duolingo english test

From 2020 to 2026

A look at the evolution of the DET



As test centers around the world closed during the pandemic, universities embraced the Duolingo English Test (DET) to keep the doors open for international students. Institutions who turned to the DET during the pandemic may be unaware of the many improvements we've implemented in the years that followed. In the spirit of using the latest technologies in assessment, Duolingo annually updates the DET, introducing new features to better serve test takers and score users. When making these updates, we continually monitor the agreement rate between older and newer versions of the test to ensure score reliability. This document serves as a guide for institutions looking to understand the DET's evolution since 2020.

About the Duolingo English Test

The Duolingo English Test (DET) is a computer-adaptive, high-stakes assessment of English language proficiency for use in English-medium settings, including university study. For maximum accessibility, the DET is delivered online, is available 24/7, and does not require testing centers or appointments. The test uses item types that accurately assess English language proficiency while maintaining feasibility to develop, administer, and score at scale. As of 2026, the DET is accepted as proof of English proficiency by over 6,500 education programs around the world.



Read the Duolingo English Test Technical Manual

go.duolingo.com/DETTechnicalManual

© 2026 Duolingo, Inc. All rights Reserved

The Evolution of the DET from 2020 to 2026

Since 2020, the DET has launched several novel item types that extend the measurement of the Academic English construct through authentic, integrated tasks. In addition, we have continuously refined our scoring algorithms and security features, updated test score concordance with major high-stakes language assessments and introduced new subscores (Speaking, Writing, Reading, and Listening). We've also made advances to our security processes and infrastructure as well as extended our services for test takers. Collectively, the developments to the DET have improved construct coverage in all skill areas, increased score reliability, as well as correlations with scores on other English proficiency tests, all while maintaining the flexible and efficient testing experience that is a cornerstone of the DET's access mission.

A summary of developments includes:

Test design, delivery & scoring

- Introduced new item types (see below).
- Revised overall concordance in Summer 2022 (Cardwell et al., 2024).
- Introduced new Speaking, Writing, Reading, and Listening subscores in July 2024.
- Released subscore concordance with IELTS Academic in 2024 and with TOEFL iBT in 2025.
- Refined the scoring models for speaking and writing.
- Refreshed and increased our item bank using generative AI (LaFlair et al., 2023).
- Developed a theoretical ecosystem for digital-first assessments that includes test-taker experience as a validity argument (Burstein et al., 2022).
- Audited test fairness processes and launched a bespoke quality monitoring platform (Belzak et al., 2023; Liao et al., 2022).
- Removed minimum speaking and writing times in July 2025.

Security & proctoring

- Enhanced foundational security (malicious software/hardware detection, improved plagiarism detection) (Belzak et al., 2025).
- Extended imposter/helper detection tools, built novel tools to detect coordinated cheating efforts.
- Implemented state-of-the-art ID verification system.
- Implemented a secondary camera, a room scan, and an ear scan for increased protection against rules violations.

Improving the test taker experience and promoting test access

- Expanded DET's Access Program, distributing over 125,000 free tests since 2018.
- Launched the We Rise Together awards recognizing individuals in the higher ed sector who contribute to initiatives that lower barriers to education.
- Released new test readiness resources, including an updated mobile practice test and a practice hub.
- Expanded university partnerships in Australia, Canada, Europe and the UK.

© 2026 Duolingo, Inc. All rights Reserved

Item development

SKILL	DET TEST ITEMS
READING	**DET 2020** **C-test** • Complete a text by completing the "damaged" words in a paragraph • A measure of test-takers' reading and spelling ability; highly correlated with overall proficiency measures **Yes/no vocabulary test (text-based)** • Read words and pseudo-words and select real English words among them • A measure of vocabulary knowledge that predicts listening, reading, and writing ability • Changed to single-screen format in 2024 for more efficient computer-adaptive calibration. **DET additions since 2020** **Interactive reading (introduced in 2022)** • Engage with a text by sequentially performing a series of tasks tapping different subconstructs of reading: reading to find information, reading for comprehension, and reading to learn. • A direct measure of reading ability. **Vocabulary in context (introduced in 2024)** • Fill in the blank in a sentence by reconstructing a "damaged" word. • A measure of productive vocabulary knowledge and the ability to use contextual cues.

SKILL	DET TEST ITEMS
WRITING	**DET 2020** **Extended writing** • Respond to **four** writing prompts that require extended responses: three picture description tasks and one independent task with a written prompt. • Direct measure of writing ability. **DET additions since 2020** **Extended writing (new scored tasks added in 2023)** • Respond to **five** writing prompts that require extended responses: three picture description tasks and two independent tasks based on a written prompt. • Changed task instructions leading to longer responses. **Interactive listening summarization (introduced in 2023)** • Write a summary of the conversation you had in the Interactive Listening task. • A direct measure of higher-level mediation skills. **Interactive writing (introduced in 2024)** • Respond to a writing task in two stages with a follow-up prompt based on the themes discussed in the initial response. • A measure of higher level writing abilities like elaboration and incorporation of feedback.

(continued on next)

© 2026 Duolingo, Inc. All rights Reserved

Item development (continued)

SKILL	DET TEST ITEMS

LISTENING

DET 2020

Dictation

- Listen to a spoken sentence or short passage and then transcribe it.
- A measure of listening and speaking (pronunciation) ability.

Yes/no vocabulary test (audio-based)

- Listen to words and pseudo-words and select real English words among them.
- A measure of vocabulary knowledge that predicts listening and speaking ability.
- Removed in 2024.

DET additions since 2020

Interactive listening (introduced in 2023)

- Participate in a situationally driven conversation in a university setting; each interlocutor's turn is presented in an audio format.
- A direct measure of listening and conversation ability.
- Replaced the audio-based Yes/no vocabulary test.
- Added comprehension questions before each conversation in 2025.

SPEAKING

DET 2020

Elicited imitation (read-aloud)

- Record yourself speaking a written sentence.
- A measure of speaking ability.
- Removed in 2025 due to the introduction of Interactive Speaking.

Extended speaking

- Respond to four speaking prompts: one picture description task and three independent speaking tasks, two with a written prompt and one with an aural prompt (note that Listen then Speak was removed in 2025 due to the introduction of Interactive Speaking).
- Direct measure of speaking ability.

DET additions since 2020

Extended speaking (new scored tasks added in 2023)

- Respond to five speaking prompts: one picture description task and four independent speaking tasks, with written and aural prompts.
- Changed task instructions leading to longer responses.

DET 2025 additions

Interactive speaking (introduced in 2025)

- Respond to a series of 6-8 questions (one at a time) in a simulated conversation with an animated character. The questions are selected based on previous responses.
- A measure of higher level speaking and interactional abilities like discourse management, fluency, and pragmatic appropriateness.

© 2026 Duolingo, Inc. All rights Reserved