



# ADVENTURES in Foreign Language

The Newsletter of OWL Testing Software • Volume 4, Issue 1



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## Welcome:

We are pleased to welcome our newest clients and pilot users:

- Poudre School District
- University of TN Knoxville
- College of Staten Island/CUNY
  - Language Services Direct
  - Language Line University
- National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters

Contact us for more information about what OWL can do for you and your students. Schedule a no obligation demonstration.

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# Cheating? Everyone ~~Does It~~ Used to Do It!

By Dr. Thekla Fall, World Language Consultant

Just look up the topic of “cheating on tests” on the internet and you might be surprised find thousands of links—everything from studies showing the widespread prevalence of cheating to tips for students on how to cheat! Most of the methods for cheating have been around for a long time and are well known—such as crib sheets, passing down tests from student to student and year to year, or simply looking on someone else’s paper. During my college years, there were always rumors that frat houses had huge file cabinets filled with tests. I wondered, even then, why professors would give the same test over and over again.

*What is even more disturbing, however, is that some teachers are now joining the ranks of cheaters!*

Nowadays, students are finding new and unintended uses for modern technology in their quest to pass courses the easy way. Whether it’s using cell phones to photograph/email test questions, texting one another for answers, and/or using iPods as modern day crib sheets when the teacher isn’t looking, it appears that students are finding many new and creative ways to cheat.

What is even more disturbing, however, is that some teachers are now joining the ranks of cheaters! At one time, tests were used primarily to assess student learning. Nowadays, with the emergence of high stakes testing and

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## Focus on Features:

# OWL upgrade offers enhancements for all users

OWL rolled out the latest version of our testing software, v 3.6.9.0, on December 28, 2010. We hope all types of clients – teachers and test creators, students, administrators and test raters -- will be pleased with all of the new features we have added in response to the input of our valued customers.

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teacher/school accountability, test results are also used to assess the effectiveness of the instruction. Some teachers (and even administrators) have succumbed to the pressure of producing higher test scores by giving students the questions ahead of time, giving students more time to respond, giving hints, and even changing incorrect answers on student papers. In my former position as district supervisor, I and about 50 or so other district administrators were each assigned to a school, for a week each year, to monitor the administration of the annual state tests. This is a huge commitment of dedicated staff time to make sure that the tests are administered properly in terms of time allotments, test distribution, in-class monitoring, and test collection; i.e., to make sure there is no cheating.

We all frown when we hear about students and staff cheating, but it shouldn't just be something we shrug off by saying "well, everyone does it." The bottom line is that it is dishonest, and there is much at stake! In addition to traditional uses of test data for grades, GPAs, student placement, class ranking, honors, scholarships, etc., tests are now used for feedback to the teacher on what needs to be re-taught and for accountability. This all works well – but only when tests are valid and reliable and when students take the tests in the prescribed manner. It is very important that hard working, honest students, teachers, or administrators aren't cheated when accolades and rewards are given out and that students don't leave school with a mindset that says everyone cheats or that cheating is ok.

*So what can be done?* Obviously, one of the best remedies to prevent cheating is to make sure that students learn the material in the first place. Learning objectives, instruction, and assessments must be aligned. If students are confident that they know what they are supposed to know, there is little incentive to cheat. Unfortunately, that may still leave some students who are inattentive in class, uninterested in the subject matter, unwilling/unable to do homework, or are simply looking for an easier way. For these students, the systemic use of computerized tests could make a dramatic difference in reducing the incidence of cheating.

Let's consider some of the major ways that are used to cheat and what preventative measures can be taken to discourage this practice.

#### **Students pass on tests from class to class and year to year**

This practice is only successful when the same test is given over and over again. Certainly, teachers and professors must realize this practice increases the risk of cheating – so why do they do it? Most likely, the answer is simply that the instructional materials purchased only include one test per unit or chapter. Since writing good test questions and tasks is time consuming and often complex, it can be difficult for the individual teacher to come up with several comparable, valid and reliable tests. That is why OWL Testing Software (OWLTS) enables teachers to collaborate across the country, to share good test items, and to create large item banks. OWLTS allows teachers to easily import and export test items complete with audio, visuals, and text as needed. In addition, OWLTS makes it easy for teachers to select and create multiple, yet comparable, versions of a particular test for different periods of the day, different days, and different years as needed.

Another reason that teachers may only have one test per chapter might be that checking and grading different versions of the same paper and pencil test could be confusing and more time consuming. Since OWLTS automatically scores all questions that have one definitive answer and provide a percentage for the total score, greatly simplifying test correction.

## **Spotlight:** **Poudre School District of Colorado using OWL Testing Software**

With nearly 5000 language students, Poudre School District is using OWL to overcome many of the hurdles associated with language practice and assessment. By customizing assignments at an individual student level, Poudre is using OWL as a valuable tool for delivering differentiated instruction and assessment on a daily basis. Instructors are tailoring activities to accommodate students at any level of proficiency in any language. Furthermore, OWL's web-based platform allows Poudre's students and instructors to access the program from any computer with a web browser. Rather than reserving time in a traditional foreign language lab, instructors can use more readily available computer labs for classroom activities.

*"We chose the OWL software because it is much more than a high-stakes, year-end testing program. It is a tool that can be used everyday in the classroom to help students and instructors improve the language learning experience," says Bethany Brown, Poudre World Language Facilitator. Ms. Brown coordinated the discovery, analysis and selection process for Poudre School District.*

For open ended questions, the teacher is able to specify one rubric for the different test versions. The total score is automatically computed.

Once the test bank and scoring rubrics have been created, there is a considerable savings of time for the teacher, time which could be used to improve instruction.



