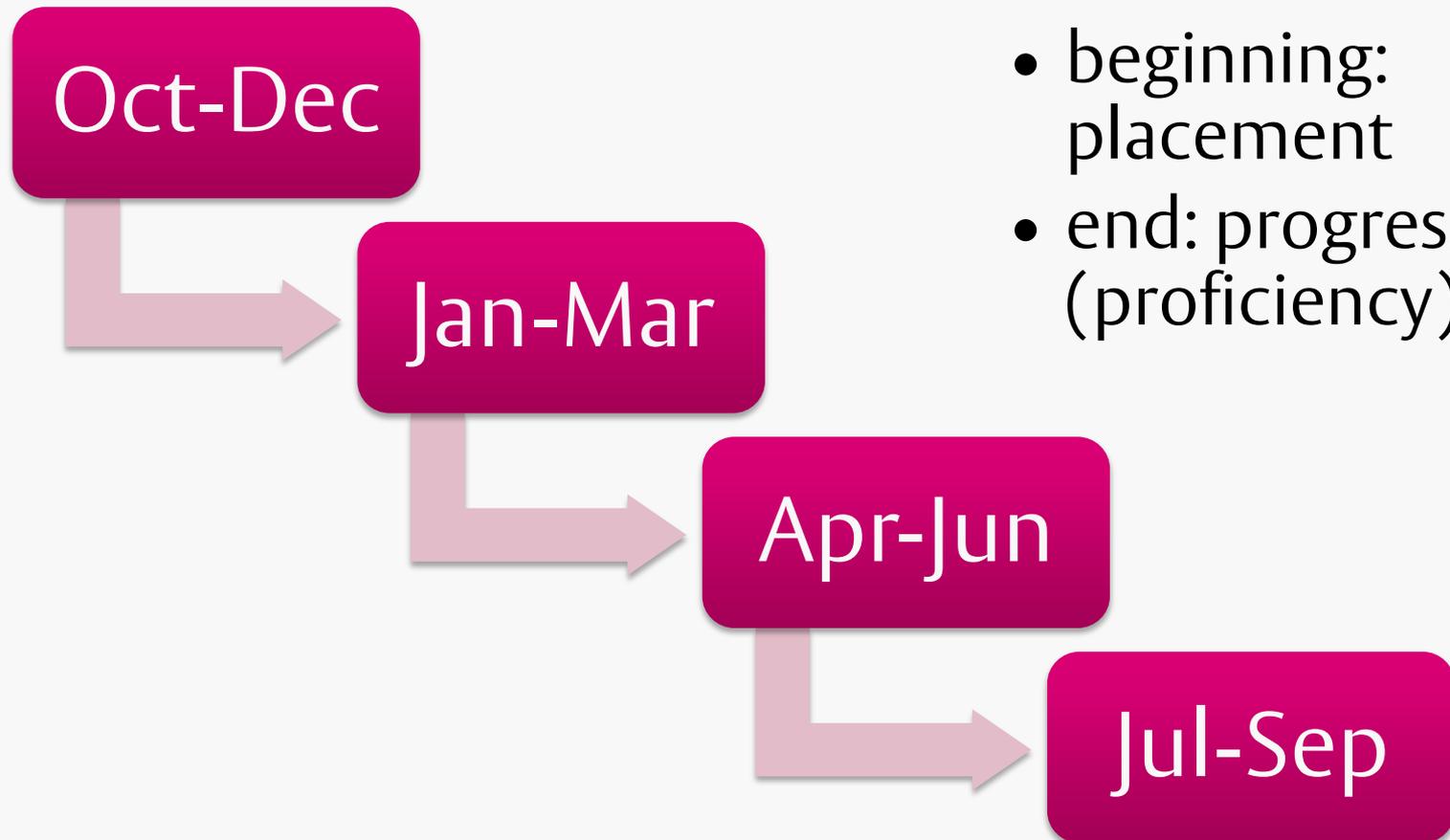


# How should, and how can, 'low level EAP' be assessed?

Bruce Howell, University of Reading

# Why assess? (e.g. Reading)

- EACH COURSE:
- beginning: placement
- end: progress (proficiency)



