



Changing expectations of the testing population

PANEL DISCUSSION

BILC STANAG 6001 TESTING WORKSHOP 2021

Why should we care about expectations?

expectations
high/low - correct/wrong



customer satisfaction



(perceived) quality

The survey

- Questionnaire (25 questions) sent out to 113 former Language Centre students and test takers
- 67 respondents (59% response ratio)
 - officers 54%
 - NCOs 42%
 - civilians 6%



The survey – sample questions

Are pen-and-paper tests obsolete?

Is it easier to read from paper or from a computer screen?

A speaking test with an avatar?

Should test results be available immediately?

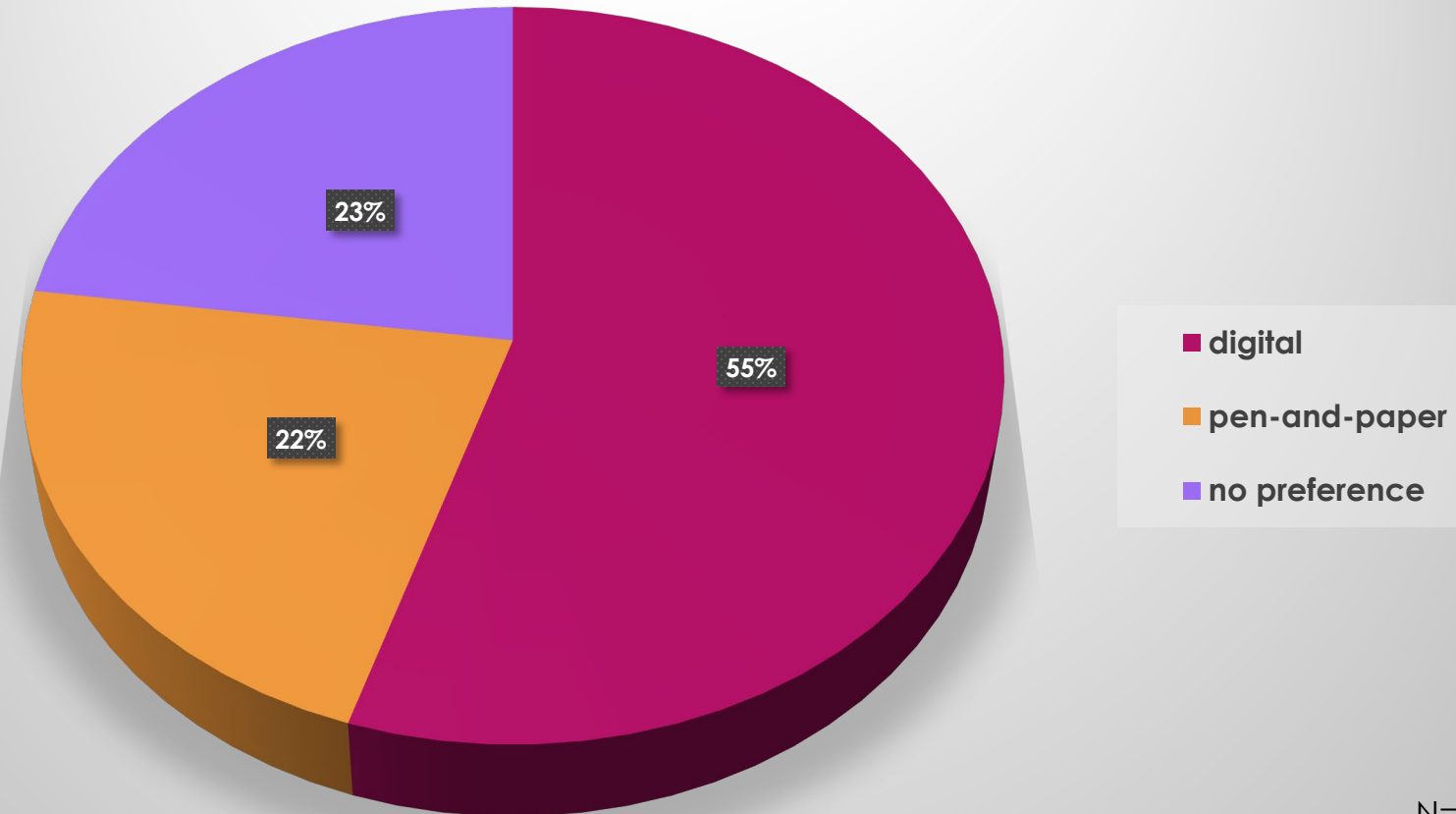
Why do you (dis)like digital tests?

The best location to take a high-stakes language test?

What is a reasonable test length?

