

TFU Foreign Language Assessment Rubrics

Below are a set of procedures and rubrics designed to assist in the assessment of the foreign language (specifically English) competency of students at TFU.

Speaking Assessment

Description:

Speaking ability—the ability to express yourself and participate in real-time conversation/discussion in an appropriate and meaningful way—is a fundamental aspect of “real-world” second language competence. The speaking rubric below (next page) is designed to be used in an examination context—a one-on-one, face-to-face “interview” test between a teacher and a student for a reasonable amount of time (possibly 7 to 10 min. per student). The student answers oral questions related to the content covered in class, and is encouraged to expand on answers and engage the instructor in conversation as the test proceeds. The student is informed at least a week ahead of time of the upcoming exam, allowing him/her to prepare by reviewing the textbook (e.g., a just-completed unit) or other learning materials from class, practicing pronunciation and/or reviewing vocabulary, grammar exercises, and conversation activities. Although this is not exactly a spontaneous conversation, it gives the student chance to show what they can do in a well-understood context (which may be more similar to typical real-world conversations than some suddenly-imposed, contrived classroom conversations). Depending on topic, pictures or other realia related may be used. As the exam progresses, the instructor assigns a score for each skill category (0-4), resulting in an overall score between zero and 20.

In interactive speaking activities, listening ability unavoidably becomes involved, so this type of speaking assessment can also be viewed as a supplement to some less interactive listening based assessments. The procedure and rubric presented here can be used for a one-time assessment, or multiple assessment results can be averaged to yield an overall assessment over the course of a school term.

If one-to-one assessment proves impractical, the rubric can also be completed through observation of normal in-class activities over the course of a term. In this case, students are aware that they are being assessed on an on-going basis and will receive a score for each skill category and an overall score (between zero and 20) at the end of the term.

(Rubric on next page)

Speaking Fluency Assessment Rubric

Categories	0-Not able to perform	1-Inadequate	2-Needs improvement	3-Meets expectation	4-Exceeds expectations
Vocabulary	Uses only few words and expressions or inadequate vocabulary.	Uses only basic, simple vocabulary and expressions. Sometimes uses inadequate vocabulary, which hinders the student from responding properly.	Uses limited vocabulary and expressions and makes frequent errors in word choice. Does not try to use new words learned in class or expand vocabulary and expressions.	Uses varied vocabulary and expressions learned in class, and makes only a few errors in word choice.	Uses appropriate expressions and a wide range of vocabulary learned in and out class.
Grammar	Can't use appropriate sentence structures. Can't put words in proper word order.	Uses only basic structures and makes frequent errors.	Uses a variety of structures with frequent errors, or uses basic structures with only a few errors.	Uses a variety of sentence structures but makes some errors.	Uses many different structures depending on contexts with only a few grammatical errors.
Pronunciation	Can't understand what the student says.	Frequent problems with pronunciation and intonation. Voice is too quiet to hear. Hard to understand.	Pronunciation, rhythm and intonation errors sometimes make it difficult to understand the student.	Pronunciation, rhythm and intonation are almost clear and accurate, but only occasionally difficult to understand.	Pronunciation, rhythm and intonation are almost always clear and accurate.
Overall Fluency	Speaks very little or doesn't speak at all.	Speaks with much hesitation, which often interferes with communication.	Speaks with some hesitation, which sometimes interferes with communication.	Speaks with some hesitation, but it doesn't usually interrupt the flow of conversation.	Speaks smoothly with little hesitation and doesn't interrupt the flow of conversation. Speaks with confidence.
Interaction	Can hardly communicate; always misses questions from the teacher and can't respond.	Ideas and purpose is not clear; usually does not respond appropriately or clearly and as the result, needs a lot of help communicating.	Tries to communicate, but sometimes doesn't respond appropriately. Sometimes ideas are not clear and hard to understand.	Focus on the conversation most of the time and communicate effectively; generally responds appropriately and tries to develop the interaction.	Gives clear ideas. Communicates effectively; almost always responds appropriately. Keeps the conversation going by asking follow-up questions.