## ‘Placement’ – getting on the right track

1. "is this candidate at least the minimum level to join the pre-sessional EAP programme?"
2. "which (e.g. writing) group within the EAP pre-sessional programme should this student be in?"
3. “what specific area needs to be addressed within the EAP in-sessional programme?” (Read 2008)

# 'Placement' – getting on the right track

## 1. programme screening

- yes/no

## 2. class placement

- multi-level

## 3. diagnostic

- descriptions not numbers?

# “It must be practical” (1)

- time restraints
- e.g. British Council (O’Sullivan 2010)

public, we decided after some serious debate to consider submitting a proposal to the British Council. The debate occurred because we had some real worries over the requirements outlined in the tender document, which can be summarised as:

- A written level test(s) which is appropriate for the network of teaching centres and which places students with a suitable degree of accuracy
- The test should be appropriate for all levels from pre A1 to C2
- The test(s) should be a positive experience for the customer and offer an appropriate level of challenge
- The test should take a maximum of 40 minutes

## “It must be practical” (2)

- 10 minutes Dictation (gap-fill sentences)
  - 10 minutes Kanji ( $\approx$  spelling)
  - 30 minutes Writing
  - 5 minutes Speaking (interview)
  - 3 minutes self-assessment questionnaire
- (Toyoda & Hashimoto 2001)

**\*\* The more data the better \*\***

**BUT a minimum of data may be enough for your situation**

# But what about EAP?

- TEEP: listening and reading into writing; task-based speaking; academic perspective on topics
- process approach can be replicated in (placement) tests (Lee 2005; Plakans 2009)
- ...but is this necessary for **low levels**?
- *experience of TEEP*: below ~4.5 can “blow it completely”
- so perhaps the approach should be:
  - general language competence
  - university **context**

# How **should** 'low level' EAP be assessed?

- Reading Writing Listening Speaking
  - yes but ... perhaps not possible
- what about just a simple grammar test?
  - NO!
  - “use of a single test format is inadequate” (Green and Weir 2004)
- why not just use international tests or school results?
  - not always available
  - expensive
  - bland, generalised
  - not always trustworthy, despite claims (Ypsilandis & Nantaridou 2007)

# Popular suggestions

- grammar test
- vocabulary test
- independent writing test
- independent reading test
- interview

# More suggestions...

- linked reading → speaking task
  - ‘two-in-one’
  - going beyond formulaic language
- dictation
  - “high correlation with grammatical knowledge AND oral/aural proficiency” (Ford-Niwa 1998, cited in Toyoda & Hashimoto 2001)
- a staged/modular procedure:
  - not all sections are needed (Fulcher 1997)
  - a pre-test screening section?
- self-assessment