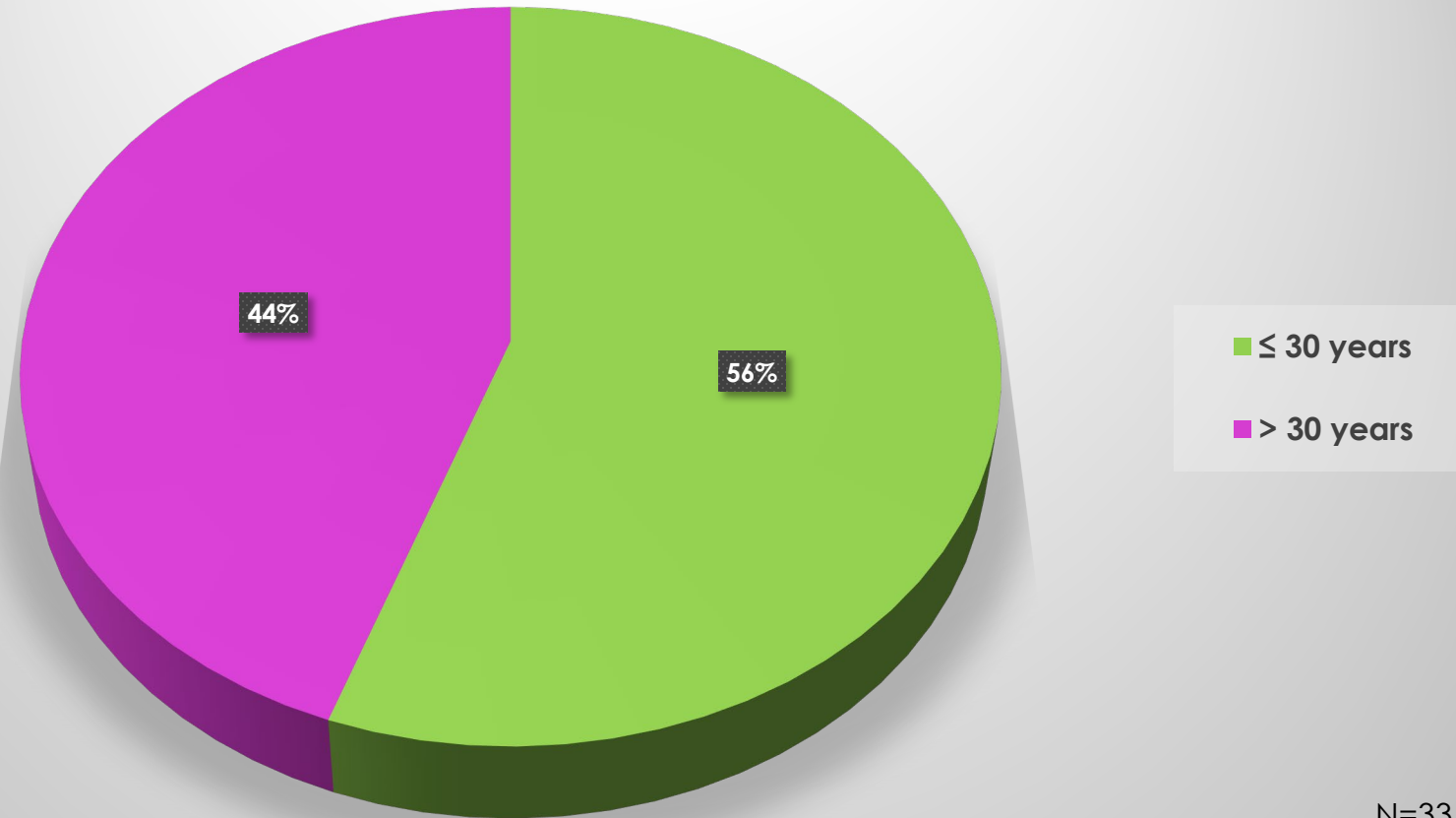
Should dictionaries be allowed in a writing test?

Preferred test modality (overall)



