

# Designing Tasks and Item Writing

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# Objectives

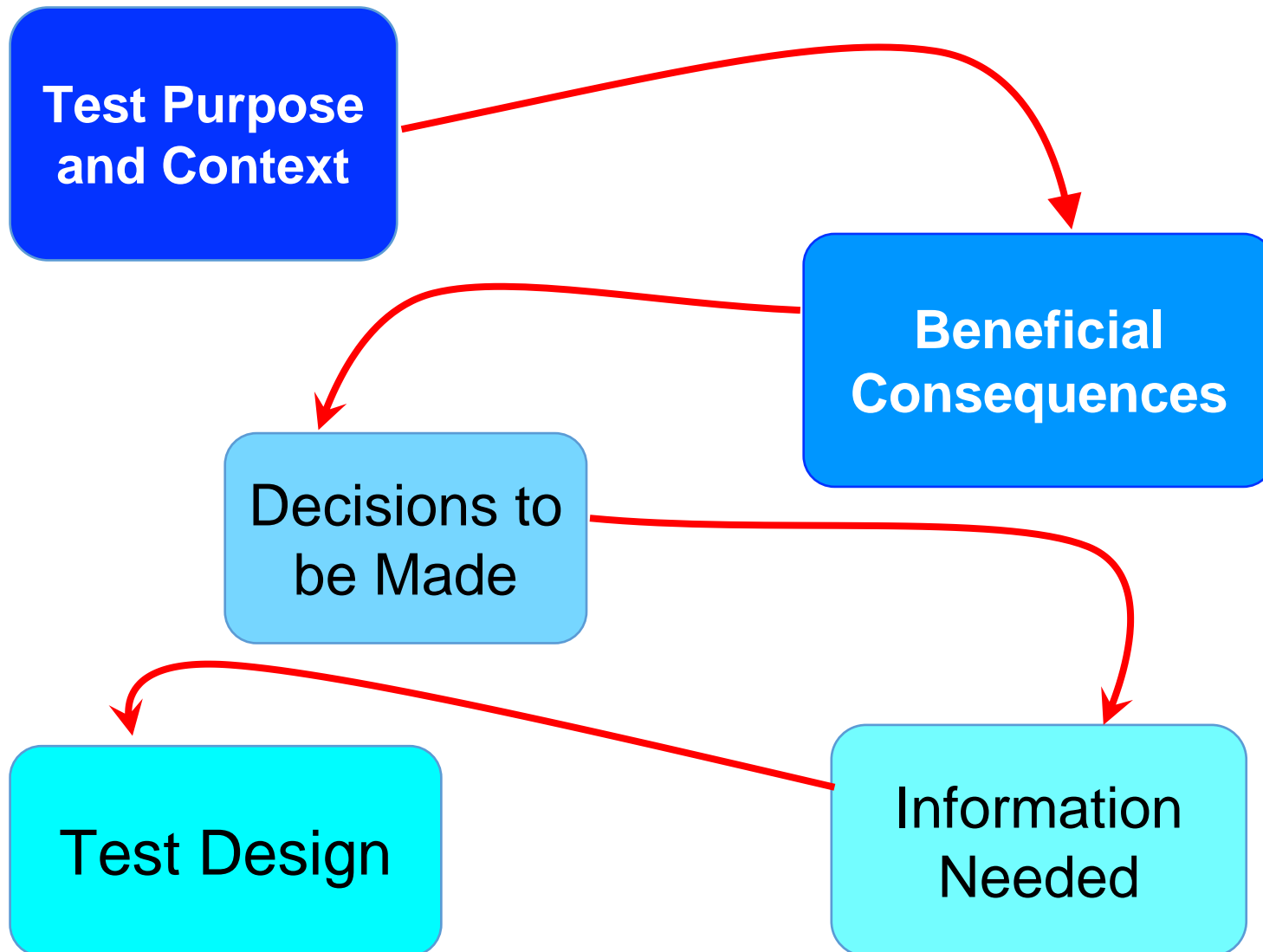
- Understand the notion of test construct
- How to use the CEFR and the Core Inventory
- How to read and use test specifications
- Practice with test items



# Part 1

# The Construct

## Defining the Construct



# What Information Do We Need?

Are my students learning in class?

