

Contents

1. Overview
2. Test design
3. Supervision guidelines
4. Placement guidance
5. Validation
6. Implementation

1. Overview

At National Geographic Learning, our English language programs develop and support the goals of global citizenship, real-world communication, and personalized success. We prepare learners to reach real-world outcomes in English. As teachers guide their students along their learning journey, we provide a wide range of assessment options to support their success.

Figure 1 National Geographic Learning assessment for real-world success model



The first step in a language learner's journey is reliable placement into a course of study. The National Geographic Learning Online Placement Test is an adaptive test of English which accurately places young adults and adults into an appropriate level of instruction. Based on their performance on listening, reading, and use of language tasks, students are assigned to one of 14 CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) ability bands, from Pre-A1 to C1. The Online Placement Test delivers a one-page Score Report with Language Skill Profile for each test-taker along with a summary report of his or her overall CEFR placement. The test has been validated for placing upper secondary and adult students.

Listening and reading input are foundational for language development. Research shows that a student's listening and reading skills strongly correlate with his or her general language proficiency. Additionally, there is a strong correlation between grammar knowledge and a student's ability in the four language skills as grammar enables learners to operate accurately and meaningfully in reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Qian and Lin 2019, Purpura 2004). As the National Geographic Learning Online Placement Test assesses listening, reading, and grammar, the test provides a reliable benchmark of each student's general English ability.

The Online Placement Test is a practical tool for teachers and institutions. Program-specific placement guides help institutions place students into a range of National Geographic Learning academic, upper secondary, and general adult programs.

Expert team

To develop the Online Placement Test, National Geographic Learning gathered internal and external assessment specialists—a customer expert panel, our own editors, a specialized assessment partner, and third-party subject matter experts. The team included:

- **LT123**, a highly experienced and expert consultancy group focused on English language assessment, learning, and training materials, who designed the test, produced the materials, and developed the reporting descriptors;
- **Anne Katz, Ph.D.**, National Geographic Learning’s assessment consultant who engaged with the team throughout development to ensure best practices in test design;
- An **expert panel of customers** from around the world, who provided critical input into the design of the test, score report, and support materials;
- Administrators and students at **twenty-eight partner institutions** around the world who field tested various versions of the Online Placement Test; and
- LT123’s psychometrician **Szilvia Papp, Ph.D.**, who researched the test design and carried out the validation analyses, which are documented in the third-party validation report and which demonstrate the efficacy of the National Geographic Learning Online Placement Test.

2. Test design

National Geographic Learning brand values

At National Geographic Learning, we bring the world to the classroom and learning to life. To reflect these brand values in the Online Placement Test, the test items were written to reflect real-world contexts and themes, and many are enhanced with National Geographic photography.

The assessment items are based on themes found in National Geographic Learning courses. These include relevant and global topics such as routines, travel, work, sports, art, and protecting the environment.

Test content is accessible to learners of both American and British English. Reading and listening texts are set in authentic, international contexts, and speakers represent a wide range of comprehensible accents.

Multi-stage adaptive test

The Online Placement Test is a multi-stage adaptive test. This means that students are given test items at higher or lower levels of difficulty based on their performance on previous questions. The first three stages of the test assess language use, reading, and listening skills and are auto graded. They are followed by a Speaking Task, which is not automatically assessed but which can be used by institutions for further evaluation of a student's language level and placement into an appropriate level of instruction.

- **Stage 1:** Students answer a set of questions that assess language use (grammar and vocabulary). Based on their responses, they are routed into one of two modules in the second stage.
- **Stage 2:** Students undergo an initial assessment of reading and listening skills. The students' answers determine which level of questions they see in the third stage.
- **Stage 3:** Students are further assessed on reading and listening skills with test items in a narrower range of levels. The test's evaluation of student performance in this stage leads to a precise indication of their level of ability in these two skills.
- **Stage 4:** Students respond orally to three speaking prompts, recording their responses.