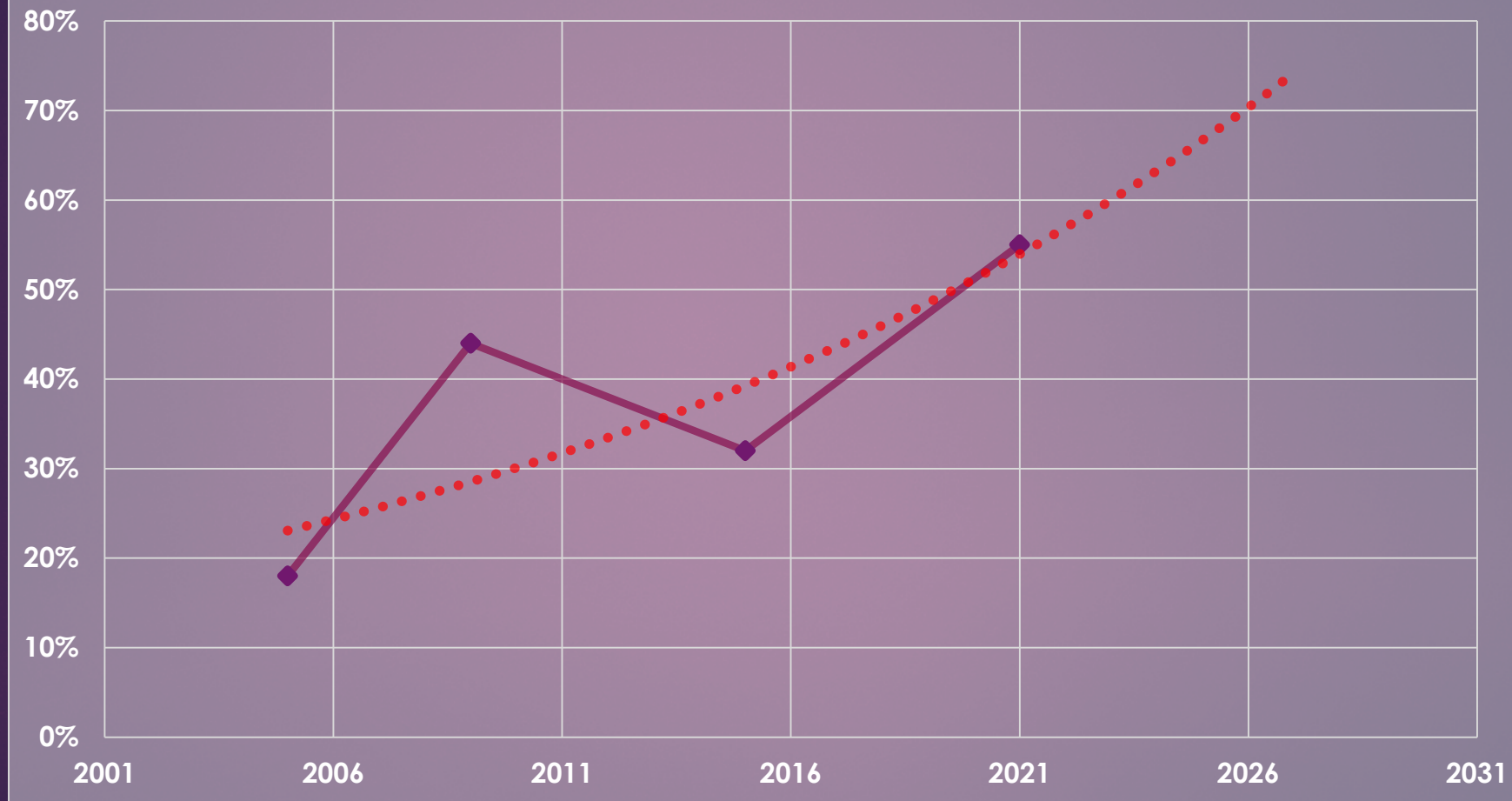
N=67

Preference for digital testing (by age)

