Ministerio de Educación

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

**EIGHTH–NINTH–TENTH YEAR
EDUCACIÓN GENERAL BÁSICA**

**FIRST–SECOND–THIRD YEAR
BACHILLERATO**

Ministerio
de **Educación**

CONTENTS

Introduction

The following guidelines attempt to enable teachers to assess more effectively and appropriately in the foreign language within a communicative approach to language teaching and learning. The suggestions are not intended as a first introduction to assessment in foreign language teaching, but rather it has been assumed that teachers are already familiar with some basics regarding the following:

(1) Assessment types (e.g. formal vs. informal),

(2) Test design (i.e. the most common types of test items used for the assessment of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of those frequently used test items, and

(2) Grading based on the regulations stated in the **LOEI**[1] and its by-law (Reglamento a la Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural),

Furthermore, and in writing these suggestions, learners from different public institutions along the country have been kept in mind, so teachers will find the guidelines more or less suitable to their teaching situation depending on the specific contexts where their pedagogical practice takes place. It is, therefore, teachers' individual reading what will let them judge whether a particular assessment technique or tool is suitable for the groups they teach.

It is worth noting that these guidelines have been written by keeping in mind students in the on-site mode (i.e. modalidad presencial de educación). This implies that teachers who are instructing students in the blended and distance learning modes (i.e. modalidad semipresencial y a distancia) are welcomed to use the document as a reference they may adopt and/or adapt after a judicious analysis of the characteristics featuring those teaching settings and their groups of learners.

SOME GENERALITIES ON ASSESSMENT

Three types of assessment are commonly practiced in our educational system: diagnostic (at the beginning of the school year), formative (along the school year) and summative (at the end of the course). Therefore, in agreement with Ur (2012), we can summarize five main reasons why English proficiency assessment is carried out in Ecuadorean classrooms; in general terms, assessment is done in order to:

1. Be aware of students' strengths and weaknesses (diagnostic assessment).

2. Evaluate how well students have learnt specific material during a course.

3. Keep track of students' progress (formative assessment).

4. Evaluate students' overall level (summative assessment).

5. Learn some useful information about successes or failures in our own teaching.

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1. LOEI: Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural

Teachers, as a result, need to plan and design formal assessment tools (e.g. written and oral tests) as well as informal instruments (e.g. checklists) that fulfill the following functions:

a. Specify learners' level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

b. Report how good learners' language skills are.

c. Assess learners' knowledge of a set of vocabulary items, a text or a grammatical feature.

d. Be aware of what students need to learn in order to plan our teaching appropriately.

A. ABOUT TEST CONSTRUCTION

It is worth mentioning that teachers should consider the following issues suggested by Coughlin (2006) which agree with teaching principles claimed by the Communicative Approach in order to construct good tests:

1. **SPEAKING TESTS:** should concentrate on item types that test for real-life situations. For example, instead of tests of reading aloud or telling stories, questions should test students' ability to understand and respond appropriately to such things as polite requests, directions, instructions, advice, etc.

2. **WRITTEN TESTS:** traditional compositions used in the past are not as appropriately useful as questions requiring students to write letters, reports, messages, etc.

3. **READING AND LISTENING TESTS:** should assess students' ability to extract specific information of a practical nature rather than attempt to have students give back irrelevant bits of information.

B. ADMINISTRATION AND SCORING GUIDE

Besides being the most common way to assess students' language ability, tests (either oral or written) are useful tools that serve some other functions, which Ur (2012) has summarized as follows:

1. They signal the end of units.

2. They motivate learners to review material in order to do examinations well.

3. They give learners a sense of achievement and progress.

4. They are instruments for useful content learning or review.

Diagnostic assessment

As experienced teachers know, written tests can be used for diagnostic evaluation that takes place at the beginning of the school year so that a student or class profile is built and teaching can be planned appropriately.

Formative assessment

For ongoing or formative assessment, written tests that include a listening, reading, language use (i.e. grammar), and writing section should ideally be administered at the end of each studied content

unit along with other assessment tools (e.g., oral lessons, homework, projects, etc.). Every test should also be graded and count as a partial score that will contribute to the 80% of the learners' final score at the end of every school term (i.e. quimestre).