The students' overall language ability is calculated using the outcomes from Stages 1-3 to place them in one of 14 CEFR-linked bands.

Speaking samples for optional review

Although speaking is not assessed by the test, students are required to complete three recorded speaking tasks. Speaking tasks are assigned according to performance on the language use, reading, and listening questions. The recordings of the speaking tasks are made available to institutions and/or teachers, along with guidance on how to evaluate the samples against CEFR speaking descriptors. When a decision on a borderline candidate is needed, it is advisable to listen to the student's speech sample.

Skill-specific reporting

Each student's Score Report provides four CEFR-based scores: Overall, Listening, Reading, and Language Use. The score report has been designed with teachers and administrators as the primary audience. It provides them with specific information about a student's performance and ability. A sample Score Report is available on the Companion Site at [ELTNGL.com/onlineplacementresources](https://eltngl.com/onlineplacementresources).

3. Supervision guidelines

These guidelines assume that centers will follow best practice, which is to administer the test in a secure environment in person. Where this is not possible and the test must be taken away from the center (e.g. at home), specific notes are supplied below. Unless stated, these guidelines apply to both in-person and remote tests.

Preparing the students

Students should be made aware of the following information before the start of the test. This is best done in students' first language where possible, to avoid any misunderstanding.

a. Purpose of test

The aim of the test is to establish the students' level of English, so they can be placed in the best class to help them progress most efficiently. The test should not be used to evaluate what students have learned. For this reason, it's in students' best interests that they take the test on their own and without help.

b. Kind of test

The NGL Online Placement Test is an adaptive test, which means that the level of the questions presented to students will vary, depending on students' responses at different stages of the test.

c. Structure of test

The test is made up of 3 stages.

1. 20 language knowledge (vocabulary and usage) questions. These cover all levels from PreA1-C1 (beginner to advanced).
2. 20 reading and listening questions, delivered in the following order:
 - 6 listening questions
 - 6 reading questions
 - 4 listening questions
 - 4 reading questions
3. A speaking task. The speaking task is not assessed. It's used by teachers and administrators to help with borderline cases and by centres as part of test security. The platform moves automatically between the stages and they are not necessarily noticeable to the student.

d. Time

- Although there is no fixed time limit on the test, it should take about 30 minutes and never longer than an hour. Students should be encouraged to answer all questions quickly and not spend a long time trying to decide on an answer. At the beginning of the test, it's likely that students will have questions that they don't know the answer to – this is fine, they should pick an answer and move on. The test will automatically adapt the level to suit each student.
- For most students, the test should take around 30 minutes. However, some higher-level students may need longer (up to one hour) as the texts and questions are more demanding at the higher levels.

e. IDs for entry

- On arrival, student IDs should be checked to ensure that the person taking the test is the same person that is enrolling on the course. As the test will be used to decide the class into which each student is placed, there is no advantage to the student to ask someone with a higher level of English to take the test.
- Ensure students have their test log-ins and know how to log in to the test.

f. Test-taking strategies

- Students should be prepared to see questions above their level in the first part of the test. This is part of the process of determining which level they are. Encourage them not to spend too long on any question that they find difficult. Ideally, they should work their way through the questions answering them to the best of their ability and in a relaxed way.
- Reassure students that it's fine if they miss something in a listening question and that they can listen again - twice should be enough.
- Students should not take screen shots or photos of any of the test screens.
- Remind students that the speaking task is to give teachers additional information and is not assessed. They should not spend longer than five minutes on the speaking task and should complete the task without making notes.

g. Navigation

- Students must give an answer to each question before they can continue. If they're not sure or don't know, they should choose any answer and then click the arrow to continue.
- Throughout the test, students will be asked to "Submit" their answers using a checkmark (✓) icon. Upon selecting this icon, the button will turn into a "Next" arrow that will lead them to the next set of questions. This process allows the test to deliver level-appropriate questions adapted to each student's performance. Explain that students will operate their own audio recordings by using the play button and that they can, if needed, play the recordings, or parts of the recordings, more than once. Students should be advised that if they can't answer the question after listening twice, they should choose an answer and move on.
- Some of the reading and listening questions have a longer text with two questions. This is indicated in the directions.

h. Completing the speaking task

- Make sure the students allow microphone access through their browser settings when prompted.
- Students should spend around 3-5 minutes on the speaking task in total.
- There are 3 questions, each of which requires a separate response. Students should read the question, take a few seconds to think about their answer, and then record it.
- Students should avoid making multiple recordings of their responses.