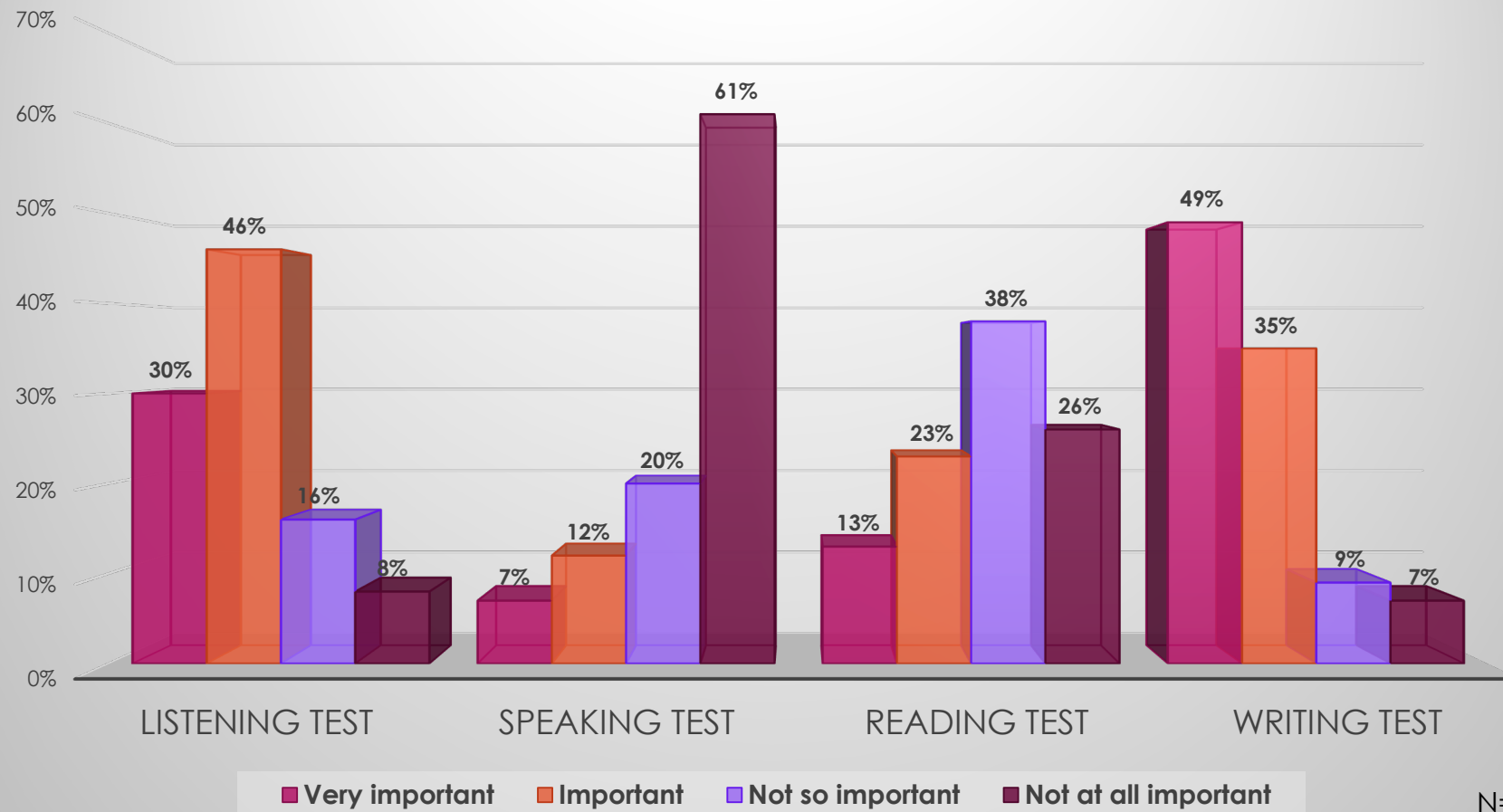


N=33

Preference for digital language tests



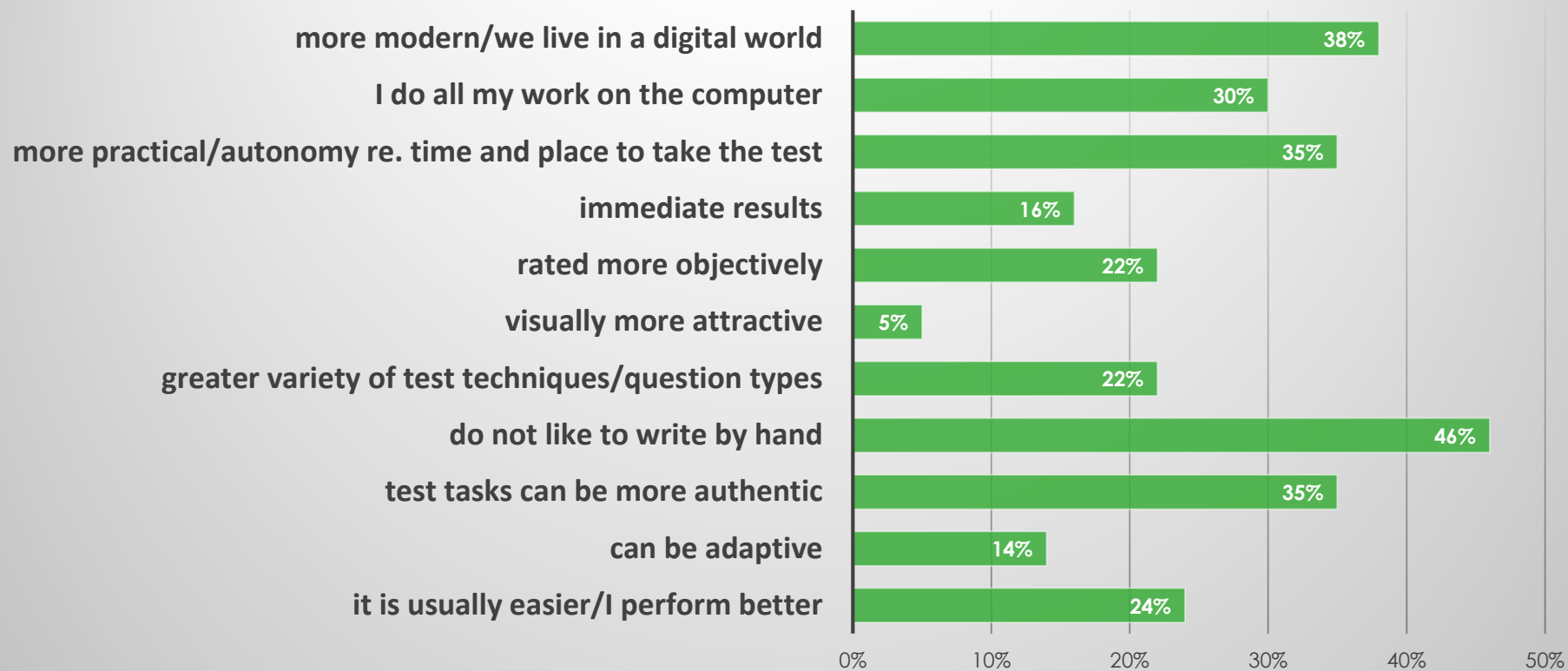
How important is it to you that the test is digital?