- Reading, writing, listening, speaking skills
- A range of general topics
- Easy and difficult questions

1

What is this person's level of English?

- Skills covered in curriculum
- Language points covered in textbook
- Course content and topics
- Questions of similar difficulty

2

Are these students ready to study in English?

- Business skills used in this field
- A range of topics relevant to this type of work
- Difficulty similar to real life experience

3

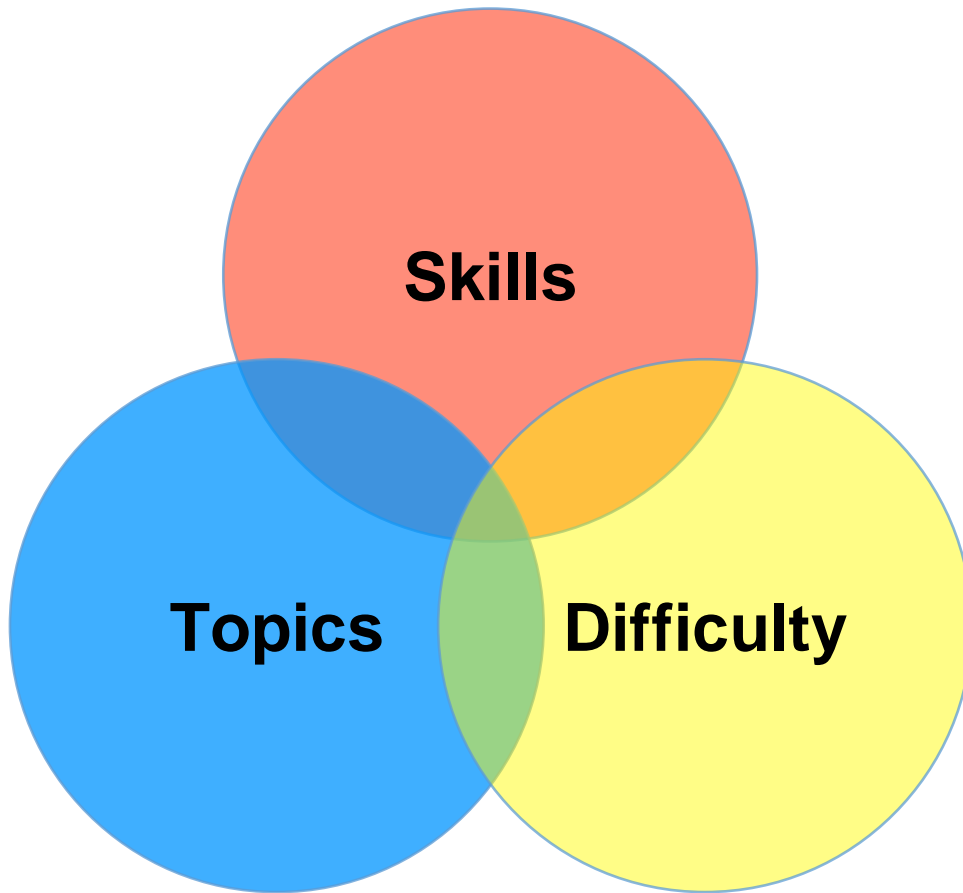
Can this person do the tasks we do in our company in English?

- Reading, writing, listening, speaking skills
- Academic topics
- Question difficulty at expected level

4

5

# Modeling the Construct



- Can be based on a **model of language**, e.g. communicative language ability
- **Frameworks** provide further detail, such as CEFR

# Advantages of the CEFR

- Easy to identify skills, topics, and difficulty
- Clear, easy to follow, flexible model
- Shows progression from level to level
- Lists skills in terms of actions defined in context



# CEFR Descriptors - Activity 1

C2

*Can understand short, simple texts on familiar matters of a concrete type which consist of high frequency everyday or job-related language.*