- As each student will work through the test at a different rate, students must speak quietly and directly into their microphone while recording their responses.
- If a student receives a recording error pop-up message, they should not close out of the test. This is the standard pop-up if there are recording issues (i.e., microphone isn't connected or the microphone is blocked for a specific site). Tell them to try again.
- Students must click the 'Submit' button for the test to be completed.

i. Personal possessions

- No notes, books, electronic devices e.g. smart phones/smart watches/MP3 players, etc. should be allowed in the exam room. All such items must be switched off and removed from students before they enter the test room. Place these items in a secure place with other personal property, e.g. at a desk at the front of the room.
- Pens and paper are not needed for the test, which is completely online. If a student requests a pen/paper for the speaking component, this should be supplied by the supervisor.

j. Asking questions

- Students should raise their hands if they want to ask a question and wait for the supervisor to approach before asking it.
- Students should otherwise avoid talking during the test (with the exception of during the speaking task).

k. Using the restroom

- Student restroom breaks should be discouraged unless there are special circumstances which are to be noted by the supervisor.
- Students should be told to return directly to the exam room.

l. Finishing the test

- When a student finishes, they should raise their hand so the supervisor can check they have submitted the test correctly.
- Students can leave as they finish but should do so as quietly as possible so as not to disturb other students who are still taking the test.
- Remind students to take all personal possessions with them.

Preparing the testing room

- Ensure that the internet connection is strong and reliable, as outages will stop the test and mean that students have to start again.
- Check the exam room is at a suitable temperature, has a clock which is visible to all, and that there is signage outside the exam room to warn other students/members of staff that a test is taking place (and when it starts/ends).

- c. Ensure seating spaced for maximum separation between students and check all tables are completely clear of papers, books, etc.
- d. Check that the equipment needed is functioning and ready to go before the test begins.
- e. Do not allow other people to enter the room and reduce outside noise by closing windows.

Wellbeing

- a. Explain to students that the aim of this test is to ensure that they are assigned to the most appropriate class for their level so their language needs are suitably met. This will mean they make better progress in their English.
- b. The test is not intended to be stressful but instead assess their strengths and weaknesses. It's intended to help measure their future learning needs and provide direction to their teachers, so as to maximise future improvement.
- c. The outcome of the test will be used only for this purpose and will not affect in any way the final outcome of their English studies.
- d. Students should focus on their own responses and not worry about what any other students are doing. Because of the way the test is designed, everyone will see a different set of questions and will work through these at different speeds.
- e. Students should be encouraged to work at their own pace, while not spending too long on any one question.
- f. The speaking task does not form part of the test. Its purpose is to give the teachers a chance to 'get to know' their students, and to support identity checks.

Guidelines for supervising during the test

- a. Before starting the test, check all students have turned off their mobile phones, smart watches, etc.
- b. Move around the room regularly changing the route you take.
- c. Watch students from the back of the room or a raised platform if possible.
- d. If you suspect a student of copying another student, of helping them, or of using notes or a phone, quietly tell the student to stop and focus on their own test. Note details of the event and the student/s involved.
- e. If a phone rings during the exam, locate it as quickly as possible, turn it off, and take it away from the student, noting their name.

Dealing with questions during the test

- a. You can clarify what students need to do if they are unsure, but do not help them answer the test questions nor give clues.
- b. If the student experiences a technical issue that prevents them from completing the test, they will need to leave the test without submitting. Each test can only be attempted once, so they will need to be reassigned the test to take it again.

