



## **One Test Fits All: a Challenge in Computer-based English Language Assessment in Higher Education**

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Computer-based language assessments are very helpful to test a large number of students and to guarantee a uniform level of language competences in student population in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

However, the widespread use of standardized tests require the test makers to design the assessment programs keeping in mind the need of students with disabilities and being respectful of students' diversity.

More than 700 students with disabilities are enrolled at the University of Padova, which since 1996 has instituted an inclusive policy and acts to improve equal opportunities. International mobility programs and language competences are considered top priorities for all students and in particular for students with disabilities.

In 2010 the Disability Support Office obtained financial support from MIUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research) for a project called "Le lingue accessibili" developed in partnership with the Language Centre of the University of Padova and the Computer Lab Aula Didattica Taliercio of the Faculty of Engineering.

The project aimed at enabling students with disabilities to take part to a computerized test, being self-sufficient in making choices while taking the same exam taken by all other students, limiting specific adjustments to very special cases. In other words, our goal was to create an accessible and usable test following the principles of universal design.

A prototype test to assess English as a foreign language has been created with the collaboration of a multidisciplinary group. The project was developed in several phases, by focusing mainly on visual and hearing impairments and proceeding through a tight user-test and reassessment loop.

After choosing the most suitable Learning Management System (LMS), the prototype has been tested and evaluated using different assistive technologies and in diverse operating environments. Furthermore, the team developed guidelines for item writers with the aim to obtain a more consistent and efficient workflow and to set the foundations for future developments.

The development and enforcement of the guidelines led to the identification of good practices in computer-based language testing to improve usability and accessibility, thus meeting the needs of a large variety of end users.