N=67

Reasons for preferring digital language tests

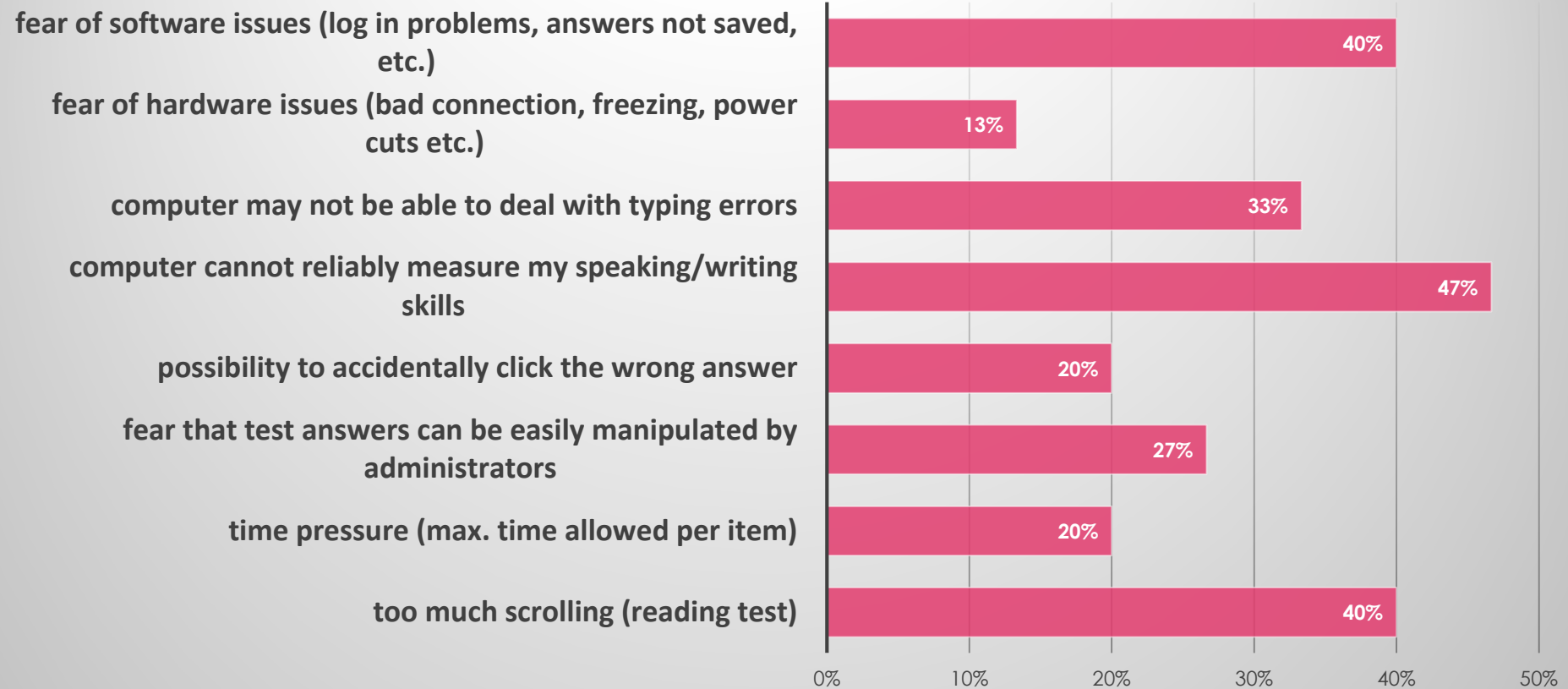
(more than 1 answer possible)



