

## Issues and Challenges in Testing and Evaluating Student Writing in English as a Second Language (ESL)

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Testing and evaluation is a key component of the teaching-learning process in the area of English Language Teaching/Learning (ELT/L) and assessment literacy is regarded as one of the most important skills an educator should possess. The current research attempts to identify issues and challenges faced by teachers in evaluating student writing. For the purpose of this research, 20 instructors from the ELTU, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya were selected to mark a standardized in-class writing test given to First year undergraduates of Faculty of Arts. The instructors were requested to select and define constructs/criteria based on which student performance should be assessed while randomly selected 40 students were given questionnaires to assess student understanding of the test purpose and criteria of evaluation. Data pertinent to the research were collected through group discussion (instructors) and questionnaires administered to instructors (20) and students (40). It was found that there was a noticeable gap between student and teacher evaluation of "good" writing and that there was a vast difference of definition of the constructs as well as overlap in definition between constructs introduced by instructors. The study highlights the importance of educating students on teacher expectations when administering writing tests and of practices such as pilot/conference marking to ensure the participation of teachers in designing assessment schemes so as to avoid measurement error and to interpret test results effectively to enable students to attain higher levels of academic achievement.

**Keywords:** ELT/L, ESL writing, testing and evaluation