

**Gyeongsang National University Freshman English Spring 2005 Mid-term Exam:
A Descriptive Report and Evaluation of a Written Exam prepared using
World Link ExamView Pro™ Test Builder version 4.1.5 software**

Dr Robert C. Meurant

This mid-term I offered a written exam for Freshman English in lieu of the traditional conversational test. As far as I am aware, I am the first to do this here for some years. I discuss my experiences in preparing the exam using the software ExamView Pro™ Test Builder v.4.1.5 provided by World Link for use with their ESL series. This software may prove useful to other teachers in the preparation of their written exams for this and for other series.

**SECTION ONE
PREPARING THE EXAM**

INSTALLING THE SOFTWARE

The software is readily installed following the instructions for the appropriate operating system (in my case Macintosh System 10.3). The first time the software is used you are required to provide license details (name, institution, address) for the copy on your computer (note that the software requires an American zip code for a state, e.g. "CO" for Colorado). You are then invited to register your copy online - and subsequently when you first boot the software if you don't register - but simply select the "don't show this box again" option and close the window to avoid that requirement.

CREATING A NEW TEST

The ExamView Startup dialog box appears when you close the registration window. Chose:
<Create a new test using the QuickTest Wizard>

In Step 1 give your test a name:

<Name the test you want to create> e.g. <Mid-term Exam Spring 2005>

In Step 2:

<Highlight the question banks you want to use and click the Select Button>
choose Stempleski_WL_le, <open>, Book 1 (presuming you too are working with Book 1), <open>, and then the Book Units you wish to test. In my case these were the first four units. However the software supports all of the Units of the Introductory Book and Books 1 - 4.

Click: <next>

This selects 4 question banks with a total of 160 questions available.

In Step 3, identify how many questions of each type you want on the test.

Questions types are:

Question Type	True/False	Multiple Choice	Yes/No	Completion	Matching	Short Answer
Possible number	15	36	11	38	40	20
My final selection	0	27	0	34	35	4

(Examples of some of these types are provided in my Mid-term Exam, which is attached).

Either enter a selection (number) for each type, or instead simply chose <Select All> as I did. Then choose <Next>. This gives a Test Summary, and you can then click <Finish> to generate the test, or <Back> to change your selections. Once the Test is generated, you can use any of the features of the program to change the test layout, edit the test headers and footers, and add new questions. The order of questions and of the multiple possible answers to specific questions can be scrambled to guard against cheating from class to class. The answer sheets in ExamView Pro™ are automatically updated when you do this.

THE FIRST THING TO DO IS ENSURE YOU HAVE THE CORRECT PAGE SETUP!
Do this by choosing File > Page Setup, and choose A4 portrait (if that is what you are using). At the same time, also choose the correct printer you will be using in the "Format for" dropdown box if you can. This will save later formatting hassles.

In my case this generated firstly a Test of 14 A4 pages, followed by a further 7 pages of answer sheets. This was clearly too much material for the exams we are required to provide.

DELETING UNWANTED QUESTION TYPES

At this stage it is convenient to delete unwanted question types. I started by deleting the True/False question types, and the Yes/No question types, as these either use audio scripts on tracks from the LISTENING: Assessment Audio CD, or accompany written scripts which consume excessive paper. However these might well prove useful for future exams, as they are akin to the recent English Zone Mid-term Exam. My rationale for deleting these categories was to reduce the length of the test, and also to minimize the time required for marking to something manageable. You can simply delete all in a section by selecting the Question Type heading (e.g. "Yes/No"), and clicking the <delete> button at the foot of the screen.

DELETING INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

I then further reduced the total to 100 questions, deleting those Short Answer questions and answers which accompany written scripts, or use audio scripts. In addition I weeded out individual questions I thought superfluous or badly worded. When deleting questions at this stage, be attentive as it is sometimes necessary to perform separate operations to delete the accompanying answers. The Answer Sheets are automatically updated to remove the deleted selections, and the Questions automatically renumber in the Exam and in the Answer Sheets.

RESCALING THE GRAPHICS

The low resolution portrait and "map" graphics generated by the software were not clear. For some reason they are displayed at 75%. These can be improved by selecting the question, double clicking on it to open an editing box, then double clicking on the illustration itself to edit it, then rescaling it to 100%, which I recommend. Remember to click <Record> not <Close>, to save the change. <Close> alone does not save changes you have made.

EDITING THE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

It is then strongly advisable that you read the questions and multiple answers very carefully, as a substantial number of them need modifying - some are in some fashion unsatisfactory, or can in some manner be improved.

For example, the first group of Multiple Choice questions include portraits, and one might be invited to decide whether the hair in one is red or brown, while the illustration itself is grayscale - so it is impossible to determine a correct answer. Other portraits have questions on body build, or on age, but it is difficult from the illustration of head and shoulders only to decide that.