The OWL application addresses three major concerns of today's language instructors :

### **Formative Assessment**

What makes OWL's application unique is its use in the formative assessment process. With OWL, instructors can create activities to assess a student's ability to apply their learning. For example, an instructor can use OWL to take an oral sample of a student ordering from a menu or giving directions.

### **Response to Intervention**

OWL Testing Software also offers an organized way to gather writing assessments and monitor student achievement to manage efficiently Response to Intervention (RTI) mandates.

### **Summative Assessment**

Finally, like most testing programs, OWL Testing Software provides a summative assessment of a student's capabilities upon exiting a program.

*"We are excited to partner with Poudre School District's exceptional language learning program," says Chris Dalessandri, president and CEO of OWL Testing Software. "I think what Poudre found so appealing about OWL is its built-in flexibility. They did not want to be forced into a pre-packaged testing solution. With OWL, Poudre is using the same test items that they had previously designed to meet their specific needs." Dalessandri continues, "Because Poudre's instructors rate their students, there is a 'wash back effect' that helps to improve instruction. By using OWL's data collection, reporting and analysis on an individual activity at the student, teacher, class and district level, Poudre can access performance and improve instruction at every level."*

### **Students look on someone else's paper**

This simple, age-old, cheating technique can be stopped by changing the order in which items are presented on a test. OWLTS makes it easy for the teacher to specify that all of the test items (or items within a section) be listed in a random order so that the test appears different from screen to screen. Furthermore, cheating by secretive texting among class members would be difficult if students weren't sure who was on which question.

### **Students cheat due to anxiety rooted in specific learning disabilities or test phobias**

Students with individual education plans may require considerable modifications to help them learn at their level. OWLTS has developed a simple way to create these modifications and assign specific versions of the tests to specific students. The modifications include (but are not limited to) an audio component for poor readers, word banks, limits on the number of choices, etc.

Giving students a practice test before the main event can do much to alleviate student anxiety.

OWLTS makes it easy to create and administer practice tests to help students become familiar with both the software interface and also the types of questions that they can expect to see on a specific test.

Even with all of these safeguards, teachers still need to be vigilant. Students may still bring in cheat sheets or some temporary form of body art (complete with formulas or verb endings). The teacher needs to monitor the test takers. However, OWLTS can help by enabling teachers to specify a time limit for individual test questions, sections, or the entire test, thus limiting the time students have to use their iPods or cell phones when the teacher isn't looking. OWLTS also enables teachers to choose whether or not students are allowed to go back to a prior part of the test and prevents students from being able to use the browser.

### **Teachers cheat to inflate student test scores on district-wide test**

Many of the advantages of OWLTS mentioned above will also discourage teachers from cheating. The most important difference is that teachers won't have a hard copy of the test beforehand (preventing disclosure of questions ahead of time).

Teachers will see the test for the first time as they monitor the first class that takes the test.

### **About the Author:**

**Thekla Fall** is a world language consultant and retired curriculum supervisor from Pittsburgh Public Schools.

### **Further resources:**

Bramucci, Dr. Robert S.  
How to Cheat: Techniques Used by Cheaters,  
[http://www.teachopolis.org/justice/cheating/cheating\\_how\\_to.htm](http://www.teachopolis.org/justice/cheating/cheating_how_to.htm),  
TEACHOPOLIS, 2003

McTaggart Jacquie, Why Some Teachers Cheat,  
<http://www.ednews.org/articles/why-some-teachers-cheat.html>,  
EducationNews Commentaries, 2008

Furthermore, the administration of multiple, yet comparable, versions of a test reduces the likelihood that teachers will give out test questions to subsequent classes, since teachers won't know what versions will be administered next.

The use of passwords and settings prevents unauthorized access to change students' incorrect responses once they are saved. Comprehensive test data collection enables tracking of student progress throughout the year, across grade levels, and to different schools making it easier to recognize

abnormalities as comparisons are made. For example, noting that students from a particular school or teacher consistently score higher one year but much lower the next.

OWLTS also affords numerous other safeguards against an inadvertent (or deliberate) faux pas. The ability to set a time limit for the test and/or individual test items assures that all students across the district or campus are given the same amount of time to take the test. A setting that allows each student to take a test only once prevents students/teachers from going in to see the test beforehand and/or being able to go in a second time to change an answer. The computer clocks the day and time the test is taken.

The good news is that with OWLTS, schools and colleges can be more certain that test data used to make critical educational decisions is accurate. Yes, teachers will still need to be vigilant and monitor the test administration since some students will always try to find another way to cheat. However, OWLTS can make it more difficult for these students to succeed, while making the job of test creation, administration, and rating/scoring so much more efficient for the teacher. With OWLTS, cheating may become a thing of the past. *Instead of saying "everyone does it" people may start to say "everyone used to do it."*



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## Focus on Features:

# OWL upgrade offers enhancements for all users

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### Improved performance for Test Takers

- Improved performance for Test Takers
- Immediate Student Feedback for Enhanced Language Learning
- Improved End User Performance
- Aspect Ratio Integrity to Accommodate Widescreen/Laptop Monitors

### Enhanced features for Test Creators

- Simplified Test Editing Interface
- Stored User Preferences
- Advanced Copying Capabilities to Maximize Use of Pre-existing Content
- Larger Image Format Options for Tests
- Added Test and Section Timer Features
- Simplified Audio Recording Interface and Improved Video Uploader
- Enhanced Test Review Page

### Increased options for Test Raters

- Simplified Auto Rating Capabilities
- Improved Rating Administration
- SPEAK™ Specific Average Scoring

### More Capabilities for Test Administrators

- Enhanced Report Saving and Sharing Functions
- Department-level Administration
- Role Assignments by Department

... and much more! Call us today for a no obligation demonstration of OWL Testing System version 3.6.9.0.