Remote tests

If you decide to have the students test remotely, inform them that:

- They should answer the tests from their own knowledge, and not access other websites or study resources, including other people.
- In case of technical difficulties or how to proceed through the test, they should contact support.
<https://support.eltnl.com/contact-support/>

When tests are taken remotely, there are significant potential risks related to security:

- Once logged in, students could ask a friend or relative to complete the test for them.
- Students have access to other resources and the internet to find answers to questions.
- Students can take screenshots and photos of the test and share these with others, thus compromising the test content.

We therefore strongly encourage you to administer the test in your center. Where this is not possible, there are certain steps which can help to reduce the risks:

- Check how long the student spent on the test. If the student spent significantly longer than expected (over 1 hour), then it's possible they were accessing other resources.
- Review the student's speaking task performance carefully. Does it seem spontaneous? Is the level of English significantly different from the level of their performance in the test?
- If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes', we suggest you carry out the optional interview task (face-to-face or via video conferencing) to verify the student's identity and/or English level.
- If the test outcome remains significantly higher than their oral proficiency, the student should re-sit the test in a supervised environment from the test administrator.

4. Placement guidance

National Geographic Learning courses

The National Geographic Learning Online Placement Test accurately places students into a level of one of National Geographic Learning course books to ensure that students are appropriately challenged. Placement guides are available for the following academic skills, general young adult and adult, and upper secondary National Geographic Learning courses on the Companion Site at [ELTNGL.com/onlineplacementresources](https://eltngl.com/onlineplacementresources):

- Academic Skills
 - *21st Century Communication, Great Writing, Grammar Explorer, Grammar in Context, Pathways, Reading Explorer, Reflect*
- General Young Adult and Adult
 - *English in Action, Keynote, Life, Outcomes, Stand Out, Voices, World English, World Link*
 - Upper Secondary
 - *New Close Up, Perspectives*

The placement guides provide an easy reference for assigning students to the appropriate level of a given course. Because the Online Placement Test score profiles a student's current level, our recommendation may indicate a higher level than the student's score to reflect the level that the student is expected to reach by the end of the course. As such, we take an aspirational approach to placement.

Optional interview

As previously noted, there are times when considering multiple measures for placement of an individual learner is prudent, especially when a test taker's score places him or her on the border between two CEFR bands.

If a student places between two levels, we recommend reviewing his or her speaking samples. This review will help determine the more appropriate level. For even greater refinement of placement, the student can be invited to do an optional interview, either in person or through videoconferencing. An interview is especially recommended when a student scores at the lower or upper end of a level, or for students who place in the lowest or highest levels (PreA1/A1.1 and B2.3/C1). Instructions for conducting and evaluating the optional interview are available on the Companion Site at [ELTNGL.com/onlineplacementresources](https://eltngl.com/onlineplacementresources).

Other factors to consider in placement include grades and teacher recommendations from previous coursework as well as a globally-benchmarked test score such as the TOEFL® Test.

Differentiating between C1- and C2- level test takers

The Online Placement Test contains items to place students up to C1 level. A student who scores at the high end of the C1 band may be able to perform at the C2 level. To determine whether the student can perform at C2, we recommend that the student sit for an oral interview and submit a writing sample for review by the institution.

For a comprehensive overview of the CEFR descriptors, see www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/the-cefr-descriptors.

5. Validation

The National Geographic Learning Online Placement test has been professionally validated through a rigorous process under the guidance of LT123's validation expert, Szilvia Papp, Ph.D. Thousands of students, from twenty different language backgrounds and enrolled at twenty-eight partner institutions, participated in our validation process. These students were drawn from public and private universities, private language institutes, and secondary schools in Bahrain, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Japan, Mexico, Oman, Peru, Romania, Ukraine, the United States, and Vietnam.

