

The Role of Listening Comprehension in the Versant™ English Test

Overview

The Versant English Test (VET) is an assessment instrument designed to measure how well a person can understand spoken English on everyday topics and respond appropriately at a native-like conversational pace in English. The VET has six item types: Reading, Repeats, Short Answer Questions, Sentence Builds, Story Retelling, and Open Questions. These integrated “listen-then-speak” item types require real-time receptive and productive processing of spoken language forms. The VET score report is comprised of an Overall score and four diagnostic subscores: Sentence Mastery, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Pronunciation.

Although a Listening Comprehension subscore is not produced, listening ability is indirectly assessed in the VET. In order to respond appropriately to any of the test questions, candidates first must be able to understand the prompt that they heard. For example, a candidate cannot answer a Short Answer Question correctly if he or she did not understand the question prompt or a candidate cannot include relevant and important details in retelling the story they heard. Due to the nature of the integrated item types, it can be concluded that listening comprehension is a necessary skill to successfully perform tasks on the VET.

The following section describes two past studies that compare VET scores to measures of listening ability to understand the relationship between candidate’s VET scores and their listening scores.

Study 1

In this study, three research-focused item types – Response Selection, Conversations, and Passage Comprehension – were developed and added to the VET. A total of 124 candidates completed the research version of the VET. For every candidate, two Overall scores were produced: one regular VET Overall score and one Overall score with listening items included. Figure 1 shows the relationship of these pairs of scores.

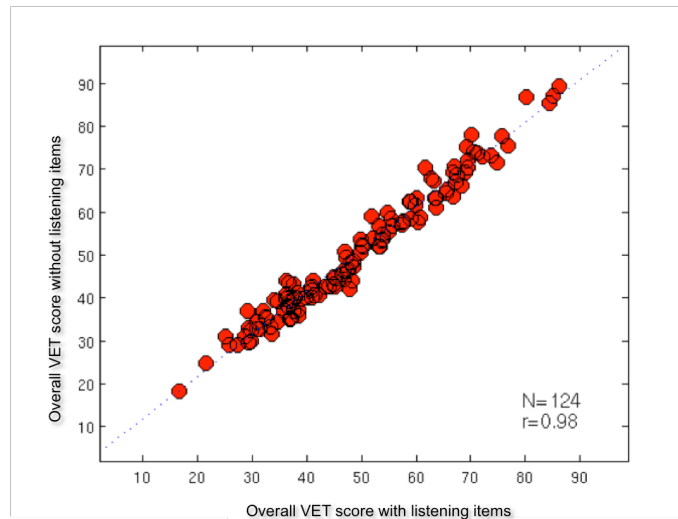


Figure 1. Scatterplot showing the relation between Overall VET scores with and without listening items.

As can be seen, there is a strong relation between the two sets of scores ($r = .98$), indicating that the VET Overall scores do not differ much even with listening-focused items.

Study 2

Over the years Pearson and third parties have collected data on parallel administrations of the VET and other well-established language tests such as TOEIC^{®1} and TOEFL^{®2} as part of VET’s validity studies. Both TOEIC and TOEFL produce a separate listening score. Table 1 presents correlations of scores between the VET Overall scores and the listening scores of the respective tests.

Table 3. Correlations of the VET with tests with listening constructs.

Test	r	n
TOEIC Listening study 1	.71	171
TOEIC Listening study 2	.79	321
New TOEFL Listening	.78	321

The table shows that VET Overall scores correlate highly with the listening scores of the other well-established tests.

Summary

The two studies demonstrate that the VET Overall score and listening measures are highly correlated. Because item types on the VET require both listening and speaking skills in successfully performing the tasks, VET score users can reasonably infer the candidate’s listening skill level from the VET Overall score.

¹ TOEIC is an abbreviation for Test of English for International Communication by Educational Testing Services[®]

² TOEFL is an abbreviation for Test of English as a Foreign Language by Educational Testing Services[®]