

Two Approaches to Thinking About Assessment

When thinking like an assessor, we ask –

- ⌚ What would be sufficient and revealing evidence of understanding?
- ⌚ Given the goals, what performance tasks must anchor the unit and focus the instructional work?
- ⌚ What are the different types of evidence required by Stage 1 desired results?
- ⌚ Against what criteria will we appropriately consider work and assess levels of quality?
- ⌚ Did the assessments reveal and distinguish those who really understood from those who only seemed to? Am I clear on the reasons behind the learner mistakes?

When thinking like an activity designer (only), we ask –

- ⌚ What would be fun and interesting activities on this topic?
- ⌚ What projects might students wish to do on this topic?
- ⌚ What tests should I give, based on the content I taught?
- ⌚ How will I give students a grade (and justify it to their parents)?
- ⌚ How well did the activities work?
- ⌚ How did students do on the test?

Types of Evidence

Performance Tasks

Complex challenges that mirror the issues and problems faced by adults. Ranging in length from short-term tasks to long-term projects, they yield one or more tangible products and performances. They differ from academic prompts in the following ways:

- ⌚ Involve a real or simulated setting and the kind of constraints, background “noise”, incentives, and opportunities an adult would find in a similar situation (i.e. they are authentic).
- ⌚ Typically require the student to address an identified audience (real or simulated).
- ⌚ Are based on a specific purpose that relates to the audience.
- ⌚ Allow students greater opportunity to personalize the task.
- ⌚ Are not secure: The task, evaluative criteria, and performance standards are known in advance and guide the student.

Academic Prompts

Open-ended questions or problems that require the student to think critically, not just recall knowledge, and to prepare a specific academic response, product, or performance. Such questions or problems:

- ⌚ Require constructed responses to specific prompts under school and exam conditions.
- ⌚ Are “open”, with no single best answer or strategy expected for solving them.
- ⌚ Are often “ill structured”, requiring the development of a strategy.
- ⌚ Involve analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- ⌚ Typically require an explanation or defense of the answer given and methods used.
- ⌚ Require judgment-based scoring based on criteria and performance standards.
- ⌚ May or may not be secure.
- ⌚ Involve questions typically only asked of students in school.

Quiz and Test Items

Familiar assessment formats consisting of simple, content-focused items that:

- ⌚ Assess for factual information, concepts, and discrete skills.
- ⌚ Use selected-response (e.g., multiple-choice, true-false, matching) or short-answer formats.
- ⌚ Are convergent, typically having a single, best answer.
- ⌚ May be easily scored using an answer key or machine.
- ⌚ Are typically secure (i.e., items are not known in advance).

Informal Checks for Understanding

Ongoing assessments used as part of the instructional process. Examples include teacher questioning, observations, examining student work, and