The test development and validation processes were guided by the socio-cognitive framework of Weir (2005) as well as by the recommended methods and procedures in the manual *Relating language examination to the CEFR* (Council of Europe, 2009). For reporting purposes, LT123 developed a bespoke set of reporting descriptors, based on the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018).

In the validation process, two rounds of field testing were carried out to ensure test quality. The analysis of these data generated recommendations to flag items for replacement or amendment. Recommendations also included changes in design for the next round of field testing. A set of native English speakers was also included in Round 2 to offer baseline data. In the final analysis, data from both rounds were combined to derive score ranges for CEFR reporting.

The validation report is available on the Companion Site at [ELTNGL.com/onlineplacementresources](https://eltngl.com/onlineplacementresources).

6. Implementation

Setting up the National Geographic Learning Online Placement Test involves a three-step process:

1. Creating a course
2. Rostering students into that course, and
3. Assigning the test to students.

While students can take the Online Placement Test on either a laptop or mobile device, we recommend that administrators and teachers set up and administer the test on a laptop or desktop computer for a better experience. Recommended systems and browsers for the platform are:

- Windows (64-bit) 7: Latest version of Chrome or Firefox
- Windows 10: Latest version of Edge
- Mac OS 10.15 or later: Latest version of Safari

Creating a course

While the Online Placement Test is not a traditional course, the process for creating a course for this assessment product is the same as it would be for any other National Geographic Learning product. After signing in as either a teacher or institution admin, follow the course creation instructions on our [support site](#). If the General Online Placement Test is not available among your Publisher Materials, contact your [local support team](#) for assistance.

Note that you can choose either of the options in the *Show/Hide 'All Content'* drop-down menu (see Figure 2).

The placement test is available to each student only once.

Figure 2 Admin view – creating a new course

New Course

Course Name *

Start Date

End Date

Course Key

Will be automatically generated by the system after clicking Create

Description

Will be automatically implemented from the selected Master Course.

Show/Hide 'All content' *

Show all

I want students to interact with my course this way

Additional Info

Add publisher materials

Online Placement Te...

Course Name	Created on
<input type="checkbox"/> Online Placement Test (A)	12/Jan/2021

Cancel

Create

Rostering students into a course

Adding students to a course requires an institutional admin account or assistance from your regional support team. The process for roosting batches of students is described in detail on our [support site](#). Figure 3 shows how student data is compiled for roosting. Figure 4 shows how the students are roosted into the system.

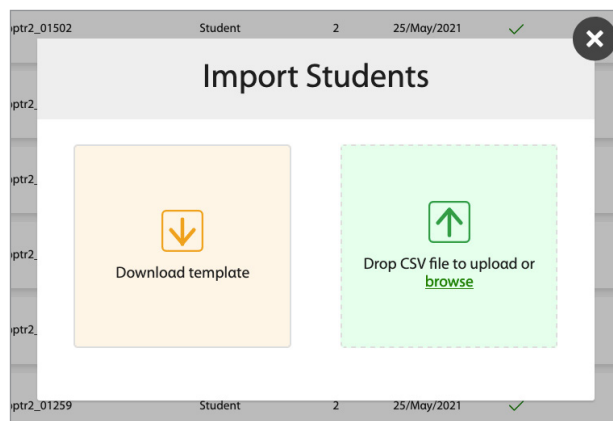
It is critical that large institutions adhere to the following limits:

- No more than 1,000 students imported at one time using the batch roosting tool.
- No more than 1,000 students roosted into any single course.

