

Linguaskill overview



This overview outlines the Cambridge approach to test validity, and the overall purpose of these two variants of the test.

Test purpose

New Linguaskill is a modular online multi-level test of English language proficiency that reports results on an internationally recognised reference framework called the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Linguaskill has two variants: *General* and *Business*.

The *General* version can be used for admissions, progress measurement, or as an exit test for higher education institutions and pathway programs. It can also be used for recruitment for roles in a non-business-specific environment where the employee needs strong English skills to perform their role but will not need specialist business terminology.

The *Business* version is designed for students entering the workplace at graduate level, or employees using the test for professional development or promotion. The aim of this version of the test is to assess whether a candidate's language ability is at a level where they are ready to engage in professional activities and operate successfully in workplace environments.

Both test versions are designed to have a positive influence on language teaching and learning.

The following key features of Linguaskill provide a sound foundation for the test results to be used in the contexts mentioned above:

- During test construction, tasks for all skills are carefully designed and based on CEFR descriptors and research into cognitive and contextual factors.
- Rigorous test content review performed by language testing professionals ensures high-quality test questions which assess critical language knowledge and skills of stakeholders' interest.
- Trial studies to confirm that the test assesses language knowledge and skills that are essential for real-world communication.
- Regular checks on test reliability of our computer-adaptive Reading and Listening modules.
- Quality assurance and monitoring of examiners for Writing and Speaking components to ensure results are fair and unbiased.

The socio-cognitive framework

Frameworks allow for the systematic description of test tasks for the purpose of language test design, test validation and research. The theoretical framework selected to guide the test evaluation process for New Linguaskill is Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive framework for language test validationⁱ. The framework allows for a systematic and comprehensive critical evaluation of construct definition and operationalisation using an evidence-based approach.

The framework (Figure 1) is described as *socio-cognitive* in that "the abilities to be tested are demonstrated by the mental processing of the learner (the cognitive dimension); equally, the use of language in performing tasks is viewed as a *social* rather than a purely linguistic phenomenon" (Taylor, 2011, p.25). The framework is very much in line with the use of language for social purposes as defined in the CEFR. It adopts an interactionist position to the construct where ability is defined in terms of both cognitive abilities and the interaction of these abilities with the surrounding social and contextual factors.

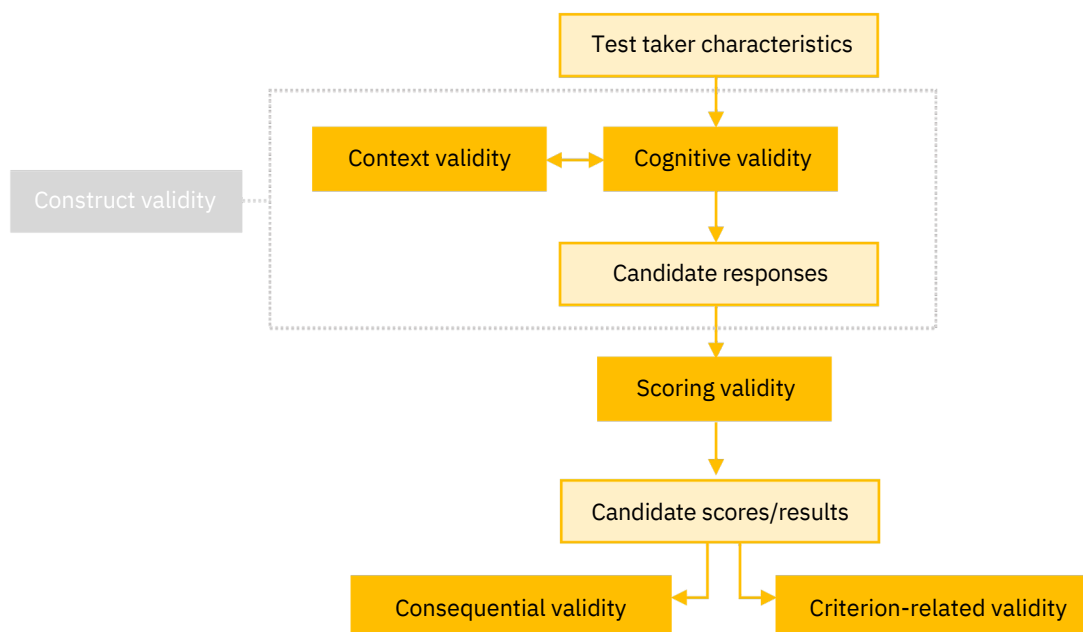


Figure 1 A socio-cognitive framework (based on Weir 2005, pp. 44-47)

The framework consists of several components that together present a unified approach to collecting validity evidence for a given test. In our evaluation process, we focus on four main components of the framework, namely cognitive, context, scoring and criterion-related validityⁱⁱ. Our validity argument is structured around these four critical components:

- **Cognitive validity:** the term refers to establishing the type of cognitive processing that is activated by the test task(s) and the extent to which the cognitive processes required to complete the tasks are appropriate for the language level of the learners and reflective of real-world mental processes.
- **Context validity:** traditionally used to refer to the content coverage of tasks, the term is used more broadly to refer to characteristics of test tasks and the extent to which they are appropriate and fair to learners taking the tests.
- **Scoring validity:** in the Weir (2005) framework, scoring validity is used as a superordinate term to include all aspects of reliability and refers to the extent to which we can depend on the scores which result from a given test.
- **Criterion-related validity:** potentially this term can relate to three basic types of comparability (Khalifa and Weir, 2009, pp.7-8): a connection between test scores and external criteria which purports to measure the same ability, demonstrative evidence of qualitative and quantitative equivalence across different test versions or linkage to an external standard (e.g. the CEFR).
- **Consequential validity:** this term relates to the uses of the test results, and whether these are valid ones. It investigates the impact of the test at different micro and macro levels: on learners, on the classroom, on the school and on educational systems, and on society as a whole.

ⁱ This approach has proven not only to be theoretically sound but also practically useful, evidenced in a number of validation activities and research projects undertaken by Cambridge for over two decades and

documented in a series of ‘construct’ volumes on writing (Shaw & Weir 2007), reading (Khalifa & Weir, 2009), speaking (Taylor, 2011) and listening (Geranpayeh & Taylor, 2013)

ⁱⁱ It should be noted that construct validity is not listed explicitly in the model, but is represented by the box surrounding the interplay between context validity (the content of the test) cognitive validity (what learners need to complete the tasks on the test) and *candidate responses* (how learners perform on the test).

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