Overall Reading, A2

C1

*Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.*

Overall Writing, B2

B2

B1

*Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.*

Overall Speaking, B1

A2

*Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.*

Overall Listening, A1

A1

8



# Part 1

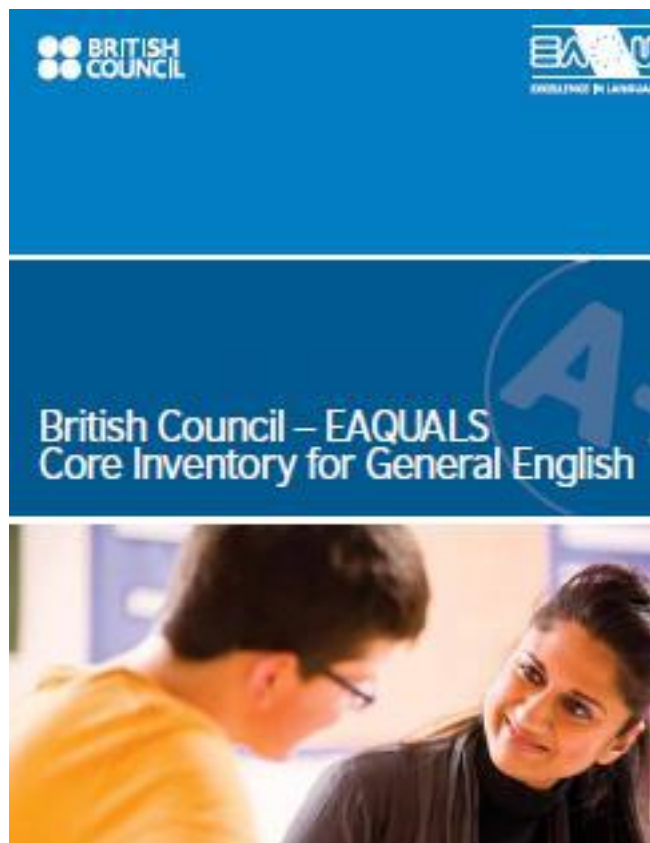
# Test and Task Specifications

# Specifications

- Blueprint for a test and tasks
- Test specifications refer to overall contents of test, purpose, context, and construct
- Task specifications list all essential information to write test content
- May include:


Purpose	Construct definition for task	Description of task	Types of questions	Number of questions
Instructions	Type of text	Text topic	Time allowed	Type of prompt
Language level	Language skills	Language elements	Lexical level	Scoring Information

# Core Inventory





- Created by British Council to expand on the CEFR
- Lists topics, texts, grammar, vocabulary appropriate at each CEFR level
- Useful for aligning tests and class content to CEFR levels
- [www.eaquals.org/resources/the-core-inventory-for-general-english/](http://www.eaquals.org/resources/the-core-inventory-for-general-english/)