Figure 3 Excel file in .csv format with student data

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Username	First Name	Last Name	Email	*Course K	*Access code	*Course
2	jc_ramirez	Juan Carlos	Ramirez		3KPZW2GBL	V2VFJGY2R	
3	lin_xian_8	Lin	Xian		3KPZW2GBL	JD722YF7TN	
4	sinead_buck	Sinead	Buckley		3KPZW2GBL	RTFTWLGPJL	
5	fatima_khan	Fatima	Khan		3KPZW2GBL	3VZZGPK4LX	

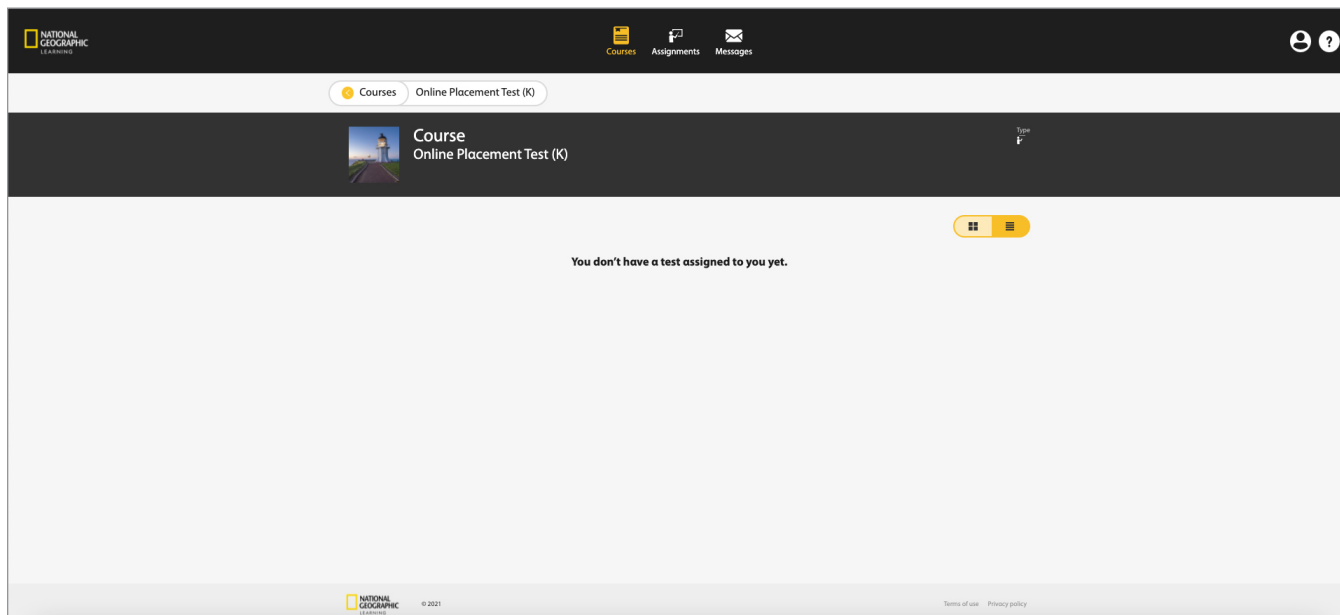
Figure 4 Roster upload feature within Online Placement Test course



Assigning the test

When students are rostered into an Online Placement Test course, the course will appear empty until the test is assigned to them (See Figure 5).

Figure 5 Student view before test is assigned



Creating an assignment for the Online Placement Test is like the assignment creation process for other National Geographic Learning products (detailed on our [support site](#)), with a few differences:

A student can attempt the placement test only once. For this reason, the *Allow the users to try again* feature is disabled—regardless of whether you check or uncheck this option. If a student exits before completing the test and needs to try again, it will be necessary to create a new assignment for him or her.

Note that the Start date and End date for the availability of the assignment are set in Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) (See Figure 6). The test becomes available at 12:00 AM GMT on the Start Date and is no longer available at 11:59PM GMT on the End Date. (You can also choose *No dates* to disable start and end date.)

