

# TEST CLASSIFICATION

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We will outline here rather briefly some of the ways tests can be classified. Understanding contrasting exam types can be helpful to teachers since tests of one kind may not always be successfully substituted for those of another kind.

**Table 1 - CONTRASTING CATEGORIES OF ESL TESTS**

Knowledge Tests .....	Performance (or Skills) Tests
Subjective Tests .....	Objective Tests
Productive Tests .....	Receptive Tests
Language Subskill Tests .....	Communication Skills Tests
Norm-referenced Tests .....	Criterion-referenced Tests
Discrete-point Tests.....	Integrative Tests
Proficiency Tests .....	Achievement Tests

Let's review the contrasts shown in Table 1. First, tests of *knowledge* are used in various school subjects, from math and geography to literature and language. While ESL knowledge exams show how well students know *facts* about the language, ESL *performance* exams show how well a student can *use* the language. Today's ESL teachers are concerned with teaching and measuring language skills.

The second contrast shown in Table 1 is that of *subjective* and *objective* examinations. Subjective tests, like translation and essay, have the advantage of measuring language skill naturally, almost the way English is used in real life. However, many teachers are not able to score such tests quickly and consistently. By contrast, objective exams, such as multiple-choice or matching tests, *can* be scored quickly and consistently.

*Productive* measures, like speaking exams, require active or creative answers, while *receptive* measures, like multiple-choice reading tests, tend to rely on recognition, with students simply choosing the letter of the best answer.

Tests of *language subskills* measure the separate components of English, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. *Communication skills* tests, on the other hand, show how well students can use the language in actually exchanging ideas and information.

Another set of contrasting tests is that of *norm-referenced* and *criterion-referenced* exams. Norm-referenced tests compare each student

with his classmates (most classroom tests are like this). But criterion-referenced exams rate students against certain standards, regardless of how other students do.

Still another pair of categories is that of *discrete-point* and *integrative* tests. In discrete-point exams, each item tests something very specific such as a preposition or a vocabulary item. Integrative tests are those like dictation that combine various language subskills much the way we do when we communicate in real life.

A final classification is *proficiency* and *achievement* tests. Proficiency tests can measure overall mastery of English or how well prepared one is to use English in a particular setting such as an auto mechanics course or a university. Achievement tests, on the other hand, simply measure progress-gains for example in mastery of count-noncount noun use or mastery of the skills presented in an entire language text or course.

It should be apparent from this discussion that several labels can be applied to any one test. But we normally apply only one pair of labels at a time, just as we do in reference to an individual who might simultaneously be a friend, lawyer, wife, mother, and mayor.

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