relating to the topic, one relating to people/organisations referred to, and one relating to sources.

**Step 3: Look at the sample assessment tasks in the curriculum**

Look at the way in which the instructions are formulated and the kinds of items that are used in the example assessment tasks. The sample assessment tasks for this LO, for example, contain a mixture of short answer questions, multiple choice and sentence completion.

**Step 4: Think about the profile of your group of learners**

To help you choose texts of appropriate difficulty and of relevance to your students, consider the characteristics of your class. For example, What band are they? Are they fast learners? What is their first language? How old are they? What level of education do they have? What is their occupational background? Do they have children? Are there particular topics that interest them?

**Exercise 3.1**

The following table may help you to identify those factors that will determine what kinds of texts you use. The last box can be filled in progressively as you find texts to use for assessment.
Table for assessing the profile of a group of learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certificate Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interests/hobbies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recent topics covered in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other relevant information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Locating texts

You can choose to create your own reading texts or you can locate suitable authentic or semi-authentic texts for your tasks. Some teachers may be skilled in developing their own texts that are appropriate and interesting for their learners. Other teachers may prefer to use or adapt appropriate material that they have located.

4.1 Locating suitable authentic and semi-authentic texts

Reading texts that are suitable for use in assessing adult learners of English can be found in many locations, including:

- Electronic resources: the Internet contains an abundance of interesting and appropriate texts that can be used in unmodified form (authentic texts) or adapted slightly for reading tasks (semi-authentic). Some useful websites are:
  - media organisations (television, newspapers etc). Some media organisations (such as the BBC and some English language newspapers in Asian countries) provide a range of reading and listening materials specially designed for non-native speakers of English;
  - educational websites containing teaching and assessment resources for language teachers;
  - Language testing websites (such as IELTS, TOEFL and Cambridge ESOL) that contain downloadable samples of tests and testing materials.

- Paper-based resources:
  - daily newspapers;
  - magazines (e.g. airline magazines);
  - brochures (community and government agencies, tourist agencies etc).

- Aural resources such as narratives and anecdotes which can be adapted for assessing reading.

- Broadcast media: radio and television programs.

Important note: All material has limitations on use related to Intellectual Property. You must always consider the copyright implications of using the material you have found. Information about copyright is available in Appendix 1.

Examples of websites that contain useful resources for reading assessment can be found in Appendix 2. There are many publications, both print and online, that deal with ways of using the Internet to access learning and assessment materials. See, for example:


Exercise 4.1

Look at some of the sites listed in Appendix 2. Then use the Internet to locate examples of the following text types:

- Procedural texts
- Informal letters
- Personal emails
- Brochures and pamphlets
- Advertisements
- Protocol documents
- Newspaper and magazine articles
- Opinion texts
- Narrative texts
- Advertisements

5. Selecting texts: Factors to consider

5.1 Conformity to the CSWE

After you have chosen the Certificate Level and Learning Outcome for which you are developing an assessment task, you need to think about the extent to which the text conforms to the specification of the relevant Learning Outcome. You should consider the following questions:

- Does it contain the elements that are relevant to the text type in question?
- Is it of an appropriate length?
- Does it allow you to assess the reading skills that you are focusing on in the LO in question (e.g., identifying the writer’s purpose, identifying the topic of a text, identifying the writer’s viewpoint, reading for specific information)?

In order to answer these questions you need to read the text carefully and ask yourself what the reader has to do in order to understand it. If possible, it is a good idea to ask colleagues to read the text and to discuss this question with them.

5.2 Interest

According to Richard Day (1994), ‘The most important factor in selecting a reading article is interest’. If the topic is not of interest, students’ motivation is likely to be lessened.

In deciding whether the text will interest students, Christine Nuttall (1996) suggests that teachers ask themselves:

Does the text

- relate to students’ needs and interests?
- tell the students things they don’t already know?
- introduce them to new and relevant ideas?
- make them think about things they haven’t thought about before?
help them to understand the way other people feel or think (for example, people with different backgrounds, problems, or attitudes from their own)?

make them want to read for themselves (to continue a story, find out more about a subject, and so on)?

It is advisable, however, to avoid topics that may be distressing, for example, death, illness, natural disasters.

### 5.3 Readability

Readability refers to the syntactic, lexical and discourse structure of the text. Questions to consider include:

- **How much background knowledge is required to understand the text?**
  
  Background knowledge is a key factor affecting a reader’s ability to understand a text. Researchers have found that topic familiarity can significantly enhance comprehension. Reading texts should therefore be based as far as possible on content that is not too far removed from learners’ experience. However, the topic should not be one that is so familiar that learners will be able to answer the questions without reading the text.

- **Is specialised or low frequency vocabulary required to understand the passage?**
  
  The more unknown vocabulary items a passage contains, the more difficult it will be for the learners to understand. Reading texts for assessment should not contain too many low frequency items. However, if one of the teaching objectives is for the learners to infer the meaning of words from context, then some unknown words or phrases can be included.

- **Does the text contain grammatical structures that are beyond the learner’s level?**
  
  The syntactic structures in the text should be within the learner’s competence.

- **Is the text culturally appropriate?**
  
  The topic of the text should not be too culturally laden unless the learners have had the opportunity to be introduced to the topic.

- **Does the text have a clearly recognisable structure?**
  
  Texts should have a clear structure so that they do not impose an overly heavy load on the reader. Ideas and arguments should be presented in a logical fashion. The discourse structure of the text should contain cohesion and transition markers that are within the learners’ ability.

- **Does the text have enough information for you to formulate the number of questions required?**
  
  If you are going to test skills such as scanning you will need to find a text that contains sufficient pieces of discrete information.

