



## Three Ways to Assess What They Know

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Your skill at providing quality assessment [evaluation] can greatly effect your student's learning (as well as student's surveys of your teaching abilities.) In addition, a quality assessment plan, featuring a balanced and authentic assessment, ensures the strengths of one tool and minimizes the weaknesses of another.



❖ *Performance tasks are a critical component of the assessment plan because they focus on applying knowledge to the real world.*

Prior to choosing an assessment strategy, it is important for you to establish learning standards that clearly delineate what is to be learned and performed and to what standard must it be learned to receive the desired corresponding course grade.

### Traditional Testing

One of the three main methods of assessment is traditional testing. It includes classroom assessments such as teacher-made or test-bank tests and assignments. Unfortunately, many teacher-made tests and even some text-supplied tests are poorly constructed as they often emphasize verbal-linguistic skills and lower-order thinking.

In her book, *How To Assess Authentic Learning*, Kay Burke gives suggestions to improve the quality of traditional tests. These guidelines include: create the test before teaching the unit, ensure that the test correlates to course objectives, arrange questions from simple to complex, vary the question type (multiple choice, fill-in, matching, etc.), include visuals and give sufficient time for all students to finish.

Burke also recommends using questions that cover different levels of thinking. Gathering information questions use verbs such as match, describe, and name. Processing information questions use verbs like compare, classify, analyze and explain. To stimulate higher-order thinking, include application questions that require the student to evaluate, judge, predict and estimate. A good traditional test will cover all three levels of intellectual skills.

### **Portfolios: Provide Direct Evidence**

The portfolio is a powerful tool for learning and assessment, and it's a collection of evidence that reflects a student's knowledge and skills in a specific subject. It focuses on process and product.

There are many types of portfolios as well as purposes for their use. The portfolio process involves three steps:

- Collecting the evidence of learning.
- Selecting artifacts for inclusion in the portfolio.
- Reflection.

Portfolios are evaluated using scoring systems, which contain multiple evaluative criteria and pre-specified quality standards. They emphasize self-assessment, reflection, goal setting and application. This strategy also prepares your students to create a professional portfolio for use in their career.

### **Performance Tasks: Problem-based Assessments**

The last main type of assessment is the performance task. This method involves using practical applications to

problems found in the real world. A multitude of options are available to you depending on the subject matter.

You may ask students to provide solutions to a current community problem, demonstrate verbal or psychomotor skills relevant to the subject matter, or create a product that is useful in that particular field. These tasks encourage higher-order thinking and train your students in real-life skills.

Evaluate performance tasks with scoring rules. Have your students assist in the development of these procedures. Performance tasks are a critical component of the assessment plan because they focus on applying knowledge to real world problems and situations.

### **Balanced and Authentic: The Twin Goals**

Your ultimate goal in using this type of assessment plan is to gain an accurate picture of student learning and achievement. You can then use this knowledge to make informed decisions regarding evaluation and to improve your teaching and the learning process. Using a variety of strategies and incorporating a balanced and authentic assessment will be most effective.