Figure 6 Start and end date as seen in Create New Assignment screen

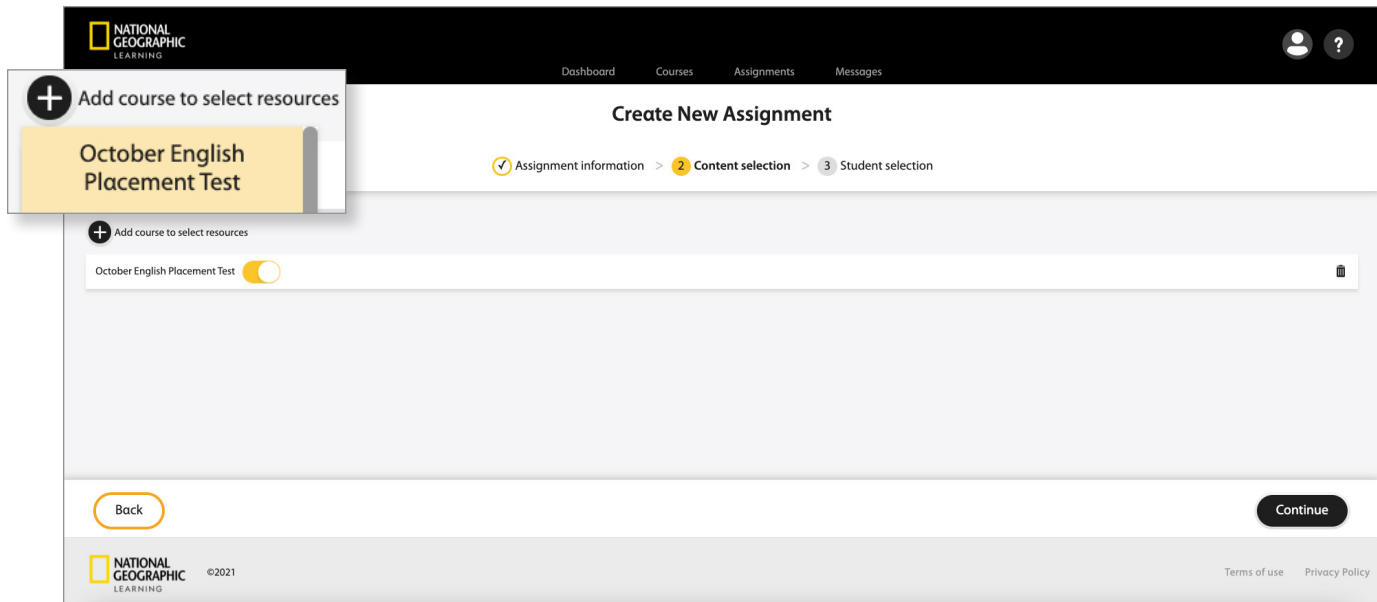
The screenshot shows the 'Create New Assignment' screen in the National Geographic Learning interface. The top navigation bar includes 'Dashboard', 'Courses', 'Assignments', and 'Messages'. The main heading is 'Create New Assignment'. Below the heading is a progress indicator showing three steps: '1 Assignment information', '2 Content selection', and '3 Student selection'. The 'Assignment information' step is active. The form contains the following fields and options:

- Name:** A text input field containing 'October Placement Test - English'.
- Start Date:** A date picker field showing '31/Aug/2021'.
- End Date:** A date picker field showing '30/Sep/2021'.
- Notes:** A text area with the placeholder 'Write your notes here'.
- Options:**
 - ☒ Allow the users to try again
 - ☐ No dates

At the bottom of the form, there are two buttons: 'Cancel' and 'Continue'. The 'Continue' button is highlighted with a dark background and white text. The footer of the screen includes the National Geographic Learning logo, copyright information '©2021', and links for 'Terms of use' and 'Privacy Policy'.