# DELNA (Read 2008)

*J. Read / Journal of English for Academic Purposes 7 (2008) 180–190*

Table 1

## The structure of DELNA

---

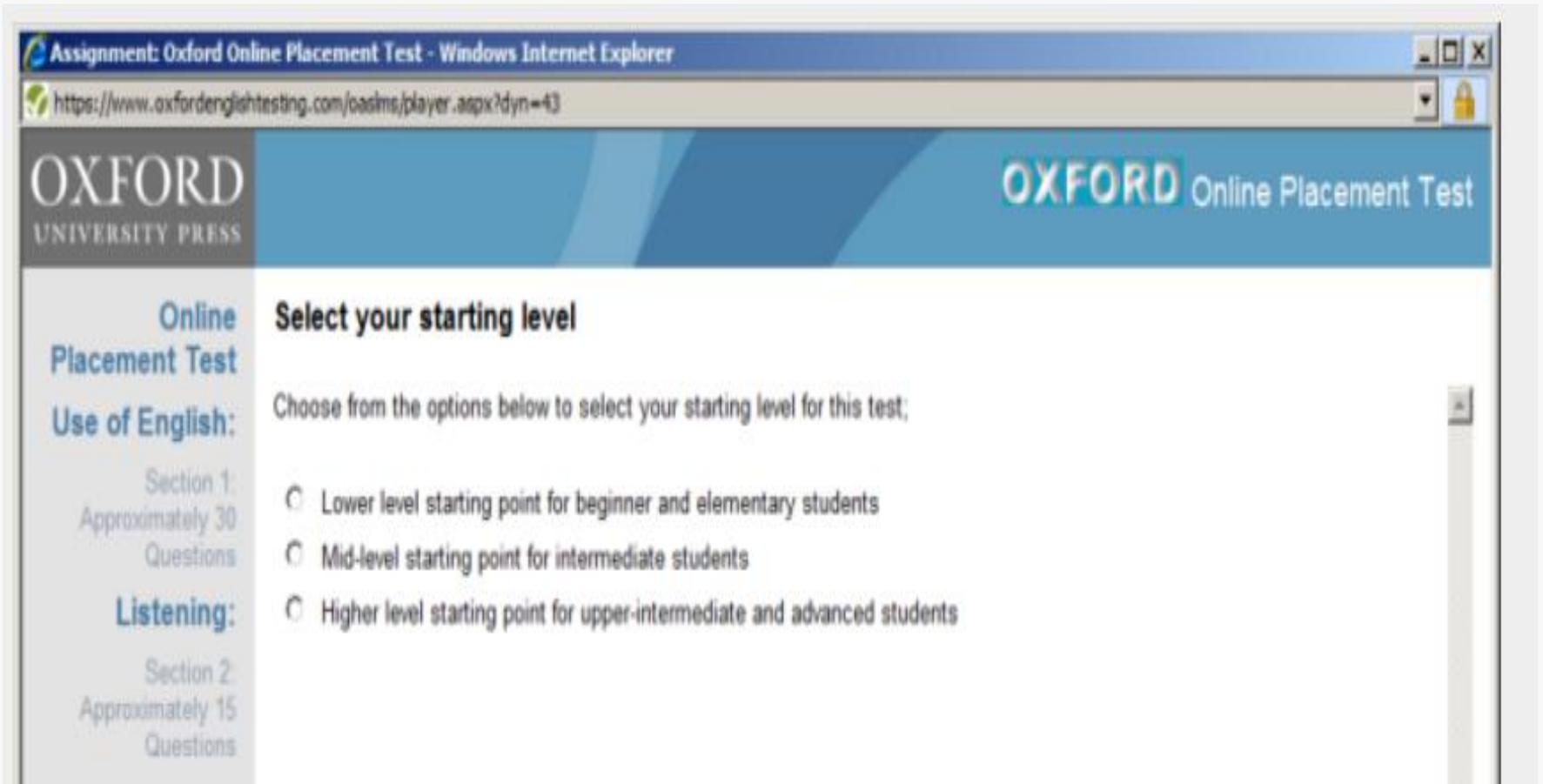
### Screening (30 min)

- Vocabulary
- Speed Reading

### Diagnosis (2 hours)

- Listening to a mini-lecture
  - Reading academic-type texts
  - Writing an interpretation of a graph
-

# Online OPT



The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Assignment: Oxford Online Placement Test - Windows Internet Explorer". The address bar displays the URL: <https://www.oxfordenglishtesting.com/oasms/player.aspx?dyn=43>. The page header features the "OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS" logo on the left and "OXFORD Online Placement Test" on the right. The main content area is titled "Select your starting level" and includes the instruction: "Choose from the options below to select your starting level for this test;". Three radio button options are listed:

- Lower level starting point for beginner and elementary students
- Mid-level starting point for intermediate students
- Higher level starting point for upper-intermediate and advanced students