N=37

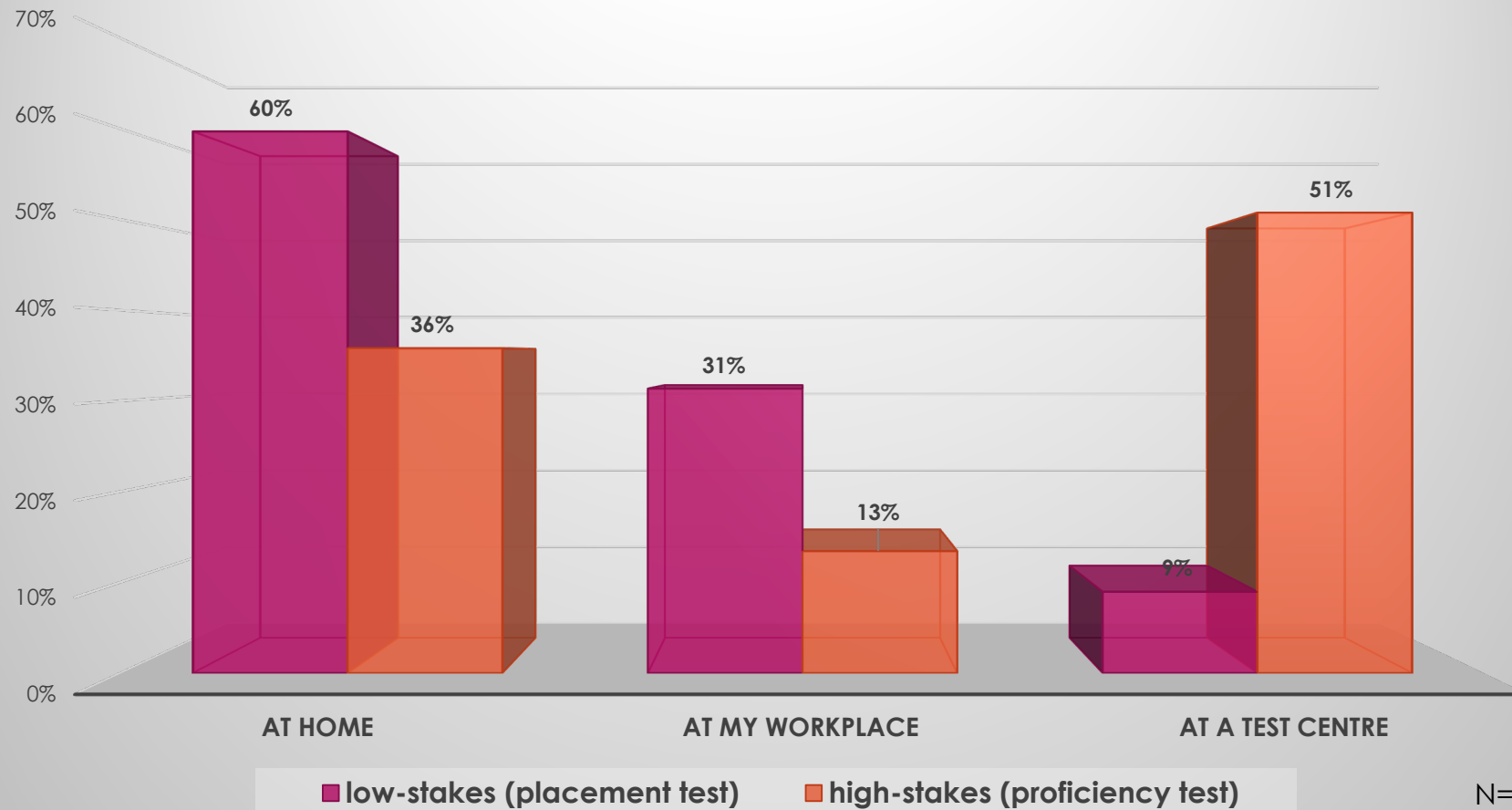
Main concerns about digital tests

(more than 1 answer possible)