In general, these progress or achievement tests—which "are designed to measure learners' language and skill progress in relation to the syllabus they have been following" (Harmer, 2010, p.380)—have to be developed by considering the specific materials to which learners have been exposed as well as the activity types they have carried out in the classroom.

The reason is that achievement tests are appropriately designed and work only if they contain item types familiar to the learners. Harmer (2010) clarifies that this does not mean teachers have to give students exactly the same texts they have seen before for a reading test, but rather "it does mean providing them with similar texts and familiar task types" (p. 380).

In other words, tests may fail in measuring the learning that has been taking place if students are faced with material that is completely new even though they "can still measure general language proficiency" (Harmer, 2010, p. 380) . Exposing learners to test items that are familiar then facilitates learners' knowing what to study in order to prepare for the written tests.

Summative assessment

According to the new bylaws of the Law of Education (Reglamento a la Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural - LOEI, 2012), which have currently established regulations and procedures for summative evaluation in all areas of knowledge, an exam at the end of each term (or quimestre) should also be administered and graded. This will account for 20% of the final score.

Test items: A reminder

According to Ur (2012), two types of questions are commonly used in written examinations: (1) close-ended and (2) open-ended. Close-ended items—which are usually easier to check but require more preparation— have mostly one pre-determined correct answer and include (but are not limited to) the following examples: multiple-choice, gap-fills, transformation, matching, rewriting, mistake correction, etc.

On the other hand, open-ended items—which are more difficult to correct and whose responses are less predictable—seem to give a better picture of how well students can communicate using the target language (Ur, 2012). Examples of such items include (but are not limited to) open-ended sentence completion (as in "If I lived in the Amazon region,…) and sentence composition (as in "Write three sentences comparing two members of your family using comparative adjectives").

By considering the advantages and disadvantages of both types of test items as well as the three issues mentioned before (teachers' goals, their students' interests, and available class time), educators can, therefore, judiciously craft their tests.

C. ABOUT ORAL TESTS

Oral tests examine students' ability to communicate orally using the language presented in class and studied at home. According to McCarthy et al. (2005), "[oral tests] can be used along with written tests as part of student grading and assessment" (p.224).

Ideally, therefore, there should be at least two oral tests covering the language in the different units learners have studied (one at the end of the 1st term; the other at the end of the 2nd term).

1. What assessment criteria should be considered?

Coughlin (2006) has said that all types of speaking tests should measure at least the following: (1) pronunciation, (2) fluency, (3) vocabulary knowledge, and (4) grammatical control. Each criterion—as well as an additional one labeled "comprehension"—has been described by Richards et al. (2005) as follows:

MINIMUM CRITERIA TO CONSIDER FOR SPOKEN EVALUATIONS

Pronunciation: ability to use correct stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns.

Fluency: ability to speak naturally and without many pauses.

Vocabulary: ability to understand and use vocabulary words and phrases.

Grammar: ability to use correct grammar and sentence structures.

Comprehension: ability to understand questions and respond appropriately.

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2. What types of activities/tasks can be carried out?

In addition to the activities teachers have wisely selected to assess their groups of learners, Jones (2008) has suggested two types of specific tasks for testing oral skills which teachers can also use. One of them is an interview (which in fact tests listening comprehension as well as speaking); the other, a picture description (which is particularly suitable for beginners). Both approaches can be compared as follows:

INTERVIEWS	PICTURE DESCRIPTION
Students ask and answer questions that are modeled on material presented in the Student's textbook. The questions are designed to encourage discussion.	Students describe or compare what they see in a picture or in a set of pictures. The pictures are also modeled on material presented in the Student's textbook.
Fewer guides or cues are given, and the interviewee must respond to each question with only his or her language ability.	Basic vocabulary can be somewhat controlled, and the tense sequencing can be suggested.
Interviews use and develop fluency in vocabulary.	Picture-based speaking stresses vocabulary and grammatical control.

Adapted from Coughlin (2006) and Jones (2008).