# Core Inventory

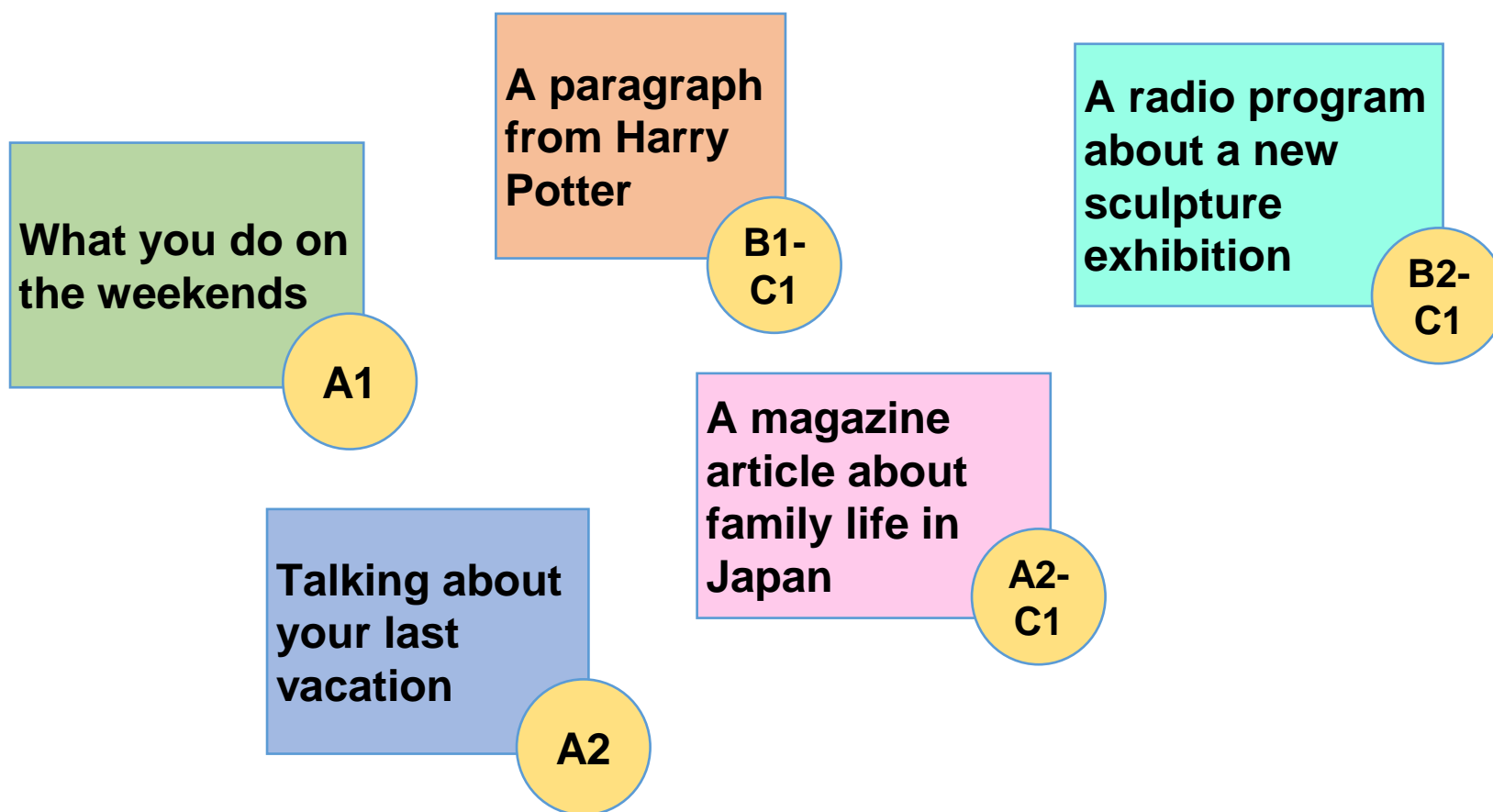


	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1
<b>Functions / Notions</b>					
Numbers					
Prices					
Telling the time					
Directions					
Greetings					
Giving personal information					
Describing habits and routines					
Describing people					
Describing things					
Requests					
Suggestions					
Advice					
Invitations					
Offers					
Arrangements/ -ing to meet people					
Obligation and necessity					
Describing places					
Describing past experiences & storytelling					
Describing feelings, emotion, attitudes					precisely
Describing hopes and plans					12

## Activity 2

Use the core inventory to find which CEFR level each topic or text type is appropriate for



# Aptis Specifications

Test	Aptis General	Component		Task	
<b>Features of the Task</b>					
<b>Skill focus</b>	<b>Identifying specific, factual information</b>				
	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1
<b>Task description</b>	Q&A about listening text. Listen to short monologues and conversations to identify short, specific pieces of information.				
<b>Further information</b>					
<b>Instructions to candidates</b>	The rubric will always contain two parts: 1) a short contextualisation: <i>listen to the message for Mary from Arturo</i> or <i>listen to the man and woman talking</i> ; 2) The second part of the rubric will be a short question, e.g. <i>What is Arturo's phone number?</i>				
<b>Presentation</b>	Written	Aural	Illustrations/graphs		
<b>Response format</b>	4-option multiple choice			<b>Items per task</b>	1
	Approximately 50 minutes for the entire Listening test (all tasks). Individual tasks are not timed.				
<b>Kind of information targeted</b>	<b>Lexical recognition</b>			<b>Factual information</b>	
	<b>Interpretative meaning at the utterance</b>			<b>Meaning at discourse level</b>	
<b>Cognitive processing Levels of listening</b>	<b>Input decoding</b>				
	<b>Lexical search</b>				
	<b>Syntactic parsing</b>				
	<b>Meaning construction</b>				
	<b>Discourse construction</b>				
<b>Features of the Input Text</b>					
<b>Length</b>	30 seconds	<b>Words</b>	60–80		2.2 – 2.6 words per second (approximate)
<b>Accent</b>	Standard British English speaker likely to be encountered in the UK. Native speakers of English.				
<b>Domain</b>	Public	Occupational		Educational	Personal
<b>Discourse mode</b>	Descriptive	Narrative	Expository	Argumentative	Instructive
<b>Pattern</b>	Monologue			Dialogue	
<b>Content knowledge</b>	General				Specific

