



## **More than just an opinion: choosing an appropriate test approach for all in easy and plain language**

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**Introduction:** An essential step in producing accessible written communication is to check whether all of your intended readers truly understand your message. This is why testing is an essential part of the Dutch method 'Language for all'. Using this method you design comprehensive and accessible information for all readers, regardless of their literacy skills. The 'Language for all' testing approach is suitable for any (online) texts with and without visuals. It is a complete test including a set of fixed elements and tailor-made assignments measuring comprehension and acceptance. Testing in 'Language for all' results in concrete suggestions for improving the information, rather than global opinions which don't tell us if the information is truly understood.

The testing approach is built on what is known in research (Boll, 2021; Eason et al., 2012; Dalemans et al., 2021; Kleijn et al., 2019; Kooijmans et al., 2022). It aims to enable participants, including those with low literacy skills, to truly and independently participate and to feel free to give their opinion.

In our presentation, we explain the choices made in selecting and using the different elements of the test approach in order to obtain optimal results. In particular we present our study regarding the cloze-assignment for assessing reading comprehension (Kleijn et al., 2019). Cloze is one of the tailor-made elements in the whole test. In a cloze-assignment participants complete a text in which several words are replaced by blank fields. They are asked to add one word in each blank field to complete the text with the correct meaning. In our study we assumed the cloze-assignment to be suitable to test for correct text understanding, if participants with low levels of literacy skills make more mistakes if the text in the assignment is more difficult. The cloze-assignment then differentiates to text-difficulty corresponding with level of literacy skills. Also this assignment needed to be understood correctly by participants with the fewest literacy skills.

**Method:** Three cloze-assignments were constructed with different levels of text difficulty: one in easy language, one in 'Language for all' (in between easy and plain language) and one in plain language. These three were presented to 78 participants with low (n=27), moderate (n=27) and high (n=24) literacy skills. Answers were scored as correct or incorrect. Additional individual cognitive interviews were conducted with 8 participants with low literacy skills.

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**Results:** As the texts of the cloze-assignments became more difficult, participants with higher literacy skills increasingly outperformed people with lower literacy skills. In the cognitive interviews 7 of 8 participants indicated they understood the cloze-assignment.

**Conclusion:** The cloze-assignment appears to be suitable regardless of the level of reading ability. Almost all participants understood the assignment. Our findings underline the usefulness of the cloze-assignment as an integral element of the 'Language for all' test approach. Furthermore we have integrated lessons learned from other research concerning for example the test-setting, the order of presenting test elements and minimizing the risk on bias. Using research-findings as a base for our test approach indicate that our testing approach is suitable for testing texts with participants with all kinds of reading abilities. In doing so, we ensure full participation of all participants.