- **Is the layout of the text clear and attractive?**
  
  Font size should not impede understanding. Graphics and other visual information may be incorporated to assist learners to contextualise the information, particularly at lower levels.
Exercise 5.1

Of the texts you have located, identify those that you think might be usable for CSWE assessment. What type of texts are they? Which LOs would they be suitable for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Text</th>
<th>Website Address</th>
<th>Text Type</th>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Modifying texts

After you have read the text carefully and thought about potential items, you may decide to change the text in line with the factors suggested above or to make it fit the specifications for the LO. These modifications might take a number of forms, including:

- cutting sections from the text, expanding or reformatting it
- adapting the wording of the text, for example by changing some words or grammatical structures, adding or deleting text. For example, if the potential items you have identified are very close together, you might need to build in redundancy by adding some more information to the text
- changing the structure of the text. For example, you might want to make a narrative text clearer for the reader by including more explicit discourse markers indicating the sequence of events or the stages.

6.1 Making a text more or less difficult

In the recent Special Project that investigated the question of what makes a reading task difficult, four focus groups of AMEP teachers discussed CSWE reading assessment tasks and identified factors which they considered contributed to task difficulty. Amongst the key factors were:
6.1 Making a text more or less difficult

In the recent Special Project that investigated the question of what makes a reading task difficult, four focus groups of AMEP teachers discussed CSWE reading assessment tasks and identified factors which they considered contributed to task difficulty. Amongst the key factors were:

The language of the text and the questions

A task is likely to be more difficult when:

• The text contains limited redundancy
• The text contains low frequency vocabulary
• The text requires specific background or cultural knowledge
• The question wording is syntactically complex.

The relationship between the text and the questions

A task is likely to be more difficult when:

• the information that the learner needs to answer the question does not have a direct syntactic or semantic match to the question (for example, it is in paraphrase)
• information from the text has to be reformulated in the answer
• the passage has to be re-read to find the answer
• the information needed to answer the question is not explicit in the text
• there is a large amount of text to be processed to find the answer.

In addition to these factors, researchers have also found that the following characteristics of a task have an influence on task difficulty:

• Sentence length: longer sentences with greater complexity are harder to understand
• Whether or not the text has a clearly marked structure (for example, whether there are clear indicators of a sequence of events: whether the different parts of the text are clearly linked with cohesive devices such as reference).

Research suggests that there is a complex interaction between individual learner factors and task/text factors such as these. For example, even though an item may be ‘easy’ in one respect (the information that is necessary to answer the question is explicit in the text), it may be ‘difficult’ in another (the reader may have to carefully read the whole text to find it). Nevertheless, the above factors can be used as an overall guide that will help you to make decisions about the demands that a task or item is likely to make on a learner, and to modify a text when you want to make it easier or more difficult. For example, if an item appeared to be very easy because of a direct match between the question and the information in the text, you could paraphrase the information in order to raise the level of challenge to the learner.

Exercise 6.1

1. Look at Text 6.1a: ‘Shop Assistant Version 1’. This text is for use in assessing Certificate 1 Module D, Learning Outcome 2. Demonstrate understanding of a written information text. Write down any modifications that you would want to make to the text in order to make it suitable for assessment for this LO.
Text 6.1a ‘Shop Assistant’ Version 1

Shop Assistant                                      Parramatta

Checkout operator wanted for supermarket.
5 days a week. 4 hours per day from 2 pm. to 6 pm.
Casual rates.

Phone: Mr Jones (02) 96287941

2. When you have done this, compare your modifications to this text with those that were made by the National Working Group on CSWE assessment when they were moderating the first version of the task. You will find this text (Text 6.1b: ‘Shop Assistant Version 2’) in Appendix 3).

- Parramatta was changed to ‘Melbourne West’ since the latter was more likely to be universally recognised as a place name than the former.
- The group decided that ‘checkout operator’ became awkward when trying to ask about the type of job advertised, since ‘shop assistant’ was already stated in the heading.
- The group thought it would be better to put ‘contact’ in the text rather than ‘phone’ since it made the question ‘Who do you phone?’ less obvious.
- The group thought there should be a second telephone number to allow a question requiring discrimination between the two.

3. Take one of the texts that you have identified and modify it to fit the CSWE specifications. Write down the reasons for your modifications.
7. Writing items

Once you have created or selected the reading text that you want to use for assessment, you will need to write the items and answer keys. Some of the most commonly used types of items that are used for assessing reading are summarised below, along with some practice exercises that will enable you to get a feel for what is involved in constructing the various item types.

When you are doing the practice exercises you may want to refer to the checklist in the Guidelines for Development of Items for Reading Assessment (Appendix 4). These contain questions that you need to consider when you are using each item type.

Item types

1. Short Answer Questions (SAQs)

What do SAQs require learners to do?

A SAQ requires the learner to answer an open-ended question (usually a Wh-question) by providing a brief response. The answer is usually a single word, short phrase or sentence. The accompanying instructions should specify the type of response that is required and how much writing is expected (for example, answer these questions in no more than a few words).

The answer key contains a list of acceptable responses that will have been developed on the basis of piloting and discussing the item with colleagues. For each item there may be one or more alternative correct responses. These must all be included in the answer key. Remember that you are assessing reading, so spelling and grammatical errors should not be taken into account unless they affect the meaning of the response, as specified in the CSWE conditions of assessment. Sometimes, incorrect responses that commonly occur may be specifically mentioned in the answer key. For example, Do not accept....

Example of SAQ

Answer these questions in a few words

Who is the email to?

____________________________________________________________________

Name two features of the Guided Walks

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
How can this item type be used?

SAQs can be used in a variety of ways for assessing the learner’s ability to locate specific information such as:

- identifying names, dates, places, events, or activities. For example, *Where do European wasps build their nests?*
- identifying specific vocabulary or referents. For example, *Who does ‘they’ refer to in the first sentence? What is the word in Paragraph 2 that means ‘to make something better’?*
- identifying the text structure in a passage. For example, *There are five sections in the passage. In which section does the author deal with the following themes?* (Section..., Section... etc).