One can and should reword the questions and the answers. It is also possible to add further questions of varying Question types.

At the beginning I added a further question (#0) with nonsensical answers, to get students to relax and not treat the exam too seriously; quite clearly none of the answers were correct, but one student very deliberately chose all of the answers as she handed me her exam paper, and I hope she enjoys her prize of an all-expenses paid trip to Hawaii.

A number of students wasted time trying to answer this question, so I have since revised it to include a correct answer, and provided in the attached exam as a sample question with instructions to demonstrate to students the appropriate method of marking answers.

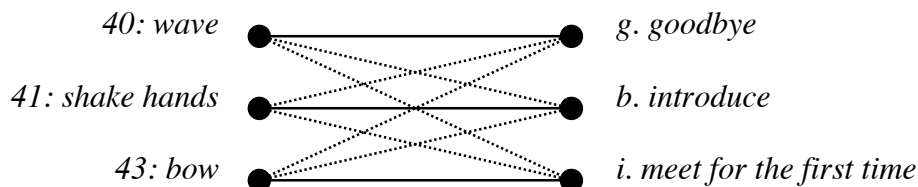
CULTURAL AMBIGUITY

Some questions and answers ExamView Pro™ Test Builder generated might, with the benefit of hindsight, have been modified. In some cases many - or even most - of the students consistently chose the wrong answer, for example:

Q.11: Where do you buy a toothbrush? “Wrong”: d. stationery store

Apparently stationery stores in Korea sell toothbrushes for children!

Some of the options are ambiguous, and there really is more than one possible correct answer. In Matching (p.5), correct answers are shown solid, feasible “wrong” answers dotted:



In Short Answer (p.7):

97. *Your face turns red. You feel this way.*

“Right”: embarrassed

“Wrong”: angry, anger, ashamed, shame, mad, shy, nervous, upset etc.

In practice, I marked such “Wrong” answers as correct if I thought them appropriate. In this short section of four questions (Q97 - Q100), this problem could readily have been avoided by supplying possible answers in a box for that section for students to choose from. I suggest also including several extra that are not the correct answers to any of the four questions.

HEADERS and FOOTERS

In the dropdown Test Menu you can modify the Headers and Footers for the first and subsequent pages. So you can customize it to suit your exam, e.g. have the class number on the first page, also title and space for the Student ID # to be entered. Remember to Record the changes, or they won’t apply! However if you plan to export the document as discussed immediately below, don’t bother to customize your Headers and Footers yet, as you lose the headers and footers on export, and need to then create them in the program you export to.

EXPORTING THE TEST FOR FURTHER EDITING OF THE LAYOUT

You could use the test as it now stands. However I considered my draft too wasteful of paper, and wanted to compress the layout using multiple columns. I therefore chose to export the document, by selecting the Rich-Text document option, which I was familiar with. The Rich Text Formatting of the .rtf file which is generated preserves the text and paragraph formatting. In this case it also retains the illustrations, and at the set scale, which is very helpful. I then opened the .rtf file in MsWord™ v.X (for the Macintosh), which although not a true page layout program, I found adequate for this task, and capable of more sophisticated layout than ExamView Pro™.

By inserting section breaks before and after lists of questions, and alternating sections of single and double columns, I created multiple columns of questions and answers and could thus conserve paper. This was quite time consuming, and if you don’t know what you are doing in a page layout program, I recommend you don’t try.

I reformatted the Shopping List table for questions 14 -17 to conserve space. I substituted ticks for crosses to avoid ambiguity (as a cross can mean “no” rather than “yes”), and also increased the font size to achieve increased legibility.

I drew horizontal lines to emphasize breaks between sections of the exam, and also reworded some of the instructions, in particular making BEST in upper case in the directions to emphasize that indeed the best answer was required. I compressed some of the questions where the length of the underlined blank for a write-in answer was too long (pp. 6,7) (i.e. “_____” rather than “_____”).

At this stage I also set up my Headers and Footers (in MsWord) for the first and subsequent pages.

FURTHER GRAPHIC EDITING

I wanted also to ensure there was no confusion between the various banks of Matching answers and questions on page 5. MsWord did not give me adequate formatting options, so I drew horizontal and vertical lines manually on the master sheet from which I would copy.

COPYING

Once you have printed Master sheets you are happy with (having checked the questions and answers thoroughly!), save yourself a lot of hassle by using the Sort function on copiers. It would preferable to double-side the exams to save paper, which some of these machines are capable of doing automatically.

SECTION TWO CONDUCTING THE EXAM

I chose the two-hour weekly session for the exam for three of my classes, but was able to conduct the exam for the fourth class in the one hour session with some over-run, the students concerned not having a following class to worry about. I regard the exam as being too long because of the hassle in grading, which I will discuss later, but it can comfortably be done by many of the students in the first hour or so.