Listening Assessment

Description:

Listening comprehension is a key aspect of “real-life” competence in an L2. The assessment procedure described here relies on instructor-observation of student performance as they carry out various tasks over the course of a term in a regular language class at TFU. These classroom tasks may range from ones purely focusing on listening comprehension (including quizzes/tests) to ones involving communicative performance (conversation activities). Students will understand that they are being assessed on an on-going basis and will receive a score for each skill area and an overall score (between zero and 20) at the end of the term.

Specific listening skills listed in the rubric, but which are not observed in class activities, should not be considered in evaluating students' performance (e.g. in a reading-focused class with little or no pair/group work, or a class with few instructions given in the L2), with total possible points adjusted accordingly (e.g., zero to 16 rather than zero to 20).

Listening Assessment Rubric

Criteria Skills	N/A	0-Not able to perform	1-Inadequate	2-Needs improvement	3-Meets expectations	4-Exceeds expectations
Understands teacher's verbal instructions	No verbal instructions provided	Could not understand and follow instructions at all	Made significant mistakes in understanding instructions and could barely follow with help from others	Made some mistakes in understanding instructions but could follow with clarification by others	Made only a few mistakes in understanding instructions and could follow with no help from others	Could understand instructions correctly and follow without trouble.
Understands teacher's verbal questions	No verbal questions provided	Could not understand questions, and provided no responses.	Made significant mistakes in understanding questions and could only provide unclear responses	Made some mistakes in understanding questions, but could provide somewhat unclear responses	Made only a few mistakes in understanding questions and could provide somewhat appropriate responses	Could understand the questions correctly and provide sufficient responses.
Understands recorded instructions	No verbal instructions provided	Could not understand and follow instructions at all	Made significant mistakes in understanding instructions and could barely follow with help from others	Made some mistakes in understanding the instructions but could follow with clarification by others	Made only a few mistakes in understanding the instructions and could follow with no help from others	Could understand the instructions correctly and follow them with no problem
Understands recorded questions	No verbal instructions provided	Could not understand the questions, provided no responses at all	Made significant mistakes in understanding the questions and could only provide unclear responses	Made some mistakes in understanding the questions but could provide somewhat unclear responses	Made only a few mistakes in understanding the questions and could provide somewhat appropriate responses	Could understand the questions correctly and provide sufficient responses.
Understands partner(s) in pair/group work	No communicative activities done	Could not understand the talks at all and couldn't pursue the communicative activity at all	Made significant mistakes in understanding others and could barely pursue the communicative activity	Made some mistakes in understanding, but could pursue the communicative activity to the certain extent	Made only a few mistakes in understanding and could pursue the communicative activity with no problem	Could understand correctly and actively pursue the communicative activity.

Writing Assessment

In order to be called a “competent” L2 writer, a learner should minimally be able to produce a logically presented, coherent, audience-appropriate short essay or piece of prose on a variety of topics. The procedure and rubric presented here can be used for a one-time assessment, or multiple assessment results can be averaged to yield an overall assessment over the course of a school term.

Procedure:

Students have 50 minutes to choose one of three topics and write a 200 word essay about the topic. The choice of topics varies for each task/test (in a multiple assessment scheme), but will include the following types of essays:

- Descriptions of people, places or things
- Giving instructions
- Narrative
- Compare/Contrast
- Expressing opinion

Students are allowed to use dictionaries during the exam and it can be written on a computer or with pencil and paper. The instructor then uses the rubric below to assign the essay a score (0–4) for each category, resulting in a total score between zero and 28.