Moreover, McCarthy et al. (2005) and Jones (2008) have suggested that in order to administer an oral interview, for instance, there should be a bank of items which can be divided into various sets as follows: Student A, Student B, Student C, and Student D. Teachers can, therefore, also prepare

their own picture sets—which may be labeled as Speaker A, B, C, and D for students to describe in a test. Unquestionably, the number of sets will depend on whether the teacher decides to test students individually, in pairs, or in groups.

3. How to work on question banks and pictures/ picture sequences?

A good web resource of question banks is the page called "Conversation Questions for ESL/EFL classroom" that belongs to "The Internet TESL Journal[2]". The page has a large group of questions organized by topic, and teachers can use it either for their EFL conversation classes and/or for their assessment question banks.

As for pictures, teachers may take a look at sample illustrations and picture story sequences available in magazines, the newspaper or the internet. Valdez and O' Malley (1992) have said that when using picture cues for oral assessment, teachers present drawings or photographs appropriate for the age and interest level of the students being assessed. Therefore, if evaluating descriptions or narration, teachers should give students a picture to study for a few minutes and then ask them to describe it in a given time (e.g. two or three minutes).

Once the learner has finished describing the picture, teachers should assign separate scores for general fluency, grammar, vocabulary, phonology and accuracy of the description/narration (look at the rubric shown in the section titled "What about scoring?").

Another way teachers can proceed is by presenting several pictures to learners and asking them to choose one or two they feel they could talk about. Once that is done, teachers can lead students into talking by asking questions like "Describe what you see in the picture", "What story does the picture tell?", "Has this ever happened to you?" or "What do you think will happen next?" among other questions.

NOTE: A set of pictures for description that teachers can use has been provided at the end of this document (see Appendix A, B, and C).

For picture sequence references, on the other hand, teachers can look at websites like http://www.abcteach.com/directory/prek-early-childhood-reading-story-sequence-3038-2-1. The drawings in some of the sequences are simple stick figures which teachers can find useful as a model to design their own simple sets of pictures. Here are two additional links that provide free picture sequence samples that teachers can download:

http://www.abcteach.com/free/s/sequence1.pdf

http://excerpts.numilog.com/books/1895451612.pdf

4. What methods can be used to assess speaking?

Teachers can make a selection of question items or pictures from the websites mentioned before or develop their own, and then decide on one of the following methods suggested by Jones (2008):

Suggested method A: One teacher interacting with one student—i.e. both asking and answering each other's follow-up questions. Teachers should give each student a copy of only her/his set of questions.

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2. "The Internet TESL Journal (ITESLJ) is a combination of monthly online publications and information from the TESL/TEFL teaching materials site. It has been online since 1995 and it has accumulated a growing archive of research articles, position papers, teaching tips and activities, quizzes, and a large collection of links to TESL/TEFL sites. It constantly presents new material in its monthly journal, is open to all contributors and contains a refreshingly wide variety of materials from teachers around the world, ranging from statistic-filled research papers to short grammar and vocabulary quizzes" (http://iteslj.org/)

Suggested method B: One teacher interacting with two students—i.e. both students asking and answering each other's questions while teacher listens and assesses their communication. Learners should be assigned roles (either as Student A, B, C, or D) in each pair, and each one should receive copies of only her/his set of questions and take turns for questions and answers.

Suggested method C: One teacher interacting with two, three, or four students—i.e. teacher may be asking each student in turn or giving each student a picture and asking relevant questions. Therefore, each learner should be assigned and given a photocopy of her/his corresponding set of questions. Other options include: (1) "Each student consistently asking questions to the same partner; (2) each student asks their questions either to the student sitting on their right or on their left" (McCarthy et al., 2005).

Furthermore, it is important to remember that each set of questions should test similar language points and that the teachers' choice of an appropriate oral assessment method will depend on the following factors:

- the number of students in their class,

- the amount of time and space they have available, and

- the administrative requirements of their institutions (Jones, 2008).