What are the advantages of this item type?

Since the answer involves production, a learner must understand the text in order to arrive at the correct answer, as opposed to other receptive item formats such as multiple choice where the correct answers may be guessed. They are relatively easy to construct compared to other selective response item types.

What are the disadvantages of this item type?

If an extended writing response is required, it can be difficult to devise a marking key that covers the range of possible responses. There may be disagreement amongst markers in cases where learners supply responses that contain grammatical or spelling errors. For this reason answers need to be carefully constrained. Where low-level learners and short, simple factual texts are involved, it can be challenging to construct items that do not simply require a straight match with the text. SAQs also take longer to score than selected response item types such as multiple choice.

Exercise 7.1

Using text 7.1, ‘Telephone message’ (Certificate II Module J, LO1), write as many short answer questions as you can. Then compare your questions with the samples from the ATB provided in Appendix 3.

Create some SAQ items for your own texts.
Text 7.1 ‘Telephone message’

Certificate II in Spoken and Written English
Module J Learning Outcome 1: Demonstrate understanding of an informal written text

DATE: 22/12 ........................................ TIME: 2.30 pm ........................................

TELEPHONE MESSAGE

TO: Amina .............................................................................................................

CALLER: Ahmed ...................................................................................................

ORGANISATION: ..................................................................................................

TELEPHONE NO: 9652 8734 ..............................................................................

☑ URGENT

☑ PLEASE RETURN CALL A.S.A.P.

☐ WILL CALL AGAIN

☐ RETURNED YOUR CALL

MESSAGE: Working overtime tonight. Please ......................................................

pick up children and get parcel from P.O. ............................................................

........................................................ ..............................................................

RECEIVED BY: Maryanne ..............................................................................

........................................................ ..............................................................

2. Sentence completion

What do sentence completion items require learners to do?

There are two types of sentence completion items: A) learners are required to complete a sentence in a given number of words taken from the text; B) candidates are given the first half of a sentence based on the text and asked to complete it from a list of possible options.

As with SAQs, sentence completion items require the development of a comprehensive answer key containing a list of acceptable responses (see above).
Example of sentence completion item: Type A

Complete the following sentences in a few words:

The movie was set in____________________________________________________

Michael’s sister enjoys playing___________________________________________

Example of sentence completion item: Type B

The writer wants people to

☐ kill European wasps  ☐ be careful of European wasps
☐ find European wasps

How can sentence completion items be used?
Sentence completion items can be used to test understanding of specific details or to test understanding of more global aspects of the text such as topic, purpose and text structure.

What are the advantages of this item type?
Sentence completion items of the first type focus the reader’s attention on specific aspects of the text and encourage careful reading.

What are the disadvantages of this item type?
If the amount of writing is not constrained, items may be difficult to mark. Items may be very easy if the information in the sentence to be completed is an exact reflection of the text.

Exercise 7.2
Using Text 7.2, ‘Letter to Ann’ (Certificate II Module J, LO1), write as many sentence completion items as you can. Then compare your items with the samples from the ATB provided in Appendix 3.

Create some sentence completion items for your own texts.
Dear Ann,

We arrived in Canberra yesterday at about 3 pm. It is so cold here! You can even see snow on the mountains. I didn’t bring enough clothes so we’ve been wearing our jackets all the time!

The kids didn’t enjoy the drive. We stopped for one night on the way, but it still took two long days of driving. Maybe we should’ve flown. Now we are here, there’s plenty to see and do, and lots of relatives to visit.

Could you please do me a favour and check our mailbox? Don’t worry about anything else — we’ll be back in two weeks’ time. The plants can wait until then!

Thanks again,

Andrew
Example of MCQ Type A

When did Nicole first know when she was in danger?

- When she went on the bridge
- When she fell down
- When she went outside to play
- When she heard the loud sound

Example of MCQ Type B

Tick the correct answer

1. This article is about:
   - sport and school
   - concerned parents
   - sport and fitness
   - family activities

How can MCQs be used?

Multiple choice items can be used to test detailed understanding of specific points or in a more global way to test understanding of the topic and purpose of the text and the text structure.

What are the advantages of this item type?

MCQs have a number of advantages: they are quick and easy to mark, they can be marked mechanically without human intervention, and there is no risk of ‘skills contamination’ since no writing is required. In addition, compared to other item formats testees can complete MCQs relatively quickly, so quite a large number of items can be administered in a short time.

What are the disadvantages of this item type?

Hughes (2003: 76) lists a number of problems with MCQs:

- They only test recognition knowledge, not productive knowledge.
- Guessing may play a major role.
- Some learners may arrive at the answer via a process of elimination rather than by using the information in the passage to find the answer.
- They are very hard to construct. Finding enough plausible distractors, particularly in a short text that does not contain much information, can be very challenging.

Exercise 7.3

1. Using Text 7.3a, ‘Coal’ from the IELTS General Training Reading module, try to write as many multiple-choice items as you can. Then compare your items with the samples provided in Appendix 3.
Greenhouse gases arise from a wide range of sources and their increasing concentration is largely related to the compound effects of increased population, improved living standards and changes in lifestyle. From a current base of 5 billion, the United Nations predicts that the global population may stabilize in the twenty-first century between 8 and 14 billion, with more than 90 per cent of the projected increase taking place in the world’s developing nations. The associated activities to support that growth, particularly to produce the required energy and food, will cause further increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The challenge, therefore, is to attain a sustainable balance between population, economic growth and the environment.

The major greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are carbon dioxide (CO2), methane and nitrous oxide. Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are the only major contributor to the greenhouse effect that does not occur naturally, coming from such sources as refrigeration, plastics and manufacture. Coal’s total contribution to greenhouse gas emissions is thought to be about 18 per cent, with about half of this coming from electricity generation.