Essay Writing Assessment Rubric

Category	0-Not able to perform	1-Inadequate	2-Needs Improvement	3-Meets Expectations	4- Exceeds Expectations
Introduction/ Opening paragraph	Does not contain an introduction.	Does not adequately state what the essay is about.	Contains a simple introduction but does not grab attention. For example, "My essay is about _____".	Clearly shows what the essay is about and attempts to grab the reader's attention.	Clearly shows what the essay is about and grabs the reader's attention.
Main Idea/Body	The essay has no support for the topic.	The support for the topic is very weak or irrelevant.	The essay contains weak support but contains evidence or examples.	The essay contains support for the topic.	The essay contains strong support for the topic and uses evidence and/or examples.
Conclusion	Does not contain a conclusion.	The conclusion is irrelevant to the introduction.	The essay concludes unsatisfactorily. It may leave the reader confused or go against the introduction.	Concludes the essay satisfactorily. Effectively restates the introduction.	Effectively restates the introduction and gives the author's position on the topic.
Sentence Structure	Does not contain structure. Words are put together randomly.	Contains very simple sentence structure. Sentences are very short and choppy.	Contains short sentences along with simple connecting words.	Uses complex sentence structures and uses connecting words with a few mistakes.	Uses complex sentence structures and correctly uses connecting words.
Grammar/Spelling	Egregious errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Contains many errors in grammar and/or spelling.	Contains a few grammatical and/or spelling errors.	Grammar and/or spelling is correct for the most part.	Virtually no grammar and/or spelling errors.
Punctuation/ Capitalization	Egregious errors in punctuation and/or capitalization.	Contains many errors in punctuation and/or capitalization	Contains a few punctuation and/or capitalization errors.	Punctuation and/or capitalization is correct for the most part.	Virtually no punctuation and/or capitalization errors.
Audience Understanding	Does not understand the intended audience.	The intended audience is not thought about or ignored in most of the essay.	Vaguely understands the audience but uses grammar and vocabulary that the reader might not be aware of.	Understands who the essay is intended for and uses grammar and vocabulary based on the audience.	Has a keen understanding of the audience and tailors the essay to the needs of the reader.

Reading Fluency Assessment

Reading fluency involves both reading speed and comprehension and should be a major focus of learners hoping to read effectively in the “real world.” Assessing reading fluency is complicated, however, by the facts that reading is typically a silent process with unseen results and that fluency depends on the reader’s language level in relation to the particular text being read. For these reasons, a multi-step rubric is employed.

Step 1

Fluent reading requires at least 97-98% understanding of the vocabulary encountered in a text {Laufer, 1989 #865}, sufficient automaticity in recognizing these words, and a sufficiently robust grammatical template to allow effective organization and creation of meaning units from the words encountered. To assess the level at which a student is likely to be able to read with some fluency, students take several brief, online placement tests designed and trialled by reputable ELT publishers to help students find ideal levels at which to successfully begin with graded readers. This can be done as a whole class activity in a CALL room, or done by individuals supported by a student assistant in our Language and Cultural Studies Support Room (LCSR)

Procedure:

Students begin by taking the following adaptive tests:

- [Black Cat Readers Level Test](#): Adaptive test determining best starter level among graded reader offerings (CEF A1–C1). Based on Cambridge KET (Keys to Essential English Test) and Cambridge CAE (Advanced English) Test. Variety of items, mostly cloze and matching with words and/or phrases. Answering correctly also requires some understanding of grammar.
- [Macmillan Readers Level Test](#): Adaptive test for *Starter – Upper Intermediate* (CEF A1–B2). Automatically ushers you through level tests till you reach appropriate starting level. Grammar and vocabulary items.

Using the results from these tests as a starting point, students take a test at the corresponding TFU level from each of the test banks (below), and follow the prescribed procedure till a recommended level is found:

- [Oxford Bookworms Level Tests](#): Separate tests for *Starter – Stage 6* (CEF A1–C1). Take a test and move up (or down), as instructed, until told you have found your level. Cloze-style, multiple choice items requiring knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.
- [Cambridge English Readers Level Tests](#): Separate tests for *Starter – Level 6* (CEF A1–C1). Take a test and move up (or down), as instructed, until told you have found your level. Items: vocabulary and definition matching.