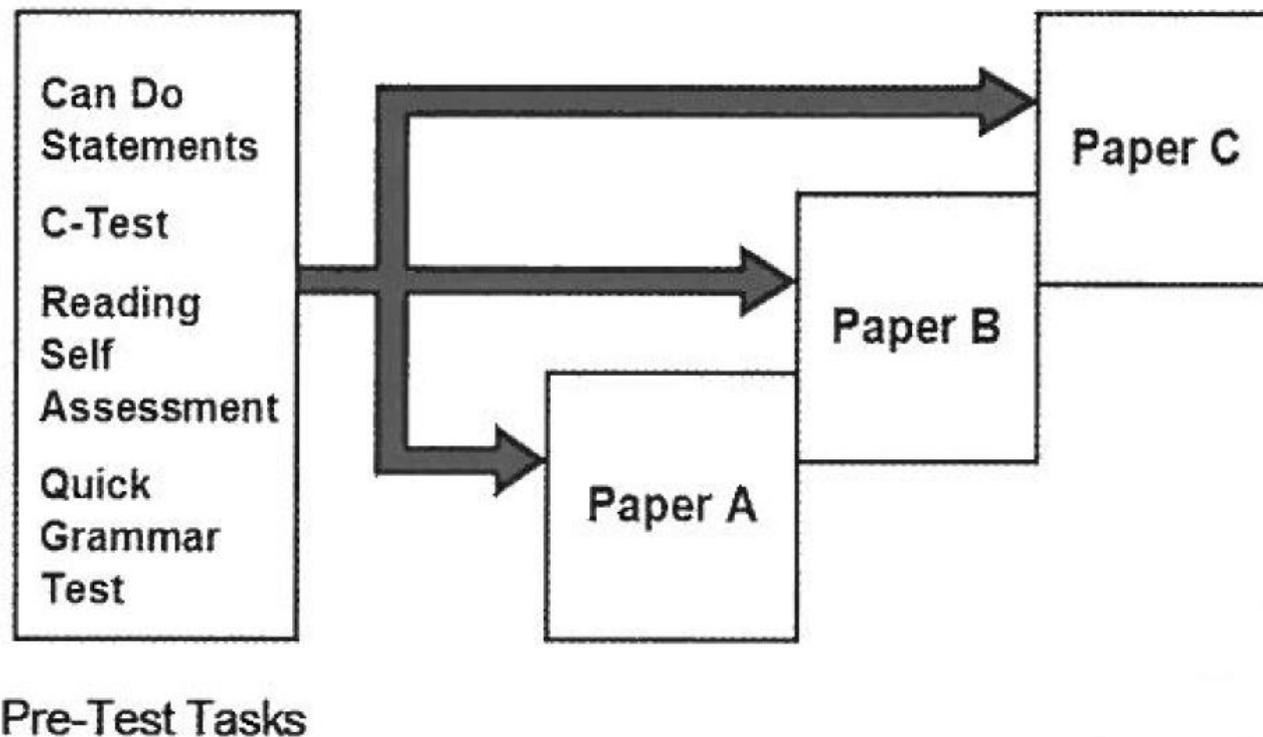
A sidebar on the left contains the following text:

