

SAM CLB 1-4
Summative Assessment Manual
Learner Benchmark Achievement
Report Tools
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Work has been completed on SAM (Summative Assessment Manual) for Canadian Language Benchmarks Stage 1, a project funded by Alberta Learning, the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, and by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in Edmonton. At the moment, the SAM CLB 1-4 manual is in the pre-publication production phase.

Project outline

SAM: Summative Assessment Manual is for the use of ESL teachers in publicly funded adult ESL programs. The purpose of SAM is to help teachers assess their students on the achievement of selected Canadian Language Benchmarks standards in speaking, listening, reading and writing at the conclusion of an agreed period of language instruction, e.g. a session. The SAM manual consists of four main parts:

1. Planning the summative assessment - deciding on the assessment strategy
2. Conducting the assessments: SAM tasks (contains 156 tasks)
3. Rating the learners' performance (guidance, examples, references, rating aids)
4. Reporting the results (standard benchmark achievement reporting forms) SAM comes in two volumes: SAM CLB 1-2, and SAM CLB 3-4.

Project description

SAM is based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 framework, standards and related curricula, and offers clarity of assessment of speaking, listening, reading and writing as separate skills. SAM is intended for measuring **student achievement** in the classroom- **after** students have been exposed to thematically and functionally related learning materials and language **instruction**. SAM is performance-based and standard-based: it compares student performance with a set of predefined criteria, and **not** with how other students in the class perform.

SAM offers a large pool of 156 "exit" assessment tasks in four parallel sets available to the teacher for CLB levels 1-4. The tasks incorporate relevant contemporary everyday topics to suit the communication assessment needs of Stage I proficiency learners in four universal themes: Food & Nutrition; Home & Community; Health & Safety; and Work.

SAM is learner and context-sensitive; it is flexible and adaptable to the needs of almost any adult ESL program in Canada. It offers multiple combinations of tasks to best match CLB-based specific classroom instruction and expected student learning. Assessment tasks at each CLB level include **formal tasks** (task security and stringent protocol considerations apply) and **informal tasks** ((**in-class observation tasks** with prior student preparation and **portfolio tasks** that students complete on their own time). The teacher chooses a formal or informal assessment strategy, depending on certain characteristics of the program and / or the learners, as described in SAM (Part I: Planning the Summative Assessment). The inclusion of the informal assessment tasks in SAM makes it a flexible and adaptable assessment system that can be used by both very formal and structured mainstream ESL programs as well as by the less structured, more community-oriented programs. Both the formal and informal assessment tasks (class observation or portfolio tasks) have user-friendly rating scales, marking schemes, and student performance samples to assist the teacher in the marking and scoring.

Project development process

The development of SAM followed several stages, such as developing the prototype, writing the tasks, the pre-pilot and pilot, marking, tabulating and analyzing of the data, and development of the final version. The first pilot tested the prototype as well as the specifics of the tasks. The findings were applied to the development of the remaining parts of the manual. The SAM tasks were written by following rigorous CLB 2000 specifications and CLB curriculum objectives in the SAM theme areas, then vetted and edited by the writing team, and trialed in ESL classes, before being sent to the piloting sites.

The pre-pilot was conducted in three ESL programs in Edmonton, followed by a larger pilot conducted in Edmonton, Windsor (Ontario), and Winnipeg. The following ESL programs participated: NorQuest College (Edmonton), Edmonton Catholic School District, Sacred Heart School, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Mason Centre for Adult Education, Windsor, Ontario Herman Centre for Adult Education, Windsor, Ontario Applied Linguistics Centre, Winnipeg.

The pilots were conducted in some cases by the teachers of the participating programs, and in other cases by trained external pilots. In addition, a validation study was conducted at the language assessment centre in Calgary (ILVARC), with a few additional samples from the language assessment centre in Edmonton (LARCC). 40 teachers and assessors, and over 350 ESL learners participated in the SAM pilots. Close to 3,000 student samples of SAM tasks were collected and analysed for the SAM pilot and validation studies. The pilots produced sufficient empirical data to confirm the validity and appropriacy of the overall design of SAM, and to improve the final version of all the piloted material and all the assessment tasks in the SAM manual.

The participating teachers, assessors, and the students provided general and / or specific feedback to the SAM material, including the cultural appropriateness feedback. The input

was sought through a questionnaire, and through direct elicitation of oral and written comments about the material and the process.