# Aptis, Continued

<b>Cultural specificity</b>	Neutral								Specific			
<b>Nature of information</b>	Only concrete		Mostly concrete				Fairly abstract				Mainly abstract	
<b>Presentation</b>	Written				Aural				Illustrations / graphs			
	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10		
	All vocabulary should be from within the K1/K2 level (See Guidelines on Adhering to Lexical Level)											
<b>Grammatical level</b>	A2 Grammatical exponents (See Guidelines on Adhering to Grammatical Level)											
<b>Topic</b>	From topic list for A2											
	<p>Monologues: Recorded telephone messages, instructions, lectures/presentations, public announcements, weather forecasts, news programs, short speeches, advertising.</p> <p>Dialogues: Interpersonal conversations (includes interaction in educational, occupational, and public domains, e.g. conversation between sales assistant and customer, or conversation between two students about study).</p>											
<b>Relationship of participants</b>	<p>Monologues: The speaker may or may not be known to the intended listener.</p> <p>Dialogues: Participants may be known to each other (friends, colleagues, teacher/student) or unknown (sales assistant/customer, public announcement).</p>											
<b>Features of the Response</b>												
<b>Stem</b>		8 (max) words		<b>Lexical</b>	K1		<b>Grammar</b>	A1 exponents				
<b>Presentation</b>	Written			Aural				Illustrations/Graphs				
<b>Options</b>	<b>Length</b>	1-5 words		<b>Lexical</b>	K1		<b>Grammar</b>	A1 exponents				
<b>Presentation</b>	Written			Aural				Illustrations/Graphs				
<b>Key information</b>	Within utterance/turn			Across utterances/turn								

Dunlea, J. & O'Sullivan, B. (2015). *Aptis General Technical Manual (Version 1.0)*. British Council.

## Creating Items

# Listening

(25 questions)

This is the Aptis Listening Test. You will hear 25 short recordings. You will hear each recording twice. Write your answers on the question paper. You will have five minutes at the end of the test to copy your answers onto the answer sheet. Before the test begins, listen to an example.



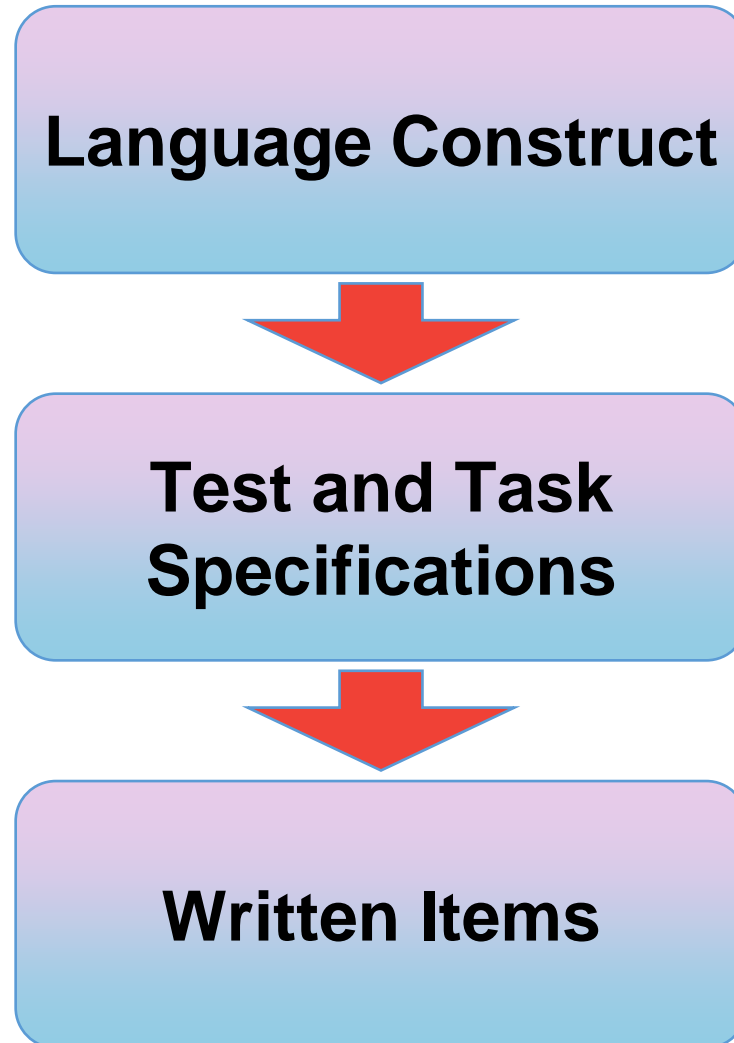
Brian planned to see his friend tonight. Why does he say he can't come?