INSTRUCTIONS

The students were instructed to enter their name and student ID number on the first page. In instructing the class at the beginning of the exam, I was at pains to avoid confusion, and brought to their attention the correct method of answering - to write the letter of choice in Multiple Choice question on the adjacent line to the question number, and not just to circle the correct letter. (I have since modified my nonsense question #0, by including a correct answer, and having the letter of the correct answer handwritten on the line to demonstrate the correct style of answering questions).

I brought to their attention that there were in a number of places two columns, and not to overlook the second column.

I also emphasized there was plenty of time to complete the exam, that there was no rush, that when they were finished they should check all their answers, and then put their hand up, I would collect their paper (at which stage I checked they had entered their name and ID on the first page, and that they had not omitted any columns).

I also stated that at any stage if any student had a question, to put their hand up and I would answer it if I thought it appropriate to do so.

I stated that books should not be on the desk, and that there should be no cheating. Generally student behavior was very good.

THE EXAM

Students seemed to follow the format well. Occasionally I found a student circling an answer instead of entering a letter, and reminded them of the correct style of answering. Several students asked what kgs were (kilograms) in Q17 Aa.

TEST TIMES

After distributing the papers, giving instructions, and telling the students to start, students took the following periods from my start time to complete the exam:

(No allowance is made for these students possibly arriving and starting late).

Class No.	Ability - my prior ranking	Major	First student to finish	Middle student to finish	Last student to finish
39	1	Social Welfare	30 min	47 min	80 min †
08	2	Architecture	42 min	-	62 min
16	4	Electronics	30 min	50 min	67 min
27	3	Horticulture	46 min *	55 min	-

- * : Disregarding 28 minutes for a test pigeon (of a little above average ability) who had earlier tested a draft test for me.
- † : This could easily have been curtailed, as I was indulging a handful of students who were stuck on the last few questions, and who made no visible progress in the last 15 minutes). I am a trifle fascinated that it was the slowest students in the best class who took the longest.
- : I didn't manage to record this data.

I conclude that for the given test of 100 questions, one hour is adequate, plus 10 minutes for instruction time, settling in/distributing papers, and mildly late arrivals for a total of 70 minutes. This will mean some slower students will not complete the exam in the allotted time.

SECTION THREE MARKING THE EXAM

In a word, this was painful. Notwithstanding my labor-saving approach of trying to optimize the process of grading and turning pages, it took far longer than anticipated, and became a hassle. With the benefit of hindsight, I now realize that this could have been overcome. The key is to use a separate answer sheet, preferably one-sided. A similar approach was used in the recent Mid-term Exam at GSNU's English Zone. There is then no need for the repetitive turning of pages while marking and while adding marks from separate pages. The exam books should still be carefully collected and counted, to avoid the possibility of cheating for later classes (however questions and their answers can be scrambled within ExamView Pro™ - before editing in MsWord - to help deter cheating for later exams).

A further time-saving refinement would be to use some computerized style of scanning answer sheets, such as the Scantron™ system of optical marking recognition using proprietary sheets, widely used in the US. This facility would logically be shared with the English Zone.

Ideally a standardized test would be used across all freshman classes, and held at one set time to avoid cheating. That may not be feasible because of timetable constraints.

Questions 84-88 require completion of a sentence with the word **a**, **an**, or **nothing**. This needs to be better explained, so that if the answer is **nothing**, students are instructed to draw a dash or line; a few students didn't answer the question, but their blank still showed as a correct answer. Others wrote in the word "**nothing**", which is not very satisfactory (e.g. "I like to put **nothing** sugar on my cereal". Others used crosses, which clashed with my marking of a cross for an incorrect answer, though I was using a different color ink to avoid confusion.

SECTION FOUR STUDENT DIFFICULTIES WITH THE EXAM

In Cultural Ambiguity in Section One above, I have already identified some problems with the questions and answers generated by ExamView Pro™.

Questions 92-96 require the completion of the sentence by writing *many*, *much*, or a form of the verb *to be*. Quite a few (floundering?) students actually wrote “*to be*”, sometimes in quotes ““*to be*””, instead of the correct “*are*” in Q.93, or of “*is*” in Q95.

As also previously discussed, Questions 1-4 are difficult to identify from the graphics, even with my modifications, and are also rather subjective in regard to body type and age.

There was some confusion with Questions 14-17 (Shopping List).

Many students had problems with the prepositions required for the Directions of Questions 23-27.

In Section 1 I discuss problems with the Matching questions on page 5. These need further refining. Some students confuse the last name *Gonzales* with the city *Sao Paulo*, so more recognizable examples would be preferable (e.g. last name “*Lee*”, city “*Beijing*”, country “*China*”. Possible confusion led me to change the auto-generated “*carrots*” : “*orange vegetables*” to “*carrot*” : “*orange or red colored vegetable*”.

