
How can we design multimodal assessment tasks?

Webinar handout

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What are multimodal assessment tasks?

These tasks are used for language assessment purposes and involve multiple modalities such as oral, written, gestural, visual, spatial, etc. One example of multimodal assessment tasks are *viewing-to-write tasks*. They require learners to watch a video containing visual and aural input and then write a text based on the video. Examples can be found on: <https://osf.io/xude7/>.

How can you make viewing-to-write tasks?

1. **Technology:** The tasks can be made with **commonly available soft- and hardware**: a) a laptop and (built-in) microphone/camera, b) a word processor to script listening texts, c) a spreadsheet program to create graphs, and d) a slide/presentation program to create slides with visuals and animations, to record speakers, and to export to a video file. Additionally, use **copyright-free materials** such as pictures from royalty-free image stock websites, and ask one or two colleagues to record the task instructions or act as speakers in the video.
2. **Content:** Choose a topic that is: a) a generally accessible subject while not overly common knowledge, b) rich in information points, c) possible to represent visually, d) likely interesting to your learners. Inspiration for content information can be found on websites, YouTube, media programmes, etc. Keep in mind the language functions you want to assess. For example, for tasks that focus on comparing and contrasting, you could search for debating sites. We made tasks in which two experts discuss their views on zoos, on commercial space travel, and on car usage. For tasks that focus on describing a process, you could search YouTube videos and websites about how something is made. We made tasks about how contact lenses, a train carriage, and instant coffee are made.
3. **Task specifications:** Determine what you want to be the general features of the task, of the video input (aural and visual), and of the expected response (written or oral performance).

Keep in mind the profile of your language learners, the curriculum, and what you have taught. Explicitly describe the intended features in a task specifications document.

Tips for designing viewing-to-write tasks

1. **Multimodality:** The type of visuals and how they are included determine whether the task requires only listening or multimodal viewing (watching and listening). To ensure that the task is multimodal: a) use various visuals in the input (e.g., content pictures, written terms, moving animations, graphs); b) if there are several speakers, show them, to see their body language; c) use visuals that complement the information d) explicitly connect the visual and listening modes (e.g., let the speakers say “In the graph, you can see...”, “Look at this!”).
2. **Complexity:** Task design needs to ensure that learners balance their attention between the different modalities, that the demands on learners’ memory skills are kept to a minimum, and that the tasks stimulate integration of the different modalities. To ensure this for viewing-to-write tasks: a) play the video twice, and b) allow notetaking during viewing.
3. **Purposefulness:** Having a clear purpose for watching and listening to the video helps learners to regulate their attention and enhances the integration of the different modalities. Therefore, in the instructions at the viewing stage: a) give an explicit direction for viewing, and b) make clear what the target language function will be at the writing stage.
4. **Administration:** If you have limited resources, you can play the video on a screen for the whole class. Learners can take notes on paper and write the required text on paper. If you can, each learner can do the task on an individual computer. You can upload the video to a private YouTube channel. Learners can take notes on paper and write the required text on their computer. If possible, display a time counter and word counter at the writing stage.

Rating multimodal performances

To reflect the multimodality, evaluate not only linguistic aspects of learners’ written performance, but also the video information represented in their text. For rating viewing-to-write performances, we developed analytic scales with one criterion on the extent and accuracy of the video content conveyed in learners’ written text, and three criteria on the quality of their writing (organisation & structure, language use, and mechanics – related to the video content).

Free materials and your feedback

Our tasks, rating scales and associated materials are available at: <https://osf.io/xude7/>.

A recording of Tineke and Judit’s webinar can be watched here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/multimodal-classrooms-mini-event>

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