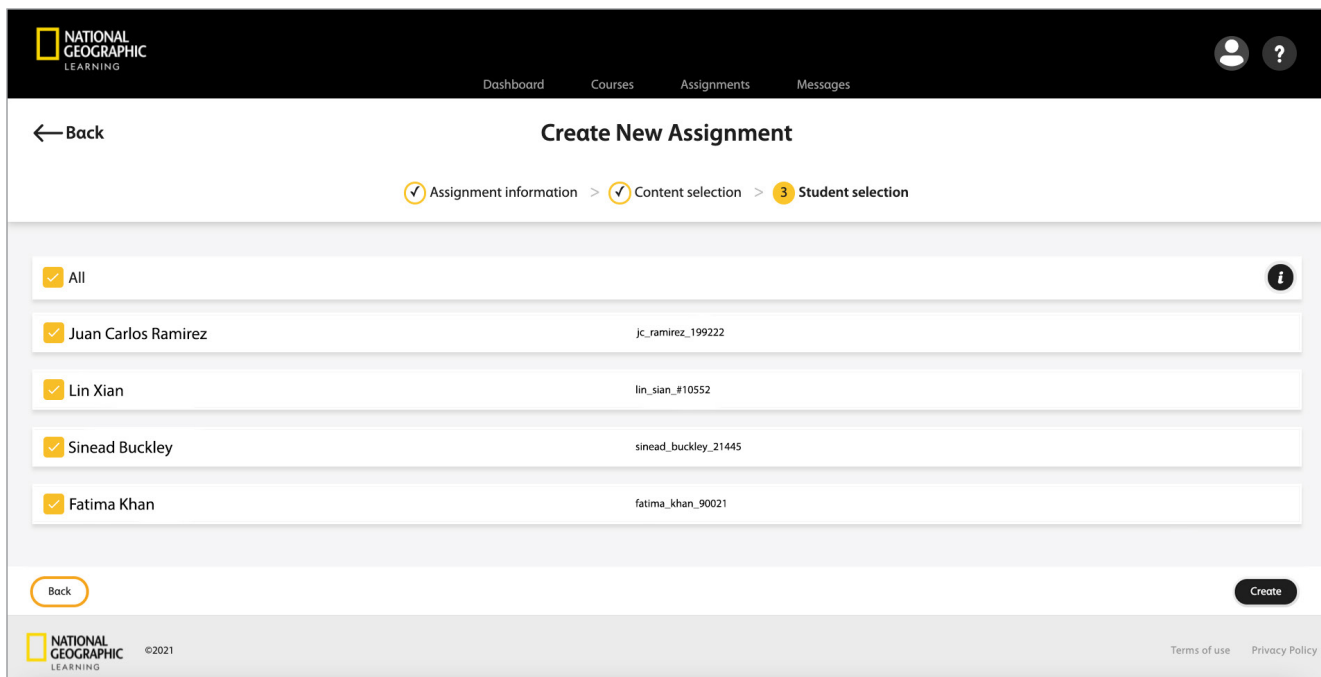
On the *Content selection* page, the Online Placement Test contains only one course. Scroll to the course name and enable this content. (See Figure 7).

Figure 7 Enabling course content as seen on the Content selection page



Finally, on the *Student selection* page (See Figure 8), select *All* or any subset of students who should take the test, and click *Create*. If you need to re-assign the test to an individual student, you can find the student by name or username. The *Create* button is at the bottom of the page—for very large courses, this requires scrolling.

Figure 8 Location of Create button on Create New Assignment screen



Administering the test

Students may take the test using a computer or the web browser of a mobile device. They will need consistent broadband Internet connection, speakers/headphones for audio, and a microphone to complete the test.

For security reasons, students cannot re-open the Online Placement Test once they start taking it. If a student exits before completing the test, it may be necessary to create a new assignment for him or her (which will provide a new set of test questions). The *Test Results* page (See Figure 9) shows students who have not started the test as having no *Time spent*. Students who have completed the test have full scores available. Students who started the test but did not complete it will be identified as having logged *Time spent* but showing 0% under *Progress*.

Figure 9 Test results for Online Placement Test

Student	Assignment	Time spent	Progress	CEFR	Use of En...	Listening	Reading	Speaking
Fatima Khan	October Placem...	42min 22sec	100%	B2.2	B2.2	B2.3	B2.2	
Juan Carlos Ram...	October Placem...	36min 12sec	100%	B2.3	B2.3	C1	B2.3	
Lin Xian	October Placem...	-	0%					

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