MOST students were unable to correctly answer Questions 74-78, and did not know what the Present Continuous was, or that it requires a form of the verb “*to be*” as well as “*-ing*” of the supplied verb stem.

MOST students did not know what a Pronoun was for Questions 79-83. Most of the answers given were incorrect, despite my verbal reiteration during the exam that “*a pronoun is something that stands in place of a noun*”.

Questions 84-88 illustrate how unsatisfactory some grammatical rules can be. In particular, Q88 - well if I had gone into the garden, taken a lettuce, and chopped it up and put it in my salad, I would say “*I also put a lettuce from the garden in my salad*” - which is here an incorrect answer. In Q.84, depending on the context, I could well say “*I want to make cake*”, (in response to “*Do you want to make cake or bread?*”), again here incorrect. Q.86 could be either “*For flavor, she adds an orange to the sauce*” or “*For flavor, she adds orange to the sauce*”.

Questions 97-100 gave students problems. I have already discussed Q.97, with many possible answers. Many students could not recall the word “*shrug*” for Question 99.

SECTION FIVE RAW GRADES

The exam results partly confirmed my prior ranking of the relative abilities of the classes, but were mildly surprising in the reversal of rank of the lowest two classes.

Class No.	Ability - prior rank	Major	Number to do exam	Highest Mark	Average Mark	Lowest Mark
39	1	Social Welfare	38 of 39	92.0%	80.50%	66.5%
08	2	Architecture	35 of 41	89.0%	75.76%	62.5 / 43.5%
16	4	Electronics	34 of 34	89.0%	69.81%	56.5 / 51.0% *
27	3	Horticulture	34 of 37	85.5%	68.32%	49.0 / 31.0% *

* : The first figure is the second to lowest mark, while the second mark is the lowest; in both cases disregarding the lowest mark gives a much more consistent range. This is readily apparent from viewing all of the results, which are attached.

I was please with the relevance of the results, which generally accorded well with my estimate of their abilities.

- Class 39 is undoubtedly my best class and a pleasure to teach.
- Class 08, whose major is my own specialty, is quite good but has some poor performers.
- Class 16 did a little better than I expected - they are a very slow class with poor language skills and very poor participation. Of the 34 who did the exam, 17 (half) passed ($\geq 70\%$), but I would probably actually pass more, as many as 24 or 25. Of course other marks for the course have yet to be taken into account.
- Class 27 consists of people who are pleasant to teach, but who are somewhat slow. Though scoring the lowest, their participation is definitely better than Class 16.
- Significantly, Class 16 is mainly comprised of boys (with only 2 girls), while Class 27 is more evenly mixed. In my experience, girls are easier to teach and participate more readily than boys.

SECTION SIX CONCLUSION

The exam results more or less confirmed my prior ranking of the abilities of the classes, and provides in my opinion a reasonably reliable test of their linguistic abilities. The poorer classes average around the pass mark of 70%, while the better classes clearly surpass it. As some of the questions had more than one feasible answer - a failing of the question banks provided with the ExamView Pro™ software - I would tend to scale the results upward.

However the exam was too much work to prepare and mark. In particular, marking would be far easier with a separate single answer sheet, preferably one-sided. Alternatively, 75 or 80 questions, instead of 100, would be a better quantity, and would allow the exam to take just one hour including instruction time. But that would still require substantial marking time.

Ideally a computerized means of scanning answer sheets would be used such as the Scantron™ system of assessment by optical mark reading of proprietary sheets as widely used in the United States. A standardized test for all freshman classes, held at the one time, would minimize cheating.

A number of the questions and answers generated by the ExamView Pro™ question banks for World Link are ambiguous and the instructions can be inadequate. Allowances need to be made for cultural differences, and the exams would benefit by being tailored to local conditions. It is very important to refine the questions and answers; the automatically generated ones are not satisfactory by themselves. However it would be feasible to evolve and update custom question banks for future use.

World Link Book 1 is clearly too advanced for the lower level Freshman classes, and the Introductory Book would have been a better choice for Classes 16 and 27. However, I feel the entire Series does not adequately encourage conversation in pairs and groups, and I reiterate that the Cambridge University Press Touchstone Series, particularly their Book 1, would be a far better choice for future Freshman classes.

Finally, moving to written exams will require substantially more work by teachers. (We have already seen an exponential increase in work required this semester from the increase in class sizes from 30 to 40 students, together with the pressures of long hours of overtime necessary to launch the English Zone). These increased administrative demands want to be reflected in significantly better conditions of employment than those current, the effects of which are being clearly revealed in the very high rate of native staff turnover. I respectfully encourage the administration to make conditions more competitive with other universities, and so encourage the retention of skilled and experienced teachers.