The worldwide coal industry allocates extensive resources to researching and developing new technologies and ways of capturing greenhouse gases. Efficiencies are likely to be improved dramatically, and hence CO2 emissions reduced, through combustion and gasification techniques which are now at pilot and demonstration stages.

Clean coal is another avenue for improving fuel conversion efficiency. Investigations are under way into superclean coal (35 per cent ash) and ultraclean coal (less than 1 per cent ash). Superclean coal has the potential to enhance the combustion efficiency of conventional pulverised fuel power plants. Ultraclean coal will enable coal to be used in advanced power systems such as coalfired gas turbines which, when operated in combined cycle, have the potential to achieve much greater efficiencies.

Defendants of mining point out that, environmentally, coal mining has two important factors in its favour. It makes only temporary use of the land and produces no toxic chemical wastes. By carefully preplanning projects, implementing pollution control measures, monitoring the effects of mining and rehabilitating mined areas, the coal industry minimises the impact on the neighbouring community, the immediate environment and longterm land capability.

Dust levels are controlled by spraying roads and stockpiles, and water pollution is controlled by carefully separating clean water runoff from runoff which contains sediments or salt from mine workings. The latter is treated and reused for dust suppression. Noise is controlled by modifying equipment and by using insulation and sound enclosures around machinery.

Since mining activities represent only a temporary use of the land, extensive rehabilitation measures are adopted to ensure that land capability after mining meets agreed and appropriate standards which, in some cases, are superior to the land’s premining condition. Where the mining is underground, the surface area can be simultaneously used for forests, cattle grazing and crop raising, or even reservoirs and urban development, with little or no disruption to the existing land use. In all cases, mining is subject to stringent controls and approvals processes.
Text 7.3b ‘Logging’

Certificate III in Spoken and Written English
Module J Learning Outcome 1: Critically read an opinion text

The dangers of logging in old-growth forests

1 Old growth forests are forests which have remained largely undisturbed by agriculture and harvesting. Logging, no matter how well managed, damages forever their environmental value. These forests provide a unique habitat for many species of plants and wildlife. In addition, they are essential for the stability of the global climate system. Furthermore, these forests are storehouses of biodiversity which scientists have not yet been able to document or evaluate.

2 Old-growth forests are home to a great many species of plant and animal life. These species depend for their survival on complex ecological relationships which have taken many thousands of years to develop in the forest environment. When the old trees are logged, the habitats and food chains they provide will not return for many hundreds of years. This will inevitably lead to the extinction of many plants and animals.

3 Scientists are only just beginning to understand the role played by forests in the global climate system. Humans have already caused the world’s climate to change. It is the forests which restore balance to the system. We cannot tell at exactly what point the world’s climate will be dangerously affected by the loss of too many trees. Already the loss of trees in the Himalayas has contributed to terrible flooding in Bangladesh. Every tree we log takes us closer to more disasters of this kind.

4 Finally, old growth forests contribute to biodiversity. Biodiversity refers to the numbers of different plants and animals which exist on the planet. Scientists say that life on Earth cannot survive without a great variety of species. Each old tree in an old-growth forest supports an ecosystem of enormous diversity. Each tree that is logged contributes to the extinction of life on Earth as we know it.

5 It seems obvious that no economic argument in support of logging can possibly justify the destruction of trees in our old-growth forests. It is vital that we protect this priceless resource in the interest on the health and safety of all people on the Earth into the future.

(343 words, excluding title)

4. Matching

What do matching items require learners to do?

Matching items present learners with two columns of information, containing, for example, statements, names of people, places, things etc (Type A). Brown (2005) refers to the information in one column as the matching item premise and that shown in the other column as the options. Learners are required to match each of these items with one option from the list of options. Usually, there are more options than premises.

Example of matching item: Type A

Look at the following people and the list of hobbies below. Match each person with the correct hobby by drawing a line between the hobby and the person

| John Nelson  | Water skiing |
| Van Nguyen  | Diving       |
| Cynthia Kozlowski | Tennis |
| Sharon Lim  | Flower arrangement |
|              | Movies       |
|              | Piano        |

In the CSWE, matching items are used to assess learners’ understanding of text structure (for example, a narrative text), as in the following example.

Example of matching item: Type B

A narrative has the structure: Orientation, Complication, Evaluation, and Resolution. Each of the four sentences below introduces a stage in the narrative. Match each one to the stage it introduces by writing the stage in the space provided. The first one has been done for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative stage</th>
<th>Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>__________</td>
<td>There was no sign of Linda…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__________</td>
<td>‘There must be two Vietnamese restaurants opposite each other’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>When the phone rang one morning in March, Linda could see on the call display screen that it was Neil.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| __________      | ‘I hope she’s alright’.

How can this item type be used?

Matching items can be used to test detailed understanding of a central theme of a passage. They are particularly useful for identifying the characteristics, roles and relationships of participants in the text (for example, who holds which opinion etc)
What are the disadvantages of this item type?

If insufficient options are provided, the correct options can be selected through a process of elimination. If all the options are not related to a central theme, learners may be confused. As with MCQs, matching items may be hard to construct unless the passage contains enough information to allow the creation of a reasonable number of plausible options.

**Exercise 7.4**

Using Text 7.4, ‘Language Learning’, from the IELTS General Training Reading module, try to create some matching items (remember that you need more options than premises). Then compare your items with those from IELTS provided in Appendix 3.

Create some matching items for your own texts.

