

Guiding principles: remotely delivered language assessment - what makes it fit for purpose?

Remote language assessment has grown from a niche alternative to a mainstream option because it offers greater convenience, flexibility, and accessibility; but its use must be carefully balanced against challenges such as security, bias, privacy, digital inequity, and the need for strong evidence that it is fit for purpose. This is not an argument against remote testing, but one for a more rigorous assessment of how, when, and in which contexts it can be used with confidence. With remote language testing also playing an increasingly important role in decisions such as those related to higher education admission or immigration, providers have a responsibility to ensure that convenience does not come at the expense of confidence in results.

While Cambridge English continues to examine the opportunities and risks of remotely delivered assessment, it has set out six foundational principles for best practice to support a more evidence-based approach to remote language testing.

Our six guiding principles:

1 Testing what matters

While test design is a fundamental consideration for any assessment, it becomes even more critical in remote settings. Practicality needs to be balanced against the need for a valid and meaningful evaluation of language proficiency. The test design and the tasks included must be carefully aligned with the specific language skills being evaluated and the overall purpose of the assessment.

2 Rigorous test security

Remote language tests need to place even greater emphasis on maintaining rigorous test security as they are more vulnerable to exam malpractice compared to in-centre tests. Providers need robust identity checks, effective monitoring, and clear protections against malpractice, alongside careful consideration for the appropriate level of remote proctoring, so that the results from remotely delivered tests can be trusted.

3 Standardised test conditions

Remotely delivered assessment sessions should follow consistent standards to ensure fairness for all test-takers. Since certain administrative aspects in remote settings fall outside the test provider's direct control, specific measures, such as prioritising user-friendly platforms, must be implemented to maintain consistency across sessions.

4 Maintain human involvement

Technology can support delivery and monitoring, but it cannot replace human judgement altogether. Appropriate human guidance, support, and oversight must remain integral to remotely delivered assessments.

5 Fair and inclusive participation

Remote testing can improve accessibility, but only if all candidates have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their competence. Remote delivery assessments need to incorporate differences in equipment, connectivity, environment and digital confidence to accommodate unique test-taker circumstances whenever possible.

6 Comparability across modes

When remote assessments are presented as an equivalent alternative to in-centre options, it is essential to validate and monitor the comparability of test quality and outcomes to ensure that scores from different delivery modes can be used interchangeably. It is also crucial that providers continuously assess the ongoing comparability of different delivery modes.

To maintain the integrity of remotely delivered language assessments, the principles outlined in this paper should be applied at every stage of testing practices. Providers, policymakers and institutions should also continue to take an evidence-based approach to ensure remote testing is secure, fair and fit for purpose.

Read the full paper **Remotely delivered language assessment: what makes it fit for purpose?** by Hye-won Lee, Daniel R Isbell and Benjamin Kremmel at cambridge.org/english-insights.

