
Techniques in Testing

Book Review by Lynn Henrichsen

TECHNIQUES IN TESTING. Harold S. Madsen. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. Pp. vii + 212. \$5.95, paper.

In any teacher's professional life, the role played by testing is an influential one. It is, therefore, quite appropriate that Oxford's new series on teaching techniques in ESL include a book about techniques in testing. The orientation of the five-book series (which also deals with teaching vocabulary, teaching writing, teaching pronunciation, and techniques and methods) is toward "practicing and student teachers of ESL." The aim of each book is to provide "practical information that relates directly to daily classroom instruction." In keeping with this aim, Madsen's book is "devoted entirely to the presentation and exemplification of practical testing techniques."

Techniques in Testing is a book that many ESL teachers around the world have long been hoping for. In a concise yet highly readable style that avoids testing and statistical jargon as much as possible, the book covers the essentials of language testing in a neat, organized fashion. While testing experts might accuse Madsen of oversimplification, newcomers to the often intimidating world of testing (whether they be student teachers still in training or experienced teachers who have never been properly introduced to the subject) will welcome the book. In addition, its very affordable price is sure to make *Techniques in Testing* even more welcome.

In a little over two hundred pages, *Techniques in Testing* provides broad and balanced coverage of the numerous aspects of second language testing. After a brief introductory chapter, the subsequent sections cover the testing of language subskills (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) and the testing of communication skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). An additional chapter addresses the topic

of evaluating tests (primarily, procedures for conducting an item analysis), and an appendix provides up-to-date information on a number of widely used commercial tests (TOEFL, Michigan, ARELS, etc.), both British and American.

At the end of most of the chapters in the book there are a number of "activities that teachers can perform that tie the content of the book directly to the teachers' responsibilities in their classes." These practice activities provide readers with the opportunity to try out the concepts and procedures discussed in the chapter.

The book is not without flaws, of course. In the attempt to cover a large amount of material quickly and simply, Madsen omits things that some might consider essential. For instance, although the concepts of test reliability and validity are presented, an explanation of how teachers might determine the reliability or validity of their tests is missing. Nevertheless, such omissions are undoubtedly purposeful. To explain these procedures adequately would require additional sections on rather complex statistical operations, and such elaboration would run counter to the basic philosophy of the book.

Less forgivable is the absence of guidelines in areas such as test administration or test score interpretation. A further, technical problem is the placement of the answer keys for the end-of-chapter activities. Regardless of one's good intentions when working on a problem, the temptation to glance at the correct answers is great when they are so plainly displayed at the bottom of the same page.

In conclusion, however, I should emphasize that the many strengths of *Techniques of Testing* far outweigh its few weaknesses. It provides an excellent introduction to the most important concepts and most commonly used procedures in second language testing.