**Text 7.4, ‘Language Learning’**

A. **INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE CENTRE**
   INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
   FRENCH & JAPANESE
   SOMMER INTENSIVE
   Also commencing January 2005
   * Mandarin * Cantonese * Thai
   * Vietnamese * Korean * Indonesian * English
   * Somali * Italian * German * Russian
   For further details contact:
   Admissions & Information Office
   5 High Street,
   5th Sydney, 2000
   Tel: 295 4461
   Fax: 235 4714

B. **Global Language Learning Centre**
   ONE OF THE WORLD’S BEST
   LANGUAGE SCHOOLS IS
   NOW IN SYDNEY
   LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE
   IN 10-20 WEEKS
   LATEST METHODS
   FULL AND PART-TIME COURSES
   BUSINESS, HOSPITALITY
   OR TRAVEL
   Phone for appointment

C. **DO YOU WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT?**
   Then come to Perth
   the Picturesque Capital City of Western Australia
   Situated on the beautiful Swan River, Perth offers you...
   - Mediterranean climate
   - lovely Indian Ocean beaches
   - every sport imaginable
   - multicultural society
   - government-owned TAFE Colleges
   - high standards of facilities and staff
   - maximum flexibility
   - hostel or homestay accommodation

   Intensive English Courses Available
   - 5 intakes per year
   - 10 week modules
   - multicultural classes
   - optional programs
   - Cost: $2000 AUD per 10 weeks

   Study Tours Available
   - English/cultural tourism

   WE PLAN THE PROGRAM
   TO SUIT YOUR NEEDS
   For further details, contact:
   TAFE International,
   Level 5, 1 Mill Street,
   Perth 6000, Western Australia
   Telephone: 619 220 3777

D. **French**
   SUMMER COURSES
   January 2008

   Adults: Crash Course 9-10 Jan
   Intensive 3 or 4 hrs a day,
   morning or evening

   Adults Normal Course 9 Jan-1 March
   10 levels from Beginner to Advanced
   Twice a week - 5 hrs morning or evening
   Once a week, Saturday 9am-1:30pm $270

   High School Crash Course 11-25 Jan
   Intensive 3 hrs a day, 1pm-4pm
   Years 9 to 12
   $300
   Starts Wednesday 11.1.07

   Club Français
   27 Claire St, Sydney, Phone 227 1746

E. **UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA**
   Learn English in Australia’s National Capital
   * The EKOS Centre has more than 14 years’ experience in providing quality language programs for overseas students.
   * Pre-departure academic study.
   * Access to University facilities.
   * Classes conducted in English with opportunity to mix with Australian students.
5. Gap-fill and gapped summary items

What do gap-fill and gapped summary items require learners to do?

Gap-fill items require the learner to fill in missing words in a sentence. With gapped summaries, the learner is required to fill gaps in a summary with a word or phrase from the text. The summaries may summarise all or part of the text.

Example of gap-fill item

The film was about the ________________ ________________ of China

Example of gapped summary

Complete the summary below.

Choose NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from the text for each answer.

All patients attending the Sports Injury Clinic in the Prince of Wales Hospital between May 2005 and December 2006 were studied in this investigation. Most of these patients come to the ................. of the hospital and claimed that they had been injured in an ................. ; others were referred to the clinic by the Accident and Emergency Department of the same hospital. A ................. was completed for each patient. Information given included personal details, diagnosis, sports participation, injury management, and the practice of warm-up and use of .................

How can this item type be used?

Gap-fill items and gapped summaries can be used to assess learners’ ability to recognise explicit information in the text.

What are the advantages of this item type?

Gap-fill and gapped summary items require minimal writing so are particularly suitable for CSWE assessment.

What are the disadvantages of this item type?

Gap-fill items may be completed correctly by simply transferring lexical items directly from the passage without understanding the text. Some short passages may not lend themselves easily to summarising.

Exercise 7.5

Using Text 7.5, ‘Street Party’ (Certificate II Module J, LO1), construct as many gap-fill items, SAQs and sentence completion items as you can.

Create some gap-fill items for your own texts.
Hi Margaret,

How are you? Do you think we could meet to talk about the street party sometime soon? Time’s running out and we’ve still got heaps to organise.

I think we should invite Jonathan and Sarah too – they said they can take care of the barbecue and drinks. Would you be able to call them?

I saw a fantastic face painter at the markets last week. I asked her if she’d be free to come to our street party and she seemed pretty keen. I don’t know how much she charges yet – she said she’d get back to me by Tuesday.

I’m free any evening this week from 7 pm and between 8–9 am on Wednesday. Let me know which day would suit you best.
6. Ordering

*What do ordering items require learners to do?*

Ordering involves numbering or sequencing parts of the text or events in a story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Penny saw a woman with Don</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don and Penny went to the markets.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She found a pot for Don.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She turned to ask his opinion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny held the hand of the person behind her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The woman thanked Penny.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny saw Don.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example of ordering item**

*How can this item type be used?*

Ordering items are commonly used when the text has a narrative structure to assess learners’ ability to understand the sequence in which events occurred. In the CSWE learners can be asked to explicitly identify the stages of the text.

*What are the advantages of this item type?*

Ordering items are good indicators of whether the learner is able to identify markers of temporality and sequence and do not test productive skills since no writing is required.

*What are the disadvantages of this item type?*

If one of the items is wrongly numbered, the rest of the items will be wrongly answered. This is why the learners should be given an example.

**Exercise 7.6**

Using Text 7.6, ‘Amy’s Party’ (Certificate I Module K, LO1), try to construct an ordering item and some SAQ items. Then compare your items with the samples from the ATB in Appendix 3.

Create some ordering items for your own texts.
Text 7.6 ‘Amy’s Party’

Certificate I in Spoken and Written English
Module K Learning Outcome 1: Demonstrate understanding of a written recount

Read the text below and then answer the questions that follow.
You may use your dictionary.