The major focus of the validation of the SAM pilot data was incorporated in the following question: “Are SAM tasks congruent with the appropriate Benchmarks competency ranges, and appropriate for the intended class levels in content, difficulty and congruence with the curriculum?” The question was examined through a variety of angles:

- a construct validity analysis, examining the closeness of SAM design with the CLB 2000 framework, standards and the related curricula
- the opinions of the teachers and the students in the pilot (face validity)
- a statistical inquiry / analysis of the pilot results in the task samples
- criterion-relatedness analysis, i.e. by comparing student results on the SAM tasks with their current CLBPT or CLBA benchmark results in the same skill.

The practicality of SAM

Since SAM is a performance-based direct assessment, it naturally takes more time to complete than an indirect 100 - item multiple choice test would. When speaking competencies are assessed, every student has to be given an opportunity to speak for a period of time. Consequently, some teachers in the pilots were concerned with the amount of time needed to complete the SAM achievement assessments. They feared that it would be an additional burden on their time unless SAM was an integral, routine part of the program curriculum. Some teachers suggested reducing the number of items in the tasks, and the number of tasks themselves. Some reductions had been planned for by the developer and occurred due to a number of items not producing the required statistical properties in the pilot, but the field-testing did not point to the desirability of any substantial cuts and structural changes to the original SAM tasks design. In the experience of the external pilots the full formal SAM assessment for a class of 15-20 students, including one-one-one interviews and the marking of the writing tasks can be accomplished in 2 to 3 school days, or can be spread to fit a more relaxed assessment schedule. A choice of mixed assessment (formal and informal tasks) or of informal assessment only would considerably reduce the time requirements by fifty percent or more. Such an assessment would be conducted every three to six months. In return for the invested assessment time, every SAM user (instructors and students alike) will gain important information about specific outcomes in language performance in view of the CLB standards. The project developers and field testers conclude that the SAM system will be reasonably practical, when the assessment is:

- planned ahead of time, as suggested in the manual
- a regular part of the program and curriculum
- accessible to every teacher
- familiar to every teacher

Format

The SAM manual features locator tabs and colour-coded material for speedy navigation. The formal task assessment records are white; student handouts to prepare for classroom observation tasks are pale yellow; student portfolio tasks are pale blue; teacher's answer and rating keys are pink. All the tasks are photocopiable. The SAM CLB 4 listening tasks (formal and informal) are recorded on a CD, which comes with the SAM CLB 3-4 volume. Included in each volume are also standard benchmark achievement report forms: 2 basic forms, and several additional optional forms that the program or the teacher may choose from if useful for their purposes.

Important exclusions

SAM is not to be used for assessing literacy students, for placement purposes or general proficiency testing, or for assessing student progress without prior instruction in the theme(s) / topic(s) of the chosen SAM assessment tasks.

Conclusion

In designing and developing SAM, every care was taken to make the SAM system teacher-friendly and student-friendly. When published, SAM is expected to be a helpful addition to the toolbox for instructors in adult ESL programs. It is hoped to have a positive washback effect - in promoting and encouraging the communicative teaching in the classroom of the competencies in the CLB 2000 standards in many ESL programs, and in bridging any gaps in CLB outcomes among programs and among their students. It may also likely increase the student awareness of the CLB standards and goals, and may motivate a more focused study and practice of specific competencies and abilities described as standards in the Canadian Language Benchmarks.

A sample of general teacher comments:

- *The decision trees are really excellent and really help. The planning form is really excellent too.*
- *I like the decision tree - very flexible range of choices - seems to cover our range.*
- *They (the tasks) all look very interesting...I would feel comfortable using SAM as an assessment tool.*
- *I like how SAM assesses all the 4 skill areas.*
- *I like checking detailed performance criteria in the tasks.*
- *I like the color coding.*
- *I like the idea of class observation tasks.*
- *The informal tasks worked really well - I like the idea.*
- *We have to make sure that it (SAM assessments) is not even more work for the teachers.*
- *The scoring system is explained well. I really like the scored samples of student work.*
- *I really like the performance samples that have been included - very helpful when it comes to marking the test.*
- *Very clear.*

Additional comments about reporting forms:

- *I think information about placement adjustment by the teacher in the form is good to have.*
- *Keeping track of students' placement and achievement records in the forms is very useful - it's important information for the teacher.*