Finally, and especially because they work with large groups, teachers are suggested to evaluate students orally in pairs or groups by considering the following summary timing table:

Oral Test	Time	Outcome
In pairs	9 minutes per conversation	8 students (Ss) evaluated in a 40-minute class period
	7 minutes per conversation	10 students (Ss) evaluated in a 40-minute class period.
	4 minutes per conversation	20 students (Ss) evaluated in a 40-minute class period.
In groups (3 or 4 Ss)	6 minutes per conversation	18 – 24 students (Ss) evaluated in a 40-minute class period.
	9 minutes per conversation	12- 16 students (Ss) evaluated in a 40-minute class period.

5. What about scoring?

Teachers could use individual scoring sheets as the ones adapted below from Richards et al. (2005), McCarthy et al. (2005), and Jones (2008). In alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the scoring sheet for "oral interview" includes "interaction"—ability to listen to and interact with a partner— as one more criterion for assessment:

a. Oral interview (50 points)

	Poor 1-2	Fair 3-4	Good 5-6	Very good 7-8	Excellent 9-10
Comprehension (ability to understand questions and respond appropriately)					
Interaction (ability to listen to and interact with a partner)					
Accuracy (grammar, syntax, and general structures)					
Fluency (vocabulary, speed, naturalness, lack of hesitation)					
Pronunciation (stress, rhythm, intonation patterns)					

Total: …………………………….out of 50.

Comments and suggestions:…………………………..…………………………………………………….....…

……....…

On the other hand, the second scoring sheet for "picture description" includes "content" as one more criterion for assessment.

b. Picture description (50 points)

	Poor 1-2	Fair 3-4	Good 5-6	Very good 7-8	Excellent 9-10
Fluency (speed, naturalness, lack of hesitation)					
Accuracy (grammar: syntax and general structures)					
Vocabulary (use of words, expressions from studied unit/s/ course for the picture's description)					
Pronunciation (stress, rhythm, intonation patterns)					
Content (precision and length in describing the subject matter and picture elements)					

Total: …………………………….out of 50.

Comments and suggestions: …………………………….……...............………………………………………

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As shown, learners are graded in five categories, and the whole test is worth 50 points, which may be interpreted as follows:

Quantitatively	Qualitatively
44-50	Excellent
36-42	Good
28-34	Average
20-26	Needs work
25 or below	Poor

Adapted from McCarthy et al. (2005)

Undoubtedly, again, teachers may feel free to adopt, adapt, change, or improve the scoring sheets here sampled and final scores out of 50 can be converted into scores out of 10 points by using **cross multiplication**[3] as needed.

6. **How to avoid subjectivity when assigning scores on a scale out of 10?**

Harmer (2010) has said that one way to make scoring scales more objective is, "to write careful descriptions of what the different scores for each category actually represent" (p.172). Therefore, below are two examples of scales for assessing speaking that describe what each score means; these **rubrics**[4] have been adapted from Jones (2008) and Spratt et al. (2008), and teachers may find them useful when assessing their students' speaking and listening.

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3   **Cross multiplication:** closest translation for "regla de tres".

4   **Rubric:** "In education, a rubric is a tool developed by instructors to assess the performances of their students. This assessment tool lists the dimensions (tasks) of the performance to be evaluated, and the specific criteria used to evaluate each dimension" (http://health.usf.edu/publichealth/eta/Rubric_Tutorial/default.htm)