Amy’s Party

Last Sunday, Bich and Van had a birthday party for their daughter Amy. She was 6 years old. Bich made a pink and white dress for Amy. Amy invited all her school friends. In the morning, Bich prepared some food and made a cake. In the afternoon, Van hung balloons in the living room. Amy’s friends came at 4 o’clock and wished her a happy birthday. They played some fun games, ate lots of food and sang Happy Birthday. Amy cut the birthday cake. Everybody clapped and sang. It was a very busy day and Bich and Van were very happy.

8. Piloting tasks

Piloting receptive skills tasks

Piloting tasks with learners is a vital step in the task development process.
The purpose of the pilot is to check whether the tasks:

1. work (ie. are comprehensible to learners);
2. elicit performances which are compatible with the CSWE performance criteria;
3. require further modification; or
4. should be rejected.

By carefully analysing the learners’ performance on the tasks, you will be able to see what modifications are necessary. In addition to the learners’ performances, you will also be getting data about the tasks from student evaluations.
Guidelines for piloting reading and listening tasks

Stage 1: Run the pilot

You will need:

- A copy of the task (with instructions) for each student
- Task evaluation sheet (Appendix 5)
- A means of recording the student evaluations

Pilot the task with at least 5 learners in your centre/class. Try to obtain a range of learner profiles (vary language background, level of formal education, age etc.)

Administer the task, observing the required conditions. Note any issues that arise on the Task evaluation sheet.

Carry out a student evaluation once the learners have finished the task. Ask the students if they enjoyed the task, if it was too easy/difficult, if they understood what to do, etc. Encourage their input on all aspects of the task.

Probe any problems they had with further questions to help in modifying the task later. This evaluation can be done orally (and recorded), or as a written exercise (with a questionnaire or response to a set of questions).

Stage 2: Collate the responses

You will need:

- The student responses
- The answer key
- Task analysis grid (receptive skills) (Appendix 5)

Mark the responses according to the Answer Key.

Record the results on the Task analysis grid. The first row has been filled in as an example. The completed grid will:

- provide a system that is consistent for all tasks;
- help you to make more reliable observations about the quality of items and text;
- help you to make decisions about which items need modification and which parts of the text may need to be rewritten (for example, there is an ambiguity in the text that needs to be made clearer);
- facilitate discussion about the tasks with colleagues and allow comparison of results.
Stage 3: Analyse the results

You will need:

- Task analysis grid (Appendix 5)
- Input from student evaluation (Stage 1)
- Task evaluation sheet (Appendix 5)

Analyse the data on your Task analysis grid. Look closely at any items for which incorrect and blank responses exceed the number of correct responses. Consider why this might be: is the language in the text or the item too difficult; is there enough time between key pieces of information, to comprehend and write the correct answer; is the Answer Key incomplete or inaccurate; etc?

Consider the comments students made in the evaluation session. If none of them liked the task, for example, why was that?

Now consider how you could modify the task to address any problems you have uncovered in the task in 1 and 2, above.

Note your ideas and recommendations for modifying the different components of the task, on the Task evaluation sheet. You might, at this stage, consider rejecting a task (for example, learners didn’t like the topic, task didn’t work/too difficult etc). Rejected task would contain features that cannot be modified.

You should also note any modification of task conditions you consider necessary. These will have come from your observations during the pilot (for example, length of time for pre-reading questions) and from the data (for example, too easy with 2 hearings etc.)

Stage 4: Modify the task

You will need:

- Task analysis grid (Appendix 5)
- Task evaluation sheet (Appendix 5)
- An electronic version of the task

Working with colleagues, discuss your analysis and suggestions for modifying the task.

Make the final modifications.

Complete final proof-reading and formatting.

You are now ready to submit your task to the AMEP Research Centre for moderation, national trialling and possible inclusion in the online task bank on the AMEP Research Centre website: http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au.
Assessing reading: References and bibliography

Researching and teaching reading

The following publications are devoted to discussion of issues in researching and teaching reading in a second language:


Publications with an AMEP focus

The following publications are of particular relevance to AMEP teachers:


Constructing reading tests

The following publications provide useful practical advice on reading test construction.


APPENDIX 1: Copyright information

Copyright and the Assessment Task Bank – a short guide

Copyright is a simple concept, a question of ownership.

Creating an original assessment task

Tasks created from scratch, with original texts and illustrations, should belong to the author. Individual employment contracts should be checked to ensure that ownership is not preempted by the employer.

Involving other people (photographs/recordings)

Where a task includes a portrait, permission should be obtained from the person in the photo. Where a task includes a sound recording, permission should be obtained from the performer.

Permission forms for images and sound, approved by DIAC, are now available from the Task Bank administrator and will shortly be available on the Assessment Home Page.

Both the writer of the task and the performer/subject of a photo should keep a copy of the signed form.

Background copyright

If exiting material is used to create a task, background copyright is the ownership of that existing material.

Licensing

If an owner can be identified it is usually possible to come to some agreement in the form of a licence or permission. This may involve a fee.

Acknowledgement

Often, however, owners are happy for their work to be used, providing that their ownership is acknowledged.

Adapting other people’s work

It is often possible to adapt another person’s work to create a suitable task. However, this involves more than just changing a few words and/or characters. The final task should not be identifiable as the original. The original is best used only as a model for the new task.
Foreground Copyright

This is defined as the ownership of the material, or task, that has been created. In the case of the Task Bank, the Commonwealth of Australia owns the copyright of all tasks on the Assessment Task Bank.