**Online Placement Test**  
**Use of English:**  
Section 1:  
Approximately 30 Questions

**Listening:**  
Section 2:  
Approximately 15 Questions

# British Council (O'Sullivan 2010)

**Figure 2** The filter test system



# Self-assessment

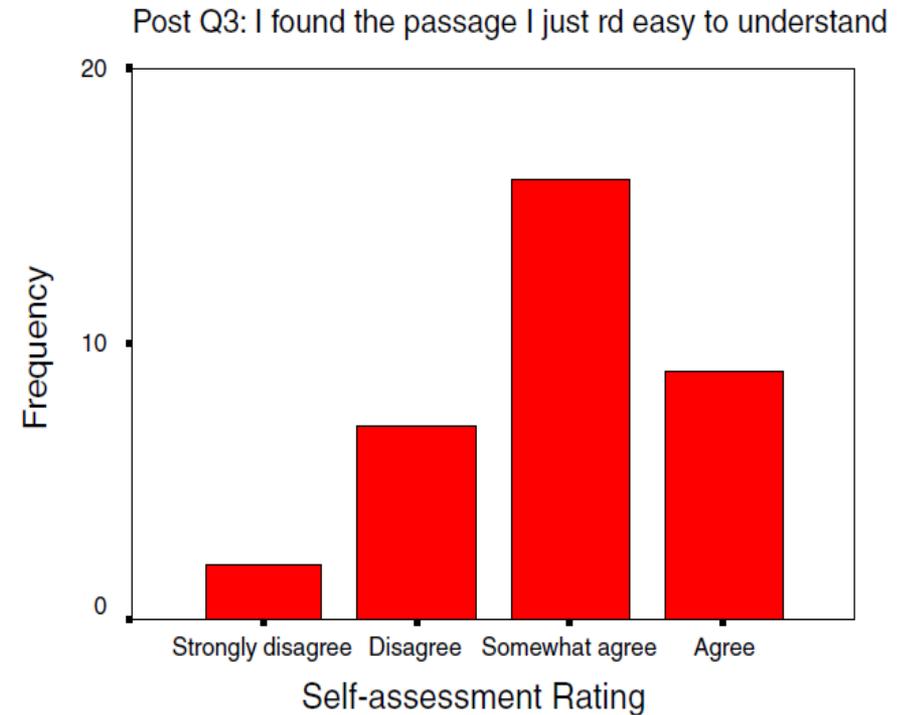
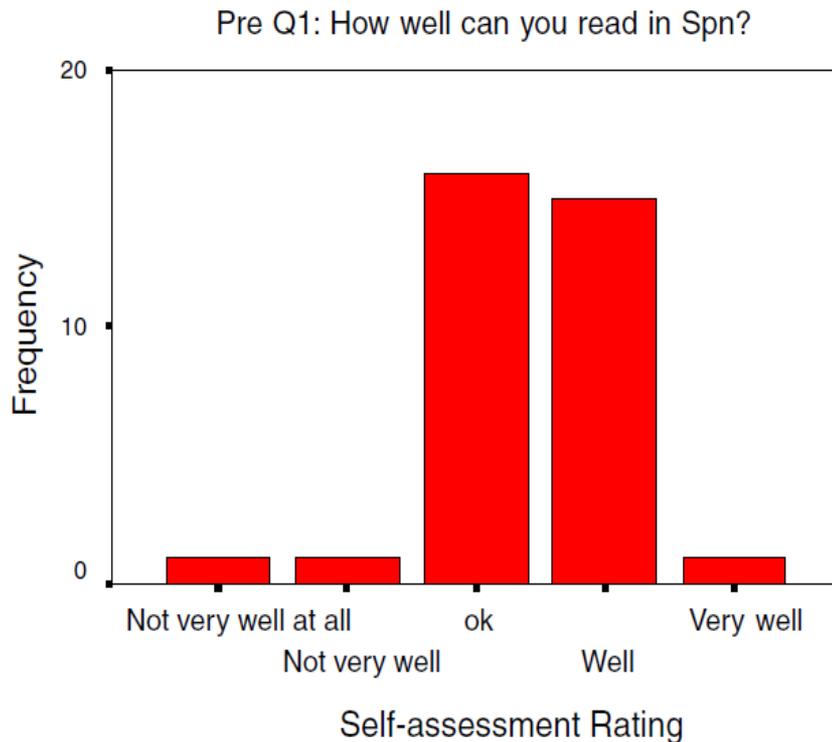
- does it work?
- research gives differing results (Dandenault 1997)

for:	against:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• practicality – saves time/money</li><li>• involves the learner in the decision-making process</li><li>• increases self-awareness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• advantages have a place in classrooms, not tests</li><li>• unconvincing for teachers</li><li>• inviting exaggeration ('cheating'?)</li><li>• influence of personality factors</li><li>• tendency to err towards the 'average' – not to rank high or low</li></ul>