	Poor 1-2	Fair 3-4	Good 5-6	Very good 7-8	Excellent 9-10
Comprehension ability to make her/himself understood	Unable to make her/himself understood while performing the **task***, even when listener asks for repetition or clarification.	Unable to make her/himself understood while performing most of the task; listener frequently asks for repetition and clarification.	Makes her/himself understood while performing at least half the task; listener sometimes asks for repetition or clarification.	Makes her/himself understood while performing most of the task; listener seldom asks for repetition or clarification.	Makes her/himself understood while performing most of the task; listener rarely asks for repetition or clarification
Interaction ability to listen to and interact with a partner	Unable to listen attentively or respond appropriately while performing the task; fails to interact with a partner.	Unable to listen attentively or respond appropriately while performing most of the task; interacts poorly with a partner.	While performing at least half of the task, listens to another person and responds reasonably well; interacts adequately with a partner.	While performing most of the task, listens attentively to another person and responds appropriately; interacts well with a partner	While performing the task, listens attentively to another person and responds appropriately; interacts very well with a partner.
Accuracy grammar, syntax, and general structures	Uncontrolled grammar and syntax, lacks knowledge of general structures.	Very frequent errors; difficulty in making meaning clear.	Frequent errors; meaning is not always clear.	Quite accurate; some errors, but meaning is clear.	Grammatical and **lexical**** accuracy are high.
Fluency vocabulary, speed, naturalness, lack of hesitation	Unnatural and labored speech, extremely hesitant on even high-frequency vocabulary words, phrases and structures.	Hesitant; very limited range of language available.	Quite hesitant; limited range of vocabulary and structures.	Some hesitation and sometimes has to search for words.	Speaks fluently without hesitation or searching for words.
Pronunciation stress, rhythm, intonation patterns	Lots of errors; unclear articulation and intonation, which makes speech almost unintelligible.	Very frequent errors; often very difficult to understand.	Frequent errors; not always clear enough to understand.	Generally clear; reasonable control of stress and intonation.	Very clear; stress and intonation help to make meaning clear.

*   **Task:** Either the interview, picture description, or any other assessment task teachers have prepared.
** **Lexical:** vocabulary

	Poor 1-2	Fair 3-4	Good 5-6	Very good 7-8	Excellent 9-10
Fluency speed, naturalness, lack of hesitation	Unnatural and labored speech, extremely hesitant on even high-frequency vocabulary words, phrases and structures.	Hesitant speech; very limited range of language available.	Quite hesitant speech; limited range of vocabulary and structures.	A little hesitant; has to search for words only sometimes.	Speaks fluently without hesitation or searching for words.
Accuracy grammar: syntax, and general structures	Lacks firm understanding of structures from the studied unit (s)/course to complete the **task***** or is too limited for effective communication	Uncomfortable with structures from the studied unit (s)/course when completing the task; formulates only rudimentary sentences.	Firm understanding of some structures from the studied unit (s)/course to complete the task, but fails to **elaborate****** .	At ease with producing expected structures to complete the task; elaborates a little.	Demonstrates full knowledge of structures from the studied unit(s)/course to complete the task; elaborates well.
Vocabulary grammar, syntax, and general structures	Lacks firm understanding of vocabulary from the studied unit (s)/course to complete the task or is too limited for effective communication	Uncomfortable with vocabulary from the studied unit (s)/ course when completing the task; incorporates very basic vocabulary only.	Firm understanding of some vocabulary from the studied unit (s)/course to complete the task, but fails to elaborate.	At ease with expected vocabulary for completing the task; elaborates a little.	Demonstrates full knowledge of vocabulary from the studied unit (s)/course to complete the task; elaborates well.
Pronunciation stress, rhythm, intonation patterns	Lots of errors; articulation and intonation are unclear; almost unintelligible speech.	Very frequent errors; difficulty in making meaning clear.	Frequent errors; not always clear enough to understand.	Generally clear; reasonable control of stress and intonation.	Very clear; stress and intonation help to make meaning clear.
Content precision and length in describing the subject matter and picture elements	Description that is not detailed, complete; no responses are given	Description that is only partially relevant ; only isolated phrases are mostly provided.	Some of the subject matter and/or elements seen in the photograph/ sequence are described, and at least two complete sentences that describe the place, people, activities and objects are uttered.	Most of the subject matter and/or elements seen in the photograph/sequence, are described in detail and at least four complete sentences that describe the place, people, activities and objects are uttered.	Detailed description of the subject matter and/or elements seen in the photograph/ sequence; at least five complete sentences that describe the place, people, activities and objects are uttered.

***   Task: either the picture or sequence description or any other similar task (s) the teacher has chosen for assessment.

