



Security in Language Testing

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Captain X



- Nearly 50 years old
- Since he was a small boy he always wanted to be a pilot
- Has been flying for over 15 years
- Has a wife who collects Gucci handbags
- Has 2 children in the local private school
- Drives a BMW
- Is a member of the local tennis club where everyone calls him "the captain"

Captain X



- ICAO Level 2
- Never learnt English at school
- Never had any major problems in 15 years of flying

Solutions ?



- Learn English?
- 6-12 months to reach Level 4 ?
- Use his influence and money to solve the problem
- Work with his friends, pool their resources

Cheating ?

- In such high-stakes testing people will try to cheat.
- Cheating becomes morally acceptable?
- The difference between “cheating” & “resourcefulness” varies greatly between cultures.
- If your test is not secure then you are wasting your time and money.



Ways people might try and cheat?

- **People**

many of us can be corrupted in the right circumstances

- **Test Materials**

if you know the questions in advance life is a lot easier

- **Database**

if you can access the database then you can change the results

- **Impersonation**

your friend who has great English can take the test for you

- **Certificate**



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your friend who has great English

- **Certificate**

make your own certificate



Best practices in preventing cheating:

- Depends on the testing system employed
- Any system will only be as strong as its weakest link.





People:

Administrators / Interlocutors /
Raters / Technical Support /
Signatories on the certificate

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- Choose them all very, very carefully
- As few people as possible
- Everyone must be accountable
- Create a “culture” that this is VERY serious work
- Ideally interlocutors and raters should not know the candidates they are testing
- If the rating is done remotely (using a recording of the test) then consider using numbers to identify the candidate (rather than the name of the candidate)



Test Materials:

- If any test materials are compromised they MUST be withdrawn and never used again.
- Hard copies to be stored within a lockable cupboard within a lockable room
- All materials must be signed out and signed back in
- Make sure you have enough test versions
- Choose your test venue carefully – can the examination be overheard?
- No bags / coats, etc. should be allowed into the interview room – digital recorders are very small nowadays.



Database:

- IT developers
- Passwords
- Backups
- Have paper copies of test data / results as well as computer data
- Employ a computer audit trail so that it is possible to see who did what and when

Impersonation:

How do you know that the person whose name appears on the certificate is really the person who took the test?

- ID checks – passport / identity cards to be shown at the time of the exam
- Training given to administrators / examiners in how to match a face to a photo
- Training to spot fraudulent identity documents
- Group-based tasks: passport / identity cards must be placed on each candidate's desk
- Photograph the candidate (with date / time stamp)



Certificate:

- The issuing of certificates to be strictly controlled and ideally centralised
- Use a certificate numbering system (preferably which includes some random numbers)
- Use original signatures (rather than pre-printed signatures)
- Consider the use of watermarked paper
- Dry seals can be more difficult to forge than ink seals / stamps
- Tinted paper is more difficult to reproduce



The image shows a sample certificate from TEA (Test of English for Aviation). The certificate is titled "This is to Certify that" and contains the following information:

- FAMILY NAME:** Angkharajayon
- FORENAMES:** Sengke
- PASSPORT NUMBER:** 40521594
- NATIONALITY:** Russian
- DATE OF BIRTH:** 09 May 1980
- SEX:** Male

The certificate states that the candidate *has achieved the following*:

OVERALL TEST RESULT		
4		

The certificate also lists the following scores:

PRONUNCIATION	STRUCTURE	VOCABULARY
4	4	4

FLUENCY	COMPREHENSION	INTERACTIONS
4	4	4

The certificate number is 4000481120, and the date of issue is 03 Mar 2011. The certificate is signed by the Director of TEA. The background of the certificate features a globe and the TEA logo.

Conclusion:

- No system is ever 100% secure
- “Affordable security” - there is always a trade-off between cost and benefit
- Many will resent the new standards
- Livelihoods, careers and egos are at stake
- Some people will try to cheat
- Pilots / controllers are relatively well paid, educated and with status and influence
- Stopping them from cheating will not be simple
- If a level 2 pilot or controller receives a level 4 certificate then we all have a serious problem