

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Foreign Languages

Computerized Adaptive Placement Exam (CAPE)

The Department of Foreign Languages (DFL) offers Computerized Adaptive Placement Exam (CAPE) in French, German, and Spanish. The CAPE developed by Brigham Young University is widely used across the country as a language placement instrument. When combined with other information, the results of these examinations assist the Department of Foreign Languages in placing a student in the appropriate level language course.

The Department of Foreign Languages is continually faced with the task of advising and placing freshmen and transfer students in appropriate courses. This decision is often based primarily upon the number of classes the student has previously taken in the language. However, placement on this basis does not take into account several important factors which determine the student's actual facility with the language, such as the effectiveness of the student's past teacher(s), the specific information covered, extracurricular, and/or other out-of-class exposure to the language.

CAPE uses state-of-the-art computer testing techniques to place students accurately and efficiently in the first two years (beginning I to intermediate II) of college language courses. The exam selects each new test item as a result of the answer given to the previous question. When the student answers an item correctly, a more difficult question is presented; if an item is answered incorrectly, an easier question is given. In short, the test "adapts" to the student's level of ability and will accurately determine the student's competency level in about twenty minutes.

Some of the benefits of using CAPE over conventional paper-and-pencil type tests include the reduction of the testing time to about twenty minutes since fewer test items are necessary. Boredom and frustration are diminished by eliminating items that are far too easy or much too difficult for an individual student.

CAPE provides immediate feedback. Upon completion of the exam, students are able to see their score.

How It Works

After starting CAPE, the student enters his or her name and KSU ID number and responds to questions regarding his/her previous language experiences to initiate a test record file.

Once the record identification information is entered, the computer prepares the student for the test. The first screen briefly explains that the student is to respond to multiple choice questions by typing and confirming the letter of the correct answer.

To ensure that the student has understood the instructions, a sample test item is given. At this point, the actual test begins.

The computerized adaptive placement exams are designed to provide individualized testing, identifying the student's ability level with combinations of grammar, reading, and vocabulary questions. The adaptive testing algorithm has been written so that the first six questions serve as "level checkers." After the first six items, the test begins to "probe" in order to fine-tune the measurement by increasing or decreasing the difficulty by one level after each response. The test terminates if 1) the student answers incorrectly four questions at the same difficulty level, or 2) the student answers five questions at the highest difficulty level possible.

By requiring at least four misses at a given level, the test makes allowances for lucky guesses or inadvertent errors due to lack of concentration, nervousness, or other distractions. To avoid duplicate questions, the index to the question is flagged. When a question is used during the test, a sequential file is created to show the student's performance during the test.

At the conclusion of the test, the computer displays the performance level of the student. The student then consults the placement chart (as determined by the Department of Foreign Languages) that lists the ranges of performance levels that pertain to the various language courses of the curriculum. Thus, the student is immediately advised of the class that appears most suited to his or her ability level.

Procedure for taking the CAPE Exam

Students unsure of what level Spanish, French or German language course in which to register, should contact Patricia Tilbian, Lab Coordinator, Foreign Language Resource Center/Language Lab, Pilcher 134, (678) 797-2197. She will schedule the CAPE exam and upon completion, the student will be placed in the appropriate level language class up to the 2002 level.