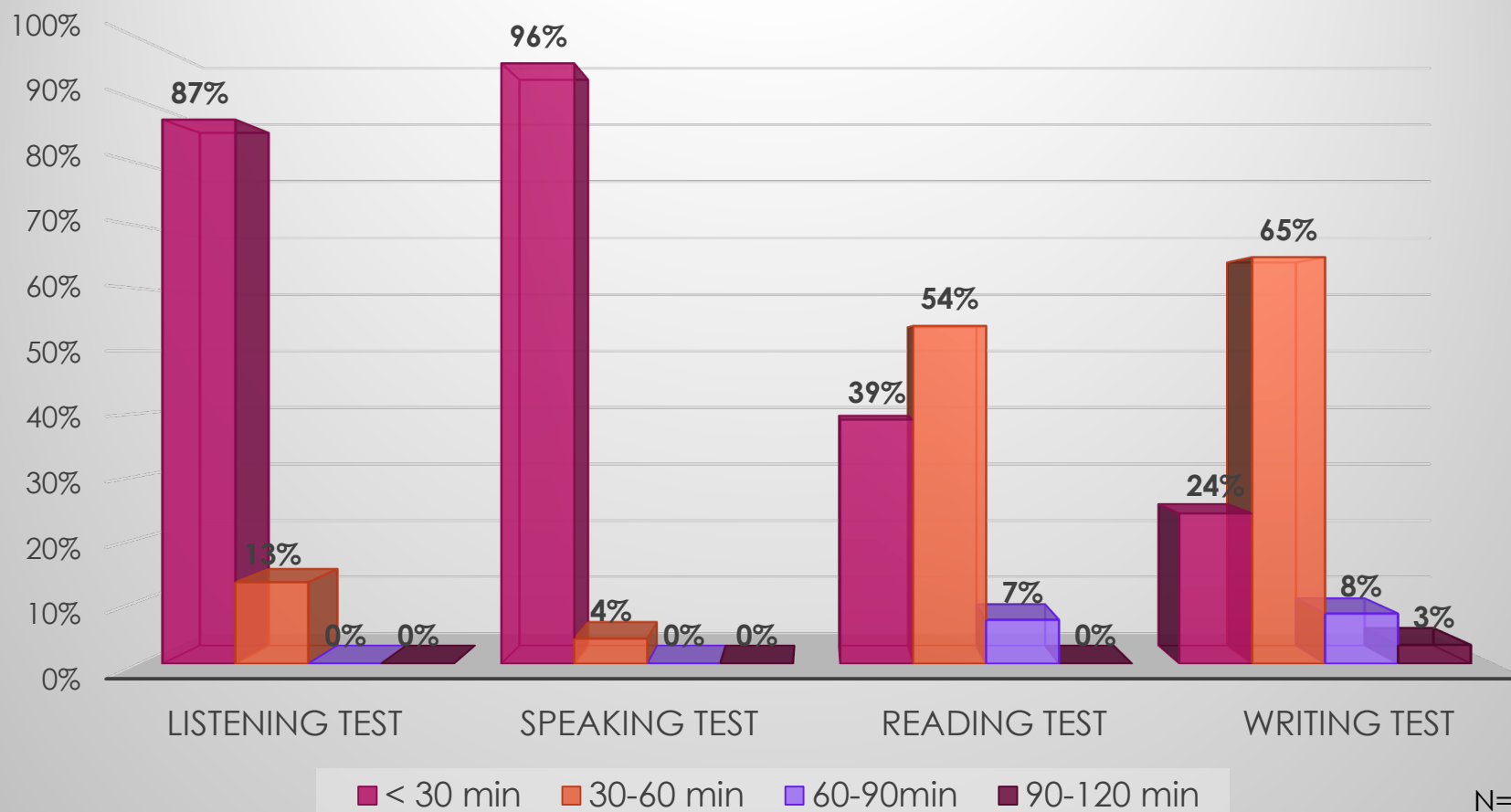


N=15

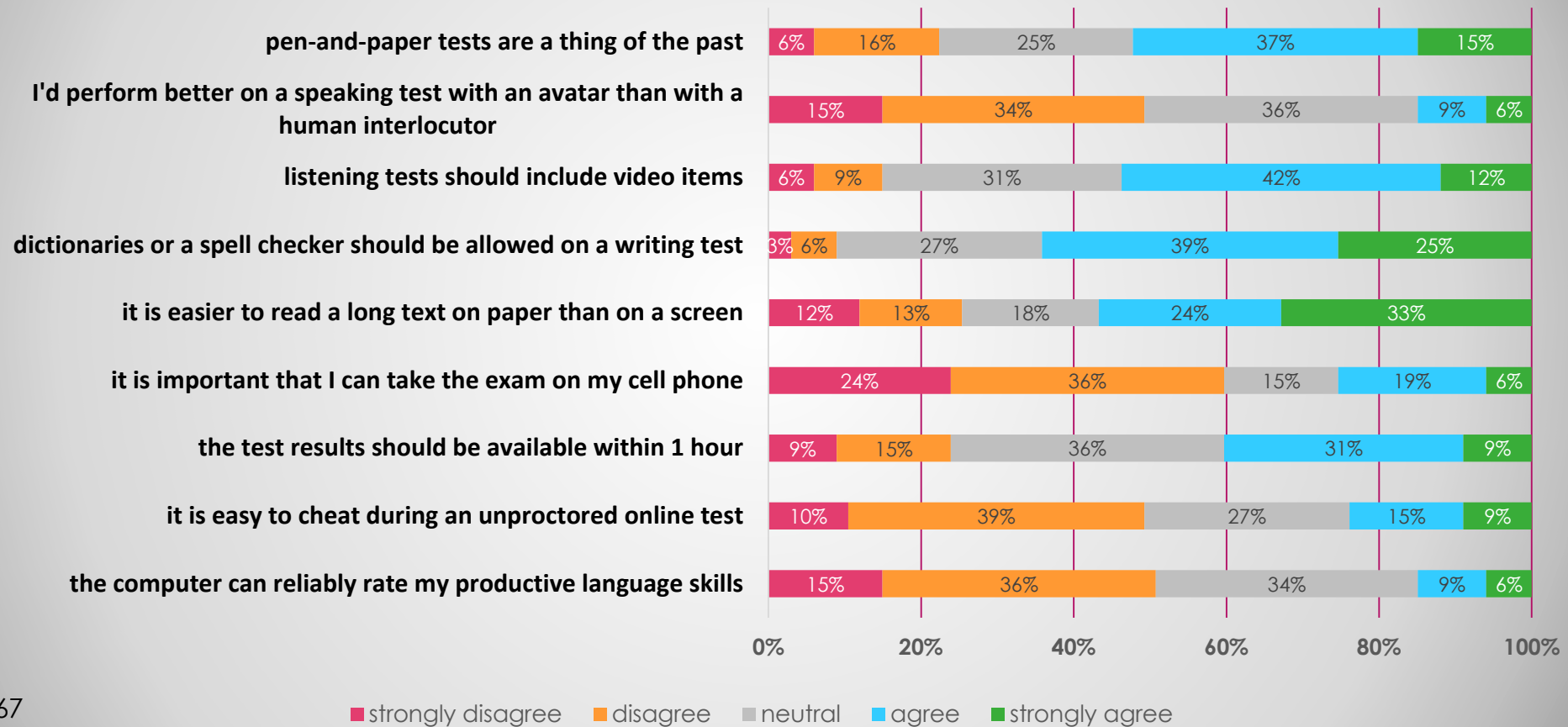
Preferred location to take a language test