****   Elaborate: to express at greater length or in greater detail.

Finally, for references on scoring rubrics for presentations—which tell students what they have to do in order to prepare their presentations—teachers can resort to an array of resources available on the Internet, or they can alternatively develop their own rubrics. The following links lead to a couple examples:

• http://www.sites4teachers.com/links/redirect.php?url=http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson416/OralRubric.pdf (a sample rubric for oral presentations)

• http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=TutorialUnsaved&module=Rubistar#no (a website teachers can make use of to design their own rubrics)

7. **What needs to be done before giving an oral test and while administering it?**

Before the test

• Ask students to review the material they have studied up to the test date.

• Photocopy any required material (i.e. question sets, scoring sheets, etc.) in the amount it may be needed.

• If testing in pairs or groups, try to match students who are friendly with each other and who are similar in ability.

• Help students relax by telling them the goal of the test is not to compete for the highest score, but rather to inform them how well they have learned the material they have studied and what material needs to be reviewed or practiced, if any.

Give learners a couple minutes to read over the questions they will have to ask each other. Jones (2008) has said that, "students should not begin immediately asking the questions to each other without having thought about them" (p.192).

During the test

Ask follow-up questions to encourage students to give fuller answers because students' short phrases do not demonstrate how much they know. Jones (2008) has suggested using the following prompts to elicit complete responses: (1) "Can you give me an example? (2) "Tell me more about that;" or "Why do you think so?"

D. ABOUT WRITING: A reminder

Ur (2012) suggests that "brief descriptions and dialogues can be used to test writing at an elementary level" (p. 181). In other words, teachers who teach at levels A1.1 and A1.2 can carefully select a picture or the beginning of a dialogue to give students a test on writing. Teachers should, however, make a careful selection of the instruments they use by limiting the lexical and grammatical knowledge required to do the test.

• Additionally, as Coughlin (2006) suggested and it was mentioned earlier in this document, tasks like the ones below may seem to be more appropriate for assessment of writing at present:

• A description of a person or place (level A1.1)

• Directions how to get somewhere (multiple-step for level A1.2)

• A friendly email or reply to it (level A1.1)

• A personal letter (for level A1.2)

• A poster (level A1.2)

One of the reasons is that they replicate "authentic" communicative, real-world tasks that might be carried out at school, work, or the community. This fact is in agreement with the communicative approach to language teaching and learning. Another reason is that good assessment tasks should be consistent with curricular objectives and assessment indicators described for a particular skill in the curriculum guidelines that establish national standards.

Finally, teachers can resort to an array of free rubric samples for assessing the tasks mentioned before through the Internet as well. They can adopt, adapt, modify, and improve those samples according to their and their learners' particular needs.

Below, please find two links to free rubric samples:

http://www.studyzone.org/testprep/ela4/h/rubricfriendlet.html(a general rubric for friendly letters)

http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=ShowRubric&module=Rubistar&rubric_id=1125149& (a general rubric for informational posters)

E. ABOUT LISTENING COMPREHENSION: A reminder

As explained earlier in this document, an interview allows to test both speaking and listening as it occurs in real life. However, there are some other alternatives for teachers to assess listening, which should be considered. Ur (2012) has summarized the following:

- Dictation and repetition, which are ways of assessing listening comprehension at the most basic level, particularly in institutions with limited technological resources (e.g. lack of CD players). Teachers make students hear a text more than once, and ask students to repeat what they have heard either in orally or in written fashion. In case technological resources—a computing lab with internet connection—are available, Rost (2011) has suggested complete or partial dictation tasks whose scoring is based on whether or not the students correctly supply the missing words. Also, there is a free example for a spelling test available at the following link: http://www.learnenglish.de/spelling/spellinggreetings.html.

- Text + comprehension questions, which is the most common form of testing. Teachers use an audio text "followed by questions with a limited possible set of right answers" (Ur, 2012, p. 179).

- Taking notes, which is a useful test for comprehension; it demands "the ability to write quickly and clearly as well as understand what is heard" (Ur, 2012, p. 179).

F. ABOUT READING COMPREHENSION: A reminder

- Ur (2012) has also summarized the following tools:

- **Reading aloud** with pauses, intonation, and stress. Ur (2012) says that learners can do this well only if they understand the text. Therefore, level A1.1 and A1.2 students should usually be given time to read, reread, and prepare before such a test because "only at very advanced levels can we expect students to sight-read competently" (Ur, 2012, p. 179). One of its disadvantages, however, is that it is time-consuming because individual students (one student at a time) would be interacting with the teacher.