# ...need to ask meaningful questions

26

*C. Brantmeier / System 34 (2006) 15–35*



# ...don't be too simplistic!

(Gere et al 2010)

## Revised DSP Survey for Non-Native English Speakers (2006 – 2008)

- |   |                                |                                   |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. I read frequently in English.  | <input type="checkbox"/> agree | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree |
| 2. I am comfortable communicating my ideas in English   | <input type="checkbox"/> agree | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree |
| 3. I wrote more than two essays in English each year in high school.  | <input type="checkbox"/> agree | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree |
| 4. I am comfortable writing papers in English longer than four pages.   | <input type="checkbox"/> agree | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree |
| 5. In high school, some of my essays required library research and the citation of sources.   | <input type="checkbox"/> agree | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree |
| 6. I am comfortable revising my papers in English without the help of a native English speaker.                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> agree | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree |
| 7. I am comfortable using standard written English, including the correct forms of grammar, punctuation, and sentence construction. | <input type="checkbox"/> agree | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree |

### PLACEMENT RECOMMENDATION LANGUAGE:

Because you responded “agree” to all or nearly all of these statements, a course that meets the First-Year Writing Requirement makes sense for you. Approved First-Year Writing Courses offered at the University include Classical Civilization 101, Comparative Literature 122, English 124, English 125, History 195, Lloyd Hall Scholars 125, and Slavic 151.

Because you responded “agree” to both statements 6 and 7 but “disagree” to two or more of the remaining statements, we highly recommend that you enroll in Sweetland’s Writing Practicum (SWC 100). In this course you will have more opportunities to work one-on-one with your instructor to build your writing skills and confidence in your writing ability. Writing Practicum is offered credit/no credit, so it will not affect your GPA.

Because you responded “disagree” to either statement 6 or statement 7, we highly recommend that you enroll in the English Language Institute’s Academic Writing for International Undergraduates (ELI 120). This course helps strengthen writing skills by focusing on three major areas: (a) organization, style, and accuracy of academic writing; (b) editing one’s own writing and the writing of class peers, and (c) using, integrating, and documenting academic sources in one’s writing. If you select this course as pass/fail, it will not affect your GPA.

# How **can** 'lower level' EAP be assessed (practical solution)



- depends on your context!

# Computer-based?

- ... if you have the resources!

<b>for:</b>	<b>against:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• simple, from the administration point of view</li><li>• data collection automatic</li><li>• scoring can be instant</li><li>• certificates can be automatic</li><li>• attractive for some</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• restrictive of item type</li><li>• impersonal (unless complemented with interview etc.)</li><li>• off-putting for some</li></ul>

# How to check your test is working

- trial/pre-test it first – if possible
  - imperative (Fulcher 1997)
- get teachers' views on suitability
- ask students about their experience
- analyse score data – eliminate problem items
- review cut level(s) – are they living up to expectations?
- how does it compare to scores on IELTS etc?
  - (concurrent validity)

## ... but remember

- we cannot assume the test ‘is not working’ just because students do not increase their level in a linear way
- depends on:
  - motivation/completion of work/attendance
  - aptitude for languages
  - external factors
    - e.g. distractions outside class
  - etc.

# Most important

- assessments must have a **system**
  - essential to have stakeholders on board (Read 2008)
  - must be easily understood by all
  - follow-up plans (e.g. split profile)
  - who does the decision-making?
- **advise** potential students so that they can make the right decision
- programme screening test:
  - short test may be OK, but it's high-stakes ...
  - so it has to have proven **reliability** and good **security**

# Bibliography

- ...on request!



# What do YOU think?

