

*Offline test specification*

## **1. Statement of purpose**

This is an integrated test of English academic reading, note-taking, summarising, paraphrasing, argumentation, and writing skills. It consists of a written guided summary task and measures the students' ability to use English at a high level of proficiency in formal academic language use settings.

## **2. General information**

This test must be taken by all students enrolled in the BBN-ANG11-104 Academic Skills 1 course. The test is offered each year towards the end of the autumn semester and can be taken once only. The time of the test is given by the 104 course tutor on the course schedule. The test is double marked first by another Academic Skills tutor and then by the course tutor. The results are usually announced either in the last week of the semester or in the first week of the examination period and are added up with the other course grades. The final course grade is calculated so that the coursework constitutes 60% and the test 40% of the grade. Only those students can get a grade for the Academic Skills course who have taken the test.

*Please note that the Academic Skills 1 (Tudományos íráskészség 2/ BBN-ANG11-104) course is a pre-requisite for the Academic Skills 2 (Tudományos íráskészség 2/ BBN-ANG11-108) course offered in the spring semester. The Academic Skills 2 course, in turn, is a pre-requisite for the Language Proficiency Examination (ANG11-001 Nyelvi alapvizsga angol nyelvből), the successful completion of which is necessary for registering for second year courses. **In short:** students who do not complete the 104 and 108 courses successfully will most likely not be able to start their second year of studies.*

## **3. To do before the test**

Students with special needs (e.g., hearing-impaired, visually impaired, dyslexic students) should let their course tutor know **by 31 October** that they would like to be accommodated (e.g., allowed the use of a computer, given extra time to complete the task, provided with a question paper with larger fonts).

## **4. The test**

### **4.1 Procedures**

Working time: 60 minutes

The use of dictionaries or any other reference materials or electronic devices, including cell phones, is NOT allowed during the examination. Test takers who cheat are suspended, and suspension will automatically result in a fail grade ('1', elégtelen).

### **4.2 Test takers are given the following instructions before the test** (main points only here):

- Switch off and put away your mobile phones.
- Do not talk during the test.
- Write in BLUE ink (kéken író töltőtollal / golyóstollal).
- Write legibly.
- Put your name, Neptun code, course code (BBN-ANG11-104/\_?\_), and tutor's name **legibly** on the question paper (*see Section 5 below for a sample question paper*).
- Put your name and Neptun code on the sheet(s) you used for drafting.
- Write the **final version** of your summary on the **back** of the **question paper**.
- If you have written a draft version, cross it out at the end.
- You can detach the sheets, but you shall have to hand in **all** the sheets at the end of the test.
- You can write for 60 minutes to complete the task.
- Count the words in the final version of your summary and write the number below it, for example: *(139 words)*.
- When you have finished writing the test, **remain seated**, put up your hand, and wait until your test paper and draft sheet are collected and your tutor tells you what you have to do next. Do not talk while you are waiting.
- The results of the test will be announced by the class tutor.

#### 4.3 Structure of the test

The test consists of a guided summary writing task. There is a reading passage of about 700 words on a general academic topic (e.g., using authentic texts as language teaching materials, the role of dictation in the language classroom, study skills) that discusses different aspects of the topic. Test takers must find and summarise **five to six** related aspects by responding to a guiding question about the reading passage. They do not have to summarise the whole text (i.e., do not write a global summary) but only those parts that contain information that answers the guiding question (i.e., write a guided summary). The summary must be a complete paragraph of about 130 (+/- 10%) words written in the neutral or semi-formal/formal style typical of popular science magazines (e.g., *National Geographic*, *Popular Science*). The summary does not have a title.

The summary is evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Content**, which has two subcriteria:
  - *Presence of content points* (the summary contains all the ideas from the reading passage relevant for the task), and
  - *Presence of irrelevant, added or repeated information* (the summary does NOT contain any irrelevant information; information added by the test taker, for example, in the form of comments on the summarised ideas; or ideas repeated within the body of the summary).
- **Paraphrasing**, which has two subcriteria:
  - *General quality of paraphrasing* (test taker briefly but comprehensively restates the content points; uses correct and appropriate vocabulary as well as semi-formal or formal style; there are no errors that hinder comprehension; spelling is correct), and

- *Distance from the source text* (summary is written in the summariser's own words as much as possible; it contains no strings of words copied from the reading passage or parts that are too close in wording to the original).
- **Texture**, which has three subcriteria:
  - *Completeness* (summary starts with a topic sentence that contains a complete APA-style signal phrase—author's surname, year of publication, and a reporting verb in Past Simple tense; continues with the developmental part including 5-6 related thematic aspects; and ends with a concluding sentence. No title is needed because such summaries typically make part of longer academic texts).
  - *Coherence and Cohesion* (logical organisation of ideas; linking devices used to connect ideas), and
  - *Punctuation* (correct and functionally appropriate use of punctuation marks).
- **Grammar** (range and accuracy of structures used; there are no errors that hinder comprehension).
- **Paragraphing** (summary is written up as one physical paragraph)
- **Length** (summary is of the length specified in the instruction for the task).