For further information on Copyright, go to:

Australian Copyright Council
http://www.copyright.org.au/information

APPENDIX 2: Assessing second language reading: Some useful websites

Resources for assessing and teaching reading

Center for Applied Linguistics Resources Guides Online: Internet Resources for Teachers of English as a Second Language
http://www.cal.org/resources/archive/rgos/eslint.html

World English:
http://www.world-english.org

Resources in Language Testing:
http://www.le.ac.uk/education/testing/ltr.html

Learning Resources:
http://literacyworks.org/learningresources/

CNN Interactive Learning Resources:
http://www.cnnsf.com/education/education.html

BBC Learning English:
www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish

Bangkok Post:
http://readbangkokpost.com

ESL Podcasts:
http://www.eslpod.com/website/index.php#

Dave’s ESL Café:
http://www.eslcafe.com

The TESL Reading and Writing Forum:
http://www.eslweb.org/resources/

Writing Den
http://www2.actden.com/writ_den/

OzESL Online:
Cambridge ESOL:
http://www.cambridgeesol.org

IELTS
http://www.ielts.org

TOEFL
http://www.toefl.org

Online journals and articles

Reading in a Foreign Language:
http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl/about.html

The Reading Matrix: The ESL Reading and Writing Resources Forum
http://www.readingmatrix.com/

The Internet TESL Journal:
http://iteslj.org/

TESL-EJ:
http://tesl-ej.org/ej42/toc.html

Online extensive reading opportunities for lower-level learners of EFL/ESL by Ken Schmidt:
http://www.cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/tesl-ej/ej13/int.html

Language Learning and Technology:
http://www.llt.msu.edu

Teaching English with Technology
http://www.iatefl.org.pl/call/callnl.htm

ReCALL
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=REC
APPENDIX 3

Examples of test items

Text 6.1b ‘Shop assistant Version 2’ with items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shop Assistant</th>
<th>Melbourne West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wanted for supermarket.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 days a week. 4 hours per day from 2 pm. to 6 pm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual rates.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact: Mr Jones (02) 9628 7941 After hours: 0413 143 922</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answer these questions in a few words:

1. What is the job?

________________________________________________________________

2. Where is the supermarket?

________________________________________________________________

3. How many days per week is the job?

________________________________________________________________

4. How many hours per week is the job?

________________________________________________________________

5. Who do you phone?

________________________________________________________________

6. What is the after hours telephone number?

________________________________________________________________
Read the message and answer the questions. You can use your dictionary.

1. Who is the message for?

________________________________________________________________

2. Who telephoned?

________________________________________________________________

3. What time did he ring?

________________________________________________________________

4. When does Amina have to ring Ahmed?

________________________________________________________________

5. What two things does Ahmed want Amina to do?

________________________________________________________________

6. Why can’t Ahmed do these things himself?

________________________________________________________________

Answer key

1. Amina
2. Ahmed
3. 2.30 pm
4. A.S.A.P./as soon as possible/urgently/after she gets the message
5. pick up children (and) get parcel from Post Office/P.O.
   Note: both parts must be given to be marked correct.
6. working overtime (tonight)/working late (tonight)/working (tonight)
Items from Text 7.2 ‘Letter to Anne’

Certificate II in Spoken and Written English
Module J Learning Outcome 1: Demonstrate understanding of an informal written text

Read the text and answer the questions in a few words. You can use your dictionary.

1. Who wrote this letter?

________________________________________________________________

2. Who was the letter to?

________________________________________________________________

3. What month was this letter written?

________________________________________________________________

4. How did Andrew travel to Canberra?

________________________________________________________________

5. Andrew went to Canberra with .

________________________________________________________________

6. Andrew is asking Ann to.

________________________________________________________________

Tick the correct answer ✓

7. The letter is about:

   a skiing holiday
   visiting friends
   a trip to Canberra
   looking after plants
Certificate II in Spoken and Written English
Module J Learning Outcome 1: Demonstrate understanding of an informal written text

Answer key

The learning outcome will be achieved by having at least five of the seven items correct including question seven which is compulsory.

1. Andrew
2. Ann
3. June
4. driving/by car
5. the kids/(his) family
6. check the/his mailbox, check/collection the/his mail
7. a trip to Canberra
Items from Text 7.3a ‘Coal’

Questions 1 – 5

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

1 The global increase in greenhouse gases has been attributed to
   A industrial pollution in developing countries.
   B coal mining and electricity generation.
   C reduced rainfall in many parts of the world.
   D trends in population and lifestyle.

2 The proportion of all greenhouse gases created by coal is approximately
   A 14 per cent.
   B 18 per cent.
   C 27 per cent.
   D 90 per cent.

3 Current research aims to increase the energy producing efficiency of coal by
   A burning it at a lower temperature.
   B developing new gasification techniques.
   C extracting CO2 from it.
   D recycling greenhouse gases.

4 Compared with ordinary coal, new, ‘clean’ coals may generate power
   A more cleanly and more efficiently.
   B more cleanly but less efficiently.
   C more cleanly but at higher cost.
   D more cleanly but much more slowly.

5 To control dust at mine sites, mining companies often use
   A chemicals which may be toxic.
   B topsoil taken from the site before mining.
   C fresh water from nearby dams.
   D runoff water containing sediments.

Question 6

Choose the most suitable title for the text from the list below.
Circle the correct letter, A, B, C or D, on your answer sheet.

   A Pollution control in coal mining
   B The greenhouse effect
   C The coal industry and the environment
   D Sustainable population growth
Items from Text 7.3b ‘Logging’

1. In the first paragraph, the writer gives three main explanations about the value of old-growth forests. Write one of these explanations here.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

2. What is the relationship between forests, humans and climate change?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

3. When discussing the flooding in Bangladesh, what word does the writer use to express his feeling about the situation?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

4. In the first sentence of paragraph 5, the writer uses language that shows their passion for their beliefs about the dangers of logging in old-growth forests. Give one example of a word or phrase used that shows this.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

5. What word in paragraph 5 means ‘absolutely necessary’?

________________________________________________________________

6. What specific example does the writer give to show man’s impact on the environment?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

7. What does the writer want people to do?

________________________________________________________________

Continued over the page
Certificate III in Spoken and Written English
Module J Learning Outcome 1: Critically read an opinion text

8. Tick the correct answer.

The writer feels that

☐ we should log old-growth forests
☐ we should log old-growth forests but only for economic reasons
☐ we should log old-growth forests but only a little
☐ we should not log old-growth forests

Answer Key

Remember that learners don’t have to write complete sentences to be marked correct. If you find a legitimate response which has obviously been overlooked, please mark it correct and let us know.

