

Dynamic Placement Test Security

Defining appropriate levels of security

On one level the distinction between low-stakes and high-stakes tests is false: for most test takers, any test feels 'high-stakes', and most candidates want to do the best they possibly can. Nevertheless, the Dynamic Placement Test is not equivalent to, say, IELTS and its output will not have an immediate impact on key life events such as qualifying for immigration status or university entrance. It is not life-changing, and test security for the Dynamic Placement Test needs to be approached with that in mind.

Security within the test

Some security elements are built into the test.

- **Adaptive pathways.** The test adapts to the language proficiency of the test taker. A higher-level user will therefore follow a different path from the lower-level user in the next seat. A fluid, flexible test is inherently more secure than a standard printed test.
- **Randomisation.** Even if two students sitting next to each other are at the same level, and are following the same path through the test, the item bank delivers questions randomly, so the students will be doing different tests.
- **Nature of the questions.** The question types make it very difficult to look up the answers on Google. If the task is to rearrange words in a sentence, or put the utterances in a dialogue into a logical order, the scope for finding the answers through a search engine is negligible.
- There is a **time limit** on the test. Attempts to cheat take time away from answering the questions and are, in this sense, self-defeating.

Invigilation and the secure environment

From the test environment perspective, the concept of test security does not differ very much between traditional paper-and-pencil tests and online tests. If test takers are working at home, or in any other setting where there is no invigilation, they are able to cheat, perhaps by getting someone else to help them. You may decide that the convenience of having students placed in appropriate classes pre-arrival outweighs the risk of a small number of them cheating. You could certainly choose to inform them that the outcome of this test is to place them in the correct class, and that cheating to get a better or worse score will be entirely counter-productive.

On the other hand, it may be important to you that the test should be as secure as possible. In this case, you should invigilate the test in exactly the same way you would a paper-and-pencil test. You can control the start time with an access code.

Start times and access codes

If test takers are using their own devices, it is optimal to ask them to download the test app beforehand. They should also work through the initial familiarisation activity to ensure that the test is running smoothly on their device. You can prevent them from seeing the test itself by specifying a Start time on the Admin Panel. Even if they have the app open, they will not be able to access the test itself until it goes live at the Start time.

You may decide that you wish to accommodate late-comers, in which case you won't know the exact Start time. In this case you can set an access code in the Admin Panel. If you do so, even when the appointed Start time is reached, students will not be able to access the test until they type in the code. You can therefore control the exact start of the test by waiting until all test takers have arrived and then display the code.