

Testing Procedures

Oral Skills Assessment

The Oral Skills Assessment interview has the following features:

- 1) The interview is conducted by a panel of three trained people.
- 2) The interview takes about ten minutes.
- 3) The interviewers have pre-session training to ensure common standards.

Students are required to read a short passage, answer 2 questions, explain a cartoon, and describe a picture. *Students should consider all conversation in the interview room to be part of the oral skills assessment.*

The current standard for graduate students is a level of proficiency that indicates that the student should be capable of both participating in seminar discussions and speaking clearly enough to be understood in instructional settings. If a graduate student passes the interview, it does not mean that the student has the subject matter expertise or the communication skills necessary to serve as a teaching assistant. Our determination should be interpreted as denoting that we found no evidence that the student's oral skills were likely to be a major hindrance to teaching based on our interview. As always, the decision to allow a student who is not required to take additional oral skills instruction to serve in a teaching capacity rightly belongs with the department. For undergraduate students, the standard is lower but remains indicative of the ability to successfully interact in Texas A&M University classroom situations (e.g., to ask questions, to respond to questions, to be able to communicate effectively in one-on-one situations) .

Assessment of Writing Skills

The composition assessment is a 30-minute written essay on an assigned topic. New test forms are used for each test administration and the writing prompts are academically oriented. Two recent prompts were as follows:

- Graduate Students: "THE MOST SERIOUS THREAT TO WORLD SOCIETY: ILLITERACY OR OVERPOPULATION (Note: a brief definition of illiteracy was provided.) Choose which of these problems you think is more serious and support your choice with specific discussion. Include the causes and effects of the problem."
- Undergraduate Students: "THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE: Should the countries of the world continue to explore space? Argue for or against continuing this exploration and support your choice with specific discussion."

Each essay is graded by two raters with expertise in composition and training in the scale and standards used in our program. If a discrepancy of 10 or more points exists between the two raters, then a third rater scores the paper. Training sessions are held before each testing session to insure common standards.

Assessment of Grammar, Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension, & Listening Comprehension

These areas are measured through the Michigan English Language Proficiency series. The Michigan series are objective tests designed to specifically measure the English skills of students for whom English is a second language. Barron's Educational Series, Inc. publishes a book *How to Prepare for the Michigan Battery* that may be useful in familiarizing students with the format of the test. This book is on reserve in the Sterling C. Evans Library and is sometimes available in local bookstores. Example test items follow:

Grammar: "Was it easy to follow the directions?"
"No, there were too _____."

- a) many direction b) many directions
- c) much direction d) much directions

Vocabulary: I would like to work on my automobile but I don't have any cars.

- a) contention about b) familiarity with
- c) realization of d) prediction of

Listening: "The manager overrode the suggestions of the 2 other committee members." (Heard from cassette tape).

- a) The manager invited suggestions.
- b) The manager never listened to any suggestions.
- c) The manager disregarded the wishes of the others.

Reading Comprehension: These questions address your understanding of a short passage. The following is an example of a similar reading comprehension item.

Studies of children's acquisition of language suggest that the faculty of language includes an inborn knowledge of the formal principles of language structure, a knowledge that depends on genetically determined portions of (usually) the left cerebral hemisphere. Although it is well established that the left hemisphere is specialized for language, one cannot say that language is "located" in this or that part of the hemisphere. What is known is that language disorders are the result of lesions in the left hemisphere. Disorders of language resulting from damage to the brain are called aphasias.

The anterior portion of the "language area" is termed Broca's area. Lesions in this area interfere with the motor and articulator aspects of language. Speech is slow, labored, grammatically incorrect, and telegraphic; in extreme cases, it may be impossible to carry out. Writing is likewise severely impaired. Comprehension of the spoken or written word, however, may be unimpaired or nearly so. (It is interesting to note that under emotional stress, a patient with Broca's aphasia may be temporarily fluent.) Because Broca's area is close to the motor cortex, if the former is damaged, the latter is often damaged simultaneously. Hence, such patients often suffer from weakness or paralysis of the right side of the body. Similar lesions in the right hemisphere will cause a left-sided weakness or paralysis but will have no effect on language.

Damage to the posterior portion of the "language area," especially to Wernicke's area, results in a loss of comprehension of the spoken word and often of the written word. The patient's native language is now like a foreign language. In addition, the patient's speech is rapid and well-articulated, but without meaning. Writing is defective, and words that are heard cannot be repeated, although hearing itself is completely normal. Similar lesions in the right hemisphere usually have no effect on language.

Injuries to the "language area" in children result in severe aphasias, but the development of language mechanisms in the right hemisphere can often compensate for them to an extraordinary degree. This potential function of the right hemisphere is probably normally suppressed by the left hemisphere. In adults, aphasias from similar lesions are often permanent.

The author is primarily concerned with

- a) describing the process of language acquisition.
- b) explaining potential treatments of language defects.
- c) showing the importance of the left hemisphere of the brain to language mechanisms.
- d) depicting various means of diagnosing language defects
- e) explaining why the left hemisphere of the brain dominates the right hemisphere