Brian said he can't come because he is \_\_\_\_\_.

1. busy
2. on holiday
3. ***not well***
4. late



## How it All Fits Together

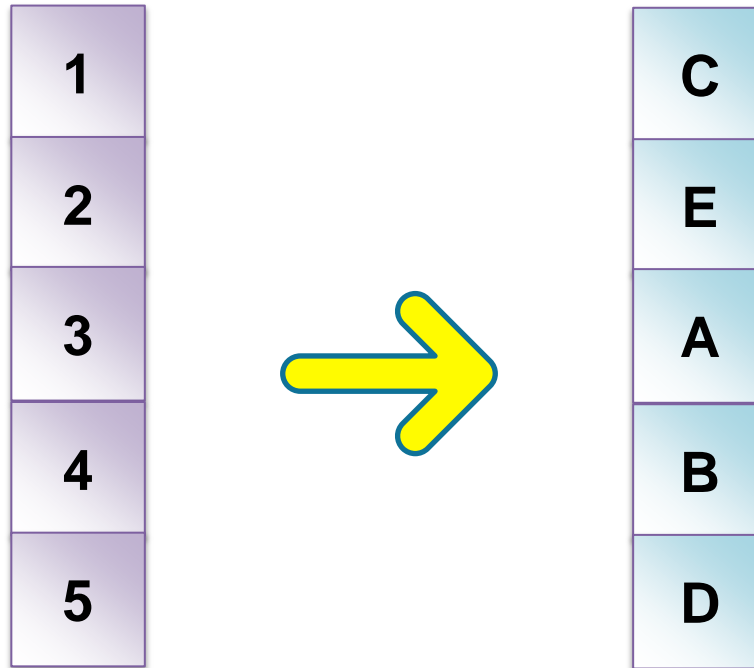


# Part 3

# Practice

## Activity 3

- Work in pairs
- Look at the following specifications.
- Match them to the type of item they are describing.



## Activity 4

- Look at the following task specification
- With the person next to you, try to write an item as best as you can following the specifications
- After you finish your item, compare with another group! Did you miss anything?

## Activity 4 - Item Writing

Skill focus	<b>Interactive writing. Responding to a written question with short a paragraph-level response.</b>
Task level	B1
Task description	The candidate responds interactively to a question presented as if the candidate is writing on an internet forum or social network site.. The response requires a short paragraph-level response.
Topic level	Appropriate for B1
Instructions to candidates	<p>The instructions identify the setting for the interaction and person or persons with whom the candidate is interacting. The following is an example only, and other kinds of follow-up questions appropriate to the setting and the B1-level targeted should be developed:</p> <p><i>You are a member of a travel club. Talk to other members in the travel club chat room. Talk to them using sentences. Use 30–40 words per answer.</i></p>
Length of post	Each post requesting information should be in the form of 1–3 short sentences. Maximum length of a post is 25–30 words, with no one sentence more than 13–15 words.
Grammar of input e-mail/notice and instruction	A1 to A2
Lexis of input e-mail/notice and instruction	K1 to K3

## Resources

Alderson, J.C., Clapham, C., & Wall, D. (1995). *Language test construction and evaluation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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# Thank You!

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