

REFLECTIONS ON ASSESSMENT AND MARKING

One of the syllabi with a lot of detailed information concerning assessment is the one for 8eTE and 9eTE. Please find below what it says about the linguistic elements to be tested (skills and use of English) as well as the weighting of the marks with regards to these elements.

Excerpt from 'Horaires et programmes'

Pupils are supposed to do a minimum of 2 tests (out of 60) per term. These tests can be sub-divided into several smaller tests for pedagogical and/or organisational reasons.

All four skills as well as Use of English will have to be assessed. However, in view of the limited number of weekly lessons, and to offer teachers more flexibility, teachers are not required to assess all four skills each and every term. They should adhere to the following guidelines and weighting:

- *Writing and Use of English have to be assessed each term. They account for 50% of the overall mark. Please note that the assessment of this category should not be based solely on gap-filling exercises.*
- *The remaining three skills have to be assessed during two out of three terms. This means that two out of the three skills make up the remaining 50% of the overall mark each term.*

<i>The following example should serve to clarify matters:</i>	Writing & Use of English	Reading	Speaking	Listening
Term 1	50%	25%	not tested	25%
Term 2	50%	not tested	25%	25%
Term 3	50%	25%	25%	not tested

Reflections on the above

Unfortunately, the 'épreuve commune' (EC) at the end of 9e is not taken into account by the above example. If you want to do the EC or if it becomes compulsory, the above variant is not possible.

Find below two examples that take into account the EC. You have to decide whether you want to test reading or listening in the first or the second term. Furthermore, you do not have any choice with regards to testing speaking throughout the year or the composition of the tests in the third term.

Example 1:

Example	Writing Use of English	Reading	Speaking	Listening
Term 1	50%	25%	25%	not tested
Term 2	50%	not tested	25%	25%
Term 3	50%	25%	not tested	25%

In terms of marks this means:

Example	Writing Use of English	Reading	Speaking	Listening
Term 1	60 marks	30 marks	30 marks	not tested
Term 2	60 marks	not tested	30 marks	30 marks
Term 3	60 marks (20 marks from the EC)	30 marks (20 marks from the EC)	not tested	30 marks (20 marks from the EC)

Example 2:

Example	Writing Use of English	Reading	Speaking	Listening
Term 1	50%	not tested	25%	25%
Term 2	50%	25%	25%	not tested
Term 3	50%	25%	not tested	25%

In terms of marks this means:

Example	Writing Use of English	Reading	Speaking	Listening
Term 1	60 marks	not tested	30 marks	30 marks
Term 2	60 marks	30 marks	30 marks	not tested
Term 3	60 marks (20 marks from the EC)	30 marks (20 marks from the EC)	not tested	30 marks (20 marks from the EC)

Distribution of the marks in term 3:

	Writing & Use of English	Reading	Listening
Regular in-class paper	40 marks	10 marks	10 marks
EC	20 marks	20 marks	20 marks
Total	60 marks = 50 %	30 marks = 25%	30 marks = 25%

Marking receptive skills and Use of English– excerpt from ‘Horaires et programmes’

*The degree of difficulty is designed in a way that pupils have to get **about 70% of the answers** right to reach pass level (i.e. 30 out of 60).*

Thus, if the number of difficulties corresponds to the number of total marks, 1.5 marks are withdrawn per wrong or omitted answer. Such a 1:1.5 ratio discourages pupils from merely guessing the answers.

Reflections on the above

The approach to marking described in ‘Horaires et programmes’ is commonly referred to as **negative marking**. It is highly controversial in academic and educational circles on an international level. Negative marking means that the focus is on the students’ deficits rather than their achievements and that they are penalised for what they do not know, i.e. their mistakes, rather than rewarded for their achievements. Worse even, students with only a couple of correct answers do not receive any recognition for whatever they have done well as is illustrated by the table below:

Correct answers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Marks	0	0	0	0	1	2,5	4	5,5	7	8,5	10

Another disadvantage of the recommended approach is that you keep working with half-marks.

There are ways of practising **positive marking** as well as meeting the requirement that 70% of the answers have to be right for the test-takers to reach pass level: a conversion table tells you how to convert the number of correct answers into marks.

Example: if your task consists of 10 items and there are 10 marks.

Correct answers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Marks	0	1	2	3	4	6	8	9	10		

There is no major difference in terms of the marks obtained by the students apart from the fact that the correct answers of the weak students are being accounted for. Nevertheless, the two approaches reflect two very different mindsets.

Marking productive skills – excerpt from ‘Horaires et programmes’

The following grids provide some general indications regarding the assessment of the individual tasks. The more specific expectations are determined by the tasks, which are based on activities practised in class. The grids can be used at different levels since the tasks can vary in terms of their complexity. It goes without saying that the task should be appropriate for the standards outlined in the syllabus.

Only the expected performance level is described. The extent to which the student surpasses or falls short of the expected performance is at the teacher’s discretion.

The overall assessment is based on the various criteria included in the marking grids.

Reflections on the above

Marking grids or marking scales are tools which are meant to standardize marking the productive skills and thereby make it more reliable and fairer. Good marking grids enable the rater to keep track of the key aspects by which a test taker’s performance is meant to be evaluated. These key aspects are referred to as evaluation criteria (e.g. content, discourse management, pronunciation ...). However, often there are quite a number of such aspects. They need to be organised in groups. A good marking grid should not contain more than six groups of criteria or main criteria. For each group of criteria or criterion, there should be descriptors which outline the quality of the performance.

The fact that ‘only the expected level of performance is described’ with relation to the grids in the syllabus for 8eTE and 9eTE is rather problematic as it leaves ample room for intra-rater as well as inter-rater divergences. Supplying your own descriptors for a ‘poor’ and a ‘very good’ performance would at least reduce the risk of intra-rater divergences. Moreover, ‘at the teacher’s discretion’ implies that a certain degree of subjectivity and bias is permissible. Also, what is intended to be a criterion-referenced approach to marking might well turn into a norm-referenced approach if there are not enough descriptors. The marks ultimately depend on how the test-takers position themselves within their class rather than on the quality of their performances.

Further marking grids / marking scales

You might want to look at the following grids for inspiration to complete the marking grids which are put at your disposal:

- assets.cambridge.org/97805217/54460/sample/9780521754460ws.pdf
 - cambridgeenglishsoutheurope.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/new-writing-assessment-criteria-2012-cambridge-english-proficiency.pdf
 - plan-msa.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/MSA_Englisch_2007_L%C3%B6sungen.pdf
 - sites.google.com/a/esjgf.com/ties/writing---assessment-criteria
 - www.bifie.at/system/files/dl/srdp_assessment_scale_b2_2012-06-11.pdf
 - www1.edexcel.org.uk/fs-sams/FS-English-writing-marking-grid%20L1-issue-1.pdf
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- IELTS Speaking band descriptors (22 Dec 2015) (PDF, 161 kb)
 - IELTS task 1 Writing band descriptors (PDF, 35 kb)
 - IELTS task 2 Writing band descriptors (PDF, 35 kb)