1. These forests provide a unique habitat for many species of plants and wildlife; or They are essential for the stability of the global climate system; or These forests are storehouses of biodiversity (which scientists have not yet been able to document or evaluate).
2. humans cause the climate to change, while forests restore the balance (to the system)
3. terrible
4. it seems obvious / no economic argument / possibly justify / destruction
5. vital
6. The loss of trees in the Himalayas has contributed to the floods in Bangladesh
7. To stop logging old-growth forests / to support/protect the old-growth forests/protect this priceless resource
8. We should not log old-growth forests
Items from Text 7.4 ‘Language Learning’

Sample task type 2

SECTION 1 Questions 1 – 8

Questions 1 – 8

Look at the five advertisements, A – E, on page 3.

Which advertisement mentions the following?

Write the correct letter, A, B, C, D or E, in boxes 1 – 8 on your answer sheet.

NB You may use any letter more than once.

1. Up-to-date teaching systems
2. that the institution has been established for a significant time
3. examination classes
4. that arrangements can be made for activities outside class
5. the availability of courses for school students
6. language teaching for special purposes
7. a wide variety of language choices
8. evening classes
Items from Text 7.5 ‘Street Party’

Certificate II in Spoken and Written English
Module J Learning Outcome 1: Demonstrate understanding of an informal written text

Read the text and answer the questions in a few words. You can use your dictionary.

1. The email is about ______________________________________________

2. Who is the email from?
   ________________________________________________________________

3. Who is the email to?
   ________________________________________________________________

4. Jonathan and Sarah can organise the _______________ and _______________

5. Helen saw a ________________________________________________ at the markets.

6. Helen is free after ________________________________ in the evening.
48

Items from Text 7.6 ‘Amy’s Party’

Certificate I in Spoken and Written English
Module K Learning Outcome 1: Demonstrate understanding of a written recount.

Read the text and answer the questions. You may use your dictionary.

1. Number the events in the order they happen in the story. The first one has been done for you.

   Everybody clapped. □
   Bich baked a cake. □
   Van hung the balloons. □
   Bich and Van had a party. 1
   Amy and her friends played games. □

   Answer these questions in no more than four words.

2. What was the party for?

3. What colour was Amy’s dress?

4. Who baked a cake?

5. Where did Van put up the balloons?

6. When did Amy’s friends arrive?
### APPENDIX 4

**Guidelines for the development of tasks and items for reading assessment (Adapted from Brown, 2005; Hughes 2003)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is the task in accordance with the CSWE specifications?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Does the task require the reader to produce the behaviour specified in the assessment criteria?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does the task reflect the way in which the reader would engage with the text in the real world?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is the task contextualized with visual cues/background information?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do the instructions tell the learners what they are supposed to do and what kind of response is expected?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Is the language of the instructions simple and clear? Have standard rubrics used in the CSWE been explained to learners? eg. ‘the first one has been done for you’?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Is the language used in the items clear and comprehensible?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Is the language used in the items grammatically correct?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Are the format and layout of the text clear?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Are the items independent of each other? (Does the answer to one question contain the answer to another?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Have ambiguous terms and statements been avoided?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Can the items be answered correctly without reading the text?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Are the items in the same order as the information in the text?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Have you shown the items and answer key to a colleague?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 a) Short answer questions and sentence completion:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Can the questions be answered correctly without reading the text?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Does the answer key cover the possible range of responses?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Has writing been kept to a minimum?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Has the amount of writing expected been specified?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Is the answer within the reader’s productive capacities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Is the amount of lexical overlap appropriate for the learners’ level?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Multiple choice items:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Can the questions be answered correctly without reading the text?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Is there just one correct response?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Are all the distractors plausible?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Are all the distractors parallel (ie do they look similar)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Have negatives and double negatives been avoided?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Does the item contain information that could help the reader answer another item?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Matching items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Are there more options than premises (Type A items)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Is the text structure clearly marked (Type B items)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Gap-fill and gapped summary items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Is the summary accurate?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Can the correct answer be taken straight from the text without understanding it?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Ordering items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Are the events in the text clearly marked?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Has an example been provided in the item?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX 5

Task analysis grid (receptive skills): range of student responses to items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no. in task</th>
<th>Answer key</th>
<th>Desired responses</th>
<th>Acceptable but unpredicted responses</th>
<th>Unacceptable responses</th>
<th>No. of correct responses</th>
<th>No. of incorrect responses</th>
<th>No. of items left blank</th>
<th>Total no. of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example Item 3</td>
<td>Saturday(s) and Sunday(s)</td>
<td>Saturday and Sunday, Saturdays and Sundays, every weekend, daytime, during the day on Saturday and Sunday</td>
<td>on Saturday, every day, in the city centre</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Task evaluation sheet

CSWE Level: Learning outcome:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task name:</th>
<th>Description of problem with task</th>
<th>Suggestions for modifying task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task Conditions</strong>&lt;br&gt;(eg compliance with CSWE, time limit)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task Characteristics</strong>&lt;br&gt;(eg clear rubrics, format)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text</strong>&lt;br&gt;(eg appropriate level of difficulty, length)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items</strong>&lt;br&gt;(eg compliance with CSWE, do they produce a small no. of unambiguous responses?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text/Items Relationship</strong>&lt;br&gt;(eg Items in text order?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer Key</strong>&lt;br&gt;(eg Does it include all acceptable responses?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your opinion?<br>Minor Changes<br>Reject Task