#### 4.4 Scoring

The summary is rated individually by two examiners and the final score is calculated based on their scores.

Criterion		Scores
Content	CP Presence & quality	0–3*
	Irr./Add./Rep. information	0–3*
Paraphrasing	Gen. quality of paraphrasing	0–3*
	Distance from the source text	0–3*
Texture	Completeness	0–3*
	Coherence and Cohesion	0–3*
	Punctuation	0–3*
Grammar		0–3*
Paragraphing		0–1
Length		0–1
Total		26

\*For a pass grade, this score must be minimum “1” point. For example,

CP Pres.	Irr./Add. info	Gen. qual. of paraphr.	Distance from source text	Compl.	Coher. & Cohes.	Punct.	Gra.	Paragr.	Length	Total
2	3	2	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	18

is a pass (grade 3, see below), but

CP Pres.	Irr./Add. info	Gen. qual. of paraphr.	Distance from source text	Compl.	Coher. & Cohes.	Punct.	Gra.	Paragr.	Length	Total
2	2	0	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	15

is a fail, because of the General quality of paraphrasing score of “0”.

The raw scores are converted into grades according to the following matrix:

0-14	1 (elégtelen)
15-17	2 (elégséges)
18-20	3 (közepes)
21-23	4 (jó)
24-26	5 (jeles)

For further details please contact the academic skills course co-ordinator, Gyula Tankó, R430 (tanko.gyula(at)btk.elte.hu).

## 5. Sample test paper

Academic Skills Test – 29 November 2007 (Working time: 60 minutes)

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Course: BBN-ANG11-104/\_\_\_\_\_  
Neptun code: \_\_\_\_\_ Tutor: \_\_\_\_\_

Write a paragraph of 130 (+/- 10%) words in which you summarise in your own words as far as possible *the potential problems with dictation in language teaching and the ways these problems can be overcome*, which are discussed in the reading passage below.

### Using dictation

by Amy Lightfoot, published in 2005

In its simplest form, dictation refers to a person reading some text aloud so that the listener(s) can write down what is being said. When used in the language classroom, the aim has traditionally been for students to write down what is said by the teacher, word for word, later checking their own text against the original and correcting the errors made. While this certainly has its uses, there are countless variations that can make it more interesting and learner-centred. For example, a related activity, sometimes called 'dictogloss', requires the students to only take notes of the key words used as they listen and then later reconstruct the text so that it has the same meaning as the original text although perhaps not exactly the same form.

There are several reasons why dictation activities work well in the classroom. From the teacher's point of view, dictations can be done with any level, depending on the text used; can be graded for a multi-level class; and usually require very little preparation and photocopying. In fact, dictation can be used to decrease preparation time for other activities. Instead of spending hours making cut-up activities such as matching vocabulary and their definitions, why not just give the students blank slips of paper and dictate the necessary information to them in the classroom? This also gives the students more listening, writing and spelling practice.

For the students, dictations can focus on both accuracy (form) as well as meaning. Speaking and pronunciation can be developed if the students do the dictating rather than the teacher. Additionally, dictation activities where students compare their version of the text to the original can increase their ability to notice aspects of the language which are sometimes overlooked, as well as mistakes which they commonly make. These might include common spelling errors, absence of articles or the third person 's', etc. The comparison also helps students to become better at identifying errors in their own written work.

What definitely needs to be addressed is the perception that students may have of doing a dictation activity. Some students (and teachers) may have developed an aversion to dictation. It is important, therefore, to ensure that we vary the ways that we do dictation in class and encourage the students to focus on meaning as well as accuracy. All sorts of texts can be dictated, from single words of a vocabulary list to sentences from a dialogue to full paragraphs. These can also be dictated in the 'wrong' order, requiring students to unscramble them once it is finished. Using dictated texts as a precursor to further activities like this will help students to see them as an integrated part of the learning process. It is important that we and the students see these activities as learning experiences rather than as simply testing their ability to listen and copy words and sentences.

A second issue is that some students may find dictation more difficult than others, especially if you are teaching a multi-level class. One way of combating this is to think about how much of the dictation we expect our students to produce. We can give weaker students skeleton versions of the text to be dictated, with gaps for them to fill in as they go along, rather than a blank sheet of paper. Incidentally, this can be a useful approach for practising 'noticing' specific parts of speech – for example, all the students can be required to listen for only the prepositions or articles needed to fill in the gaps.

Students often are not very good at looking for mistakes in what they have written when comparing it to the original text. It can often be easier to check the errors in someone else's text rather than in our own. Also, it might be an idea to leave some time between completing the dictation and checking the text against a correct version as students are often better able to find their errors with 'fresh' eyes. Doing this will also be good training for students, giving them strategies for checking their own written work.

In this article we have examined the benefits and problems associated with dictation as well as explored some variations on the traditional approach. Dictation does not work for everything or for everyone, but by looking again at this traditional method we can add to our classroom techniques a touch of the familiar with a little innovation.

**Write the clean copy of your summary on the back of this sheet.**