[This table](#) shows the matching levels for each reader series and the TFU Level

Graded Reader Series: Correspondence Table										
Series	TFU Level	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Black Cat Green Apple; Reading & Training					Starter A1 - 1.5	Step 1 A2 - 2.5	Step 2 B1 - 2.5	Step 3 B1 - 3.5	Step 4 B2 - 4.5	Step 5 - B2 5.0 Step 6 - C1 6.0
Macmillan Readers		1-Starter pA1 - 300 - 0.8	2-Beg. (short) A1 - 600 - 1.3	2-Beg. (long) A1 - 600 - 1.6	3-Elementary A2 - 1100 - 3.0	4-Pre-Intermed. A2/B1 1400 - 3.5	5-Interm. B1 - 1600 - 3.8	6-Up. Intermed. B2 - 2200 - 4.8		
Cambridge English Readers			Starter A1 - 250 - 1.1	Level 1 A1 - 400 - 1.5	Level 2 A2 - 800 - 2.7	Level 3 B1 - 1300 - 3.7	Level 4 B1 - 1900 - 4.8	Level 5 B2 - 2800 - 5.8	Level 6 C1 - 2800 - 6.3	
Oxford Bookworms		Starters (comic) A1 - 250 - 0.9	Starters (book) A1 - 250 - 1.1	Stage 1 A1/2 - 400 - 2.0	Stage 2 A2/B1 700 - 2.7	Stage 3 B1 - 1000 - 3.3	Stage 4 B1/2 - 1400 - 3.9	Stage 5 B2 - 1800 - 4.8	Stage 6 B2/C1 2500 - 5.8	
		A1, A2, B1, etc. = Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels.								
		250, 600, 1,300, etc. = Average headword count for books at that level.								
		0.9, 2.7, 3.3, etc. = Yomiyasusa level from SSS/SEG Japan.								
		TFU Level 0 = Picture books and very low level readers available from some publishers (Cengage, Penguin, etc.)								

The “TFU Levels” from the four test packages above are averaged to yield a final **TFU Level Score** (0–8), making up the first part of the **TFU Reading Fluency Assessment**.

Example:

Test	TFU Level
Black Cat Readers Level Test	3
Macmillan Readers Level Test	4
Oxford Bookworms Level Tests	3
Cambridge English Readers Level Tests	5
Average	3.8

Step 2

Several types of performance can offer a window on the reading fluency of learners:

- Reading speed during silent reading and performance on gist-oriented, post-reading measures of comprehension (without access to the text); showing ability to process text quickly with reasonable understanding.
- Read aloud tasks showing ease of word recognition, ability to group words into meaning units, and intonation and rhythm demonstrating a real-time understanding of the text.
- Fluent readers should also have the ability to drill down and efficiently draw out the fine detail/meaning of a text, so we include performance on a timed, intensive reading task showing ability to grasp details, make fine distinctions and make inferences based on a close reading.

Reading for Speed and Fluency (RSF) (Nation & Malarcher, 2007, Compass Publishing) is one of the very few published series of materials designed for reading fluency work with EFL learners. Although an even lower level would be helpful, experience at TFU has shown that *Book 1* of the series (*RSF1*) is relatively accessible by TFU students reading at Levels 0–4. *Book 2* (*RSF2*) will be used with those at TFU Levels 5–7. Steps 1 & 3 (below) can be done all together as an in-class activity, or can be individually administered by an assistant in the LCSR. (At some point, excerpts from graded readers may replace *RSF* materials to give even more level-appropriate reading assessments.)

Procedure:

1. Student silently reads two ~300 word texts from *RSF1* for time and completes the 5-question comprehension checks w/o access to the texts. Reading rates (RR) in wpm and comprehension scores (CS) % for the two texts are recorded and averaged. A reading coefficient value (RC) is then calculated ($RR \times CS$, e.g., $150 \text{ wpm} \times 60\% = 90$). Given that a relatively fluent L2 reader might read 250 wpm with an accuracy of 80% ($RC = 200$), we divide student RC by “ideal” RC and multiply by 16 to yield a **Speed & Comprehension Score** between zero and 16.
2. Student reads one of the texts aloud, while faculty member scores the performance using the multi-dimensional rubric below. Read Aloud Scores range from 0-16. This can be done during class time while other students read or complete tasks, or during specially arranged sessions.
3. Student is given a total of 10 minutes to answer a set of sixteen open-book questions requiring a close reading of each of the two previously read texts. Items types include finding details, making distinctions and making inferences. Answers are scored to yield an **Intensive Reading Score** between zero and 16.
4. Scores from the above three tasks are averaged to yield a **Reading Fluency Score** between zero and 16.

