

# **Task-based assessment in language learning programs: Pieces of the puzzle**

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Over the last decade, the adoption of task-based approaches to language teaching has necessitated a reconsideration of the way in which language tests and assessments are designed and delivered. At the level of standardized proficiency testing, a greater focus on the need for task authenticity has led to greater efforts on the part of test developers to base their testing constructs on “real-life” communicative language use in a variety of contexts, thus potentially enhancing validity. At the level of the language classroom itself, the introduction of task-based syllabuses that are closely aligned with learning outcomes has highlighted the critical role of formative assessment in promoting learning and given teachers a greater role in assessment task design, to the point where teacher-conducted assessments are now being used either on their own or in conjunction with other measures as evidence of learning outcomes.

However, although these developments suggest a major shift in assessment policies and practices, a number of problems continue to surround the implementation of task-based approaches, both in high-stakes tests and classroom contexts. These include disagreements amongst stakeholders regarding the nature and purpose of task-based and formative assessment, conflicting theoretical claims and research findings on the nature of language ability and task performance, and an inadequate appreciation on the part of educational authorities of resourcing needs. Drawing on recent research, this paper will examine these problems via a range of illustrative examples and suggest ways in which they might be addressed, with a particular focus on the role that assessment literacy can play in facilitating policy making and assessment practice.