- **Text + comprehension questions,** which is the most common test format for reading. In this kind of test, students read a text and answer questions (e.g. gap fill, multiple-choice or open questions to answer using their own words).

- **Cloze**, in which teachers normally delete words at regular intervals (every seventh word, for instance) within a text, and students have to demonstrate comprehension by choosing the words that best complete the reading from the options given.

- **Jumbled paragraphs,** in which teachers split a text into paragraphs and scramble the correct order, so that learners can resort to their understanding of the content and knowledge of the text type's typical structure to sort them out. Teachers could, for example, split the components of an e-mail, scramble them, and ask learners to re-build the e-mail in the correct order.

G. USE OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDELINES AND SPECIFICATIONS AS A RESOURCE FOR ASSESSMENT: Suggestions

The National Curriculum Guidelines and Curriculum Specifications have facilitated the establishment of the following:

- Standards and indicators for educational quality within the teaching-learning processes of English, and

- Description of the degree of performance required of students for each level of language proficiency (i.e. A1.1, A1.2; A2.1, A2.2; B1.1, B1.2) through:

  ° Educational objectives for each component of the communicative competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic),

  ° Objectives per language skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) for each school year, and

  ° Assessment indicators per language skill and per school year.

Therefore, such information can unquestionably be used in the assessment processes carried out within the foreign language classrooms in Ecuador, and one way of doing it is by making progress **checklists**[5] whose items are based on the objectives per language skill and school year.

Those objectives can be "**exploded**[6]" (i.e. broken down into their implicit constituents and listed to design tools for continuous assessment or for summative assessment at the end of a course).

- For example, one of the objectives that level A1.1 learners are expected to achieve for speaking is to, "***Interact in a simple way by asking and answering simple questions about the learners' personal and educational background***" (National Curriculum Specifications for the English language, p. 19). Consequently, teachers can separate this broad level of general language proficiency into implicit constituent parts as follows:

- I can introduce myself, or I can ask people what their names are.

- I can say where I live, or I can ask people where they live.

- I can say my address, or I can ask people what their address is.

- I can say how old I am, or I can ask people how old they are.

I can say where and what I study, or I can ask someone where and what they study.

By doing so, both teachers and students may then easily have a list of what learners "can do"; however, it is also important to describe how well learners "can do" each point on the list, so teachers can indicate the degree of quality (e.g. "Ok", "Very little") for each item on the list. Students will then be able to reflect on the abilities they have gained and design "can do" checklists like the one below:

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5. **Checklists:** in assessment, the use of a list of skills or behaviors that an observer checks off while observing someone doing something, such as while observing a student complete a task or activity.
6.. Term borrowed from the Council of Europe (2003).

SPEAKING SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL (sample):

How well can you do these things? Check (√) the boxes. If you check "OK" or "A little", answer the question on the last column on the right.

I can…	Very well	OK	A little	How can I do it better?
Introduce myself				………………………………
Say where I live				………………………………
Say my address				………………………………
Say how old I am				………………………………
Say where and what I study				………………………………
Ask people what their names are				………………………………
Ask people where they live				………………………………
Ask people how old they are				………………………………
Ask people what and where they study				………………………………

At this point, it is important to remember that this form of self-assessment is a vital way to encourage learners' autonomy, which is an important teaching principle that needs to be fostered in English classrooms in agreement with the precepts claimed by the Communicative Language Approach.

The reason is that self-assessment checklists help students not only to reflect about their strengths and weaknesses—and the progress they are making—but also to make an appropriate learning plan, which students may commit to themselves in order to start taking responsibility and initiative in their own learning processes.

Finally, learners will also be able to regularly monitor their level of accomplishment in each level through the following assessment tools: (1) progress checks, (2) student self-evaluation checklists provided in students' textbooks and prepared by the teachers, (3) unit tests, (4) term exams, (5) projects students are assigned, and any other instrument teachers have wisely chosen.

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Appendix B

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