Read Aloud Fluency Assessment Rubric

	0-Not able to perform	1-Inadequate	2-Needs Improvement	3-Meets Expectations	4- Exceeds Expectations
Expression and Volume	Reading is almost inaudible, not clear enough to follow what is being read.	Reads in a quiet voice as if has no confidence in reading of text. The reading does NOT sound natural—not like talking to an acquaintance.	Reads in a quiet voice. The reading sounds natural in part of the text, but reader does not always sound comfortable and expressive.	Reads with volume and expression. However, sometimes slips into expressionless, unnatural-sounding reading.	Reads with varied volume and expression. Sounds like s/he is talking comfortably with acquaintance, with voice matching the interpretation of the passage.
Phrasing	Monotone voice and unnatural grouping of words makes comprehension difficult to impossible.	Reads word-by-word in a monotone voice.	Reads in two or three word phrases, not adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation.	Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness. Reasonable stress and intonation.	Reads with good phrasing; adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation.
Smoothness	Long pauses cause listener to “lose the thread.”	Frequently hesitates while reading, sounds out words, and repeats words or phrases. Makes multiple attempts to read the same passage.	Reads with extended pauses or hesitations. Many “rough spots.”	Reads with occasional breaks in rhythm. Has difficulty with specific words and/or sentence structures.	Reads smoothly with some breaks, but self-corrects with difficult words and/ or sentence structures.
Pace	Slow or failed attempts to utter many words causes even sentence-level comprehension difficulties.	Reads slowly and laboriously.	Reads moderately slowly.	Reads fast and slow throughout reading.	Reads at a conversational pace throughout the reading.

Rubric modified from Rasinski (2004) – *Creating Fluent Readers*.

The **Reading Fluency Score** is then recorded beside the **TFU Level Score** to yield **TFU Reading Assessment** (Level - Fluency) scores between L0-F0 and L8-F16.

The Level Score is doubled and averaged with the Reading Fluency Score to yield a single value for the overall, four-skill assessment (see below).

Combined Language Skills Assessment

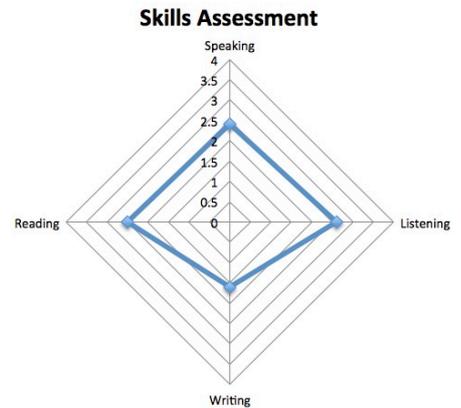
At the end of term or assessment period, assessments for each skill area can be brought together on one report form. Scores for each area are normed to a 0-4 scale and averaged to yield a **Combined Language Assessment Score**.

TFU Combined Language Skills Assessment

Example:

	Score	Total Possible	0-4 Scale	
Speaking	12	20	2.4	0 - Not able to perform
Listening	13	20	2.6	1 - Inadequate
Writing	11	28	1.6	2 - Needs improvement
Reading*	L4-F12 10	16	2.5	3 - Meets expectations
Combined			2.3	4 - Exceeds expectations

*Note: The Level Score is doubled and averaged with the Reading Fluency Score to yield a single value for the overall, four-skill assessment (see below).



We hope the language skills assessment scheme and rubrics presented here will become a useful part of our efforts to encourage and monitor second language development among the TFU student body, particularly those with perceived goals for current and future second language use.

TFU Language Educators' Group (TFU-LEG)