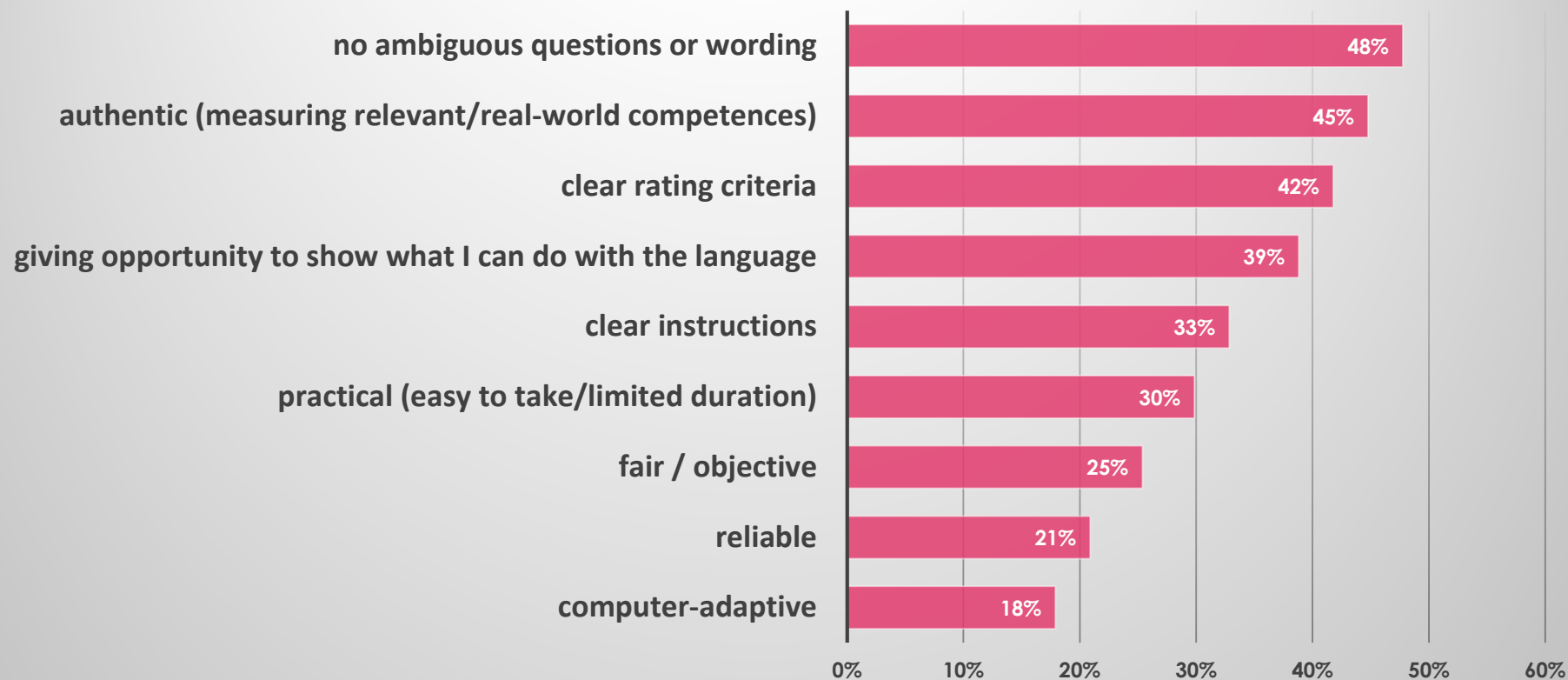
Preferred test length



How much do you agree or disagree?



The most important qualities of a language test (select 3)



N=67

Main outcomes

The respondents expect language tests that are

- ✓ administered (mostly) by **computer** (except for speaking), at home or at a test centre
- ✓ rated by **human raters**
- ✓ **short** (no more than 2.5 hours for a full test battery)
- ✓ using **video** items for listening
- ✓ measuring authentic/**relevant** language skills

In particular, they have high expectations regarding

- ✓ clear **instructions**
- ✓ clear **rating criteria** and cut scores
- ✓ **unambiguous wording** of the questions and options
- ✓ the use of **aids**/resources similar to those in real life

Changing expectations

Two different ways of dealing with expectations

Changing expectations

Passive role: how have expectations changed and how do we react to that?

Pro-active role: managing expectations



Expectation management = **controlling** and **shaping** / modifying the expectations of your test takers

Expectations are often preconceptions or assumptions based on **previous experiences**

- test takers may use previous experiences with (language) tests as a benchmark for what they expect from you if they take your test

Managing expectations

- Get a clear picture of what your test takers expect
 - through regular surveys, informal talks, etc.
 - expectations are based on what has come before. Therefore, have an awareness of what is accepted practice in your field of expertise and how you can do better.



- Make sure test takers' *expectations match reality*
 - think carefully about which expectations you (want to) create and deliver accordingly
 - don't assume every test taker knows what is going to happen next when they sign up for the test. Many students or test takers do not have very clear expectations, and they accept whatever you tell them.

Managing expectations

- **information** and **communication** are crucial
 - provide step-by-step explanations of what is going to happen, in which order and how things will be delivered (be aware that some people will make assumptions anyway and not read your explanations, and then be disappointed when they don't get what they expect)
 - candidate handbook with sample test items, mode of delivery, regulations and instructions
- Negative feedback is often the result of a difference between what you said was going to be delivered, how that was interpreted, and then what was actually delivered. So make sure to **live up to your own standards** and to the expectations you yourself created

Managing expectations

- Correct **wrong expectations** immediately > *wrong* expectations are more damaging than *low* expectations!



Final remarks

- Success comes down to **understanding what people want** and making sure they get it exactly how they expect to get it or even better than they expected.
- **Don't over-manage expectations.** All you need to do is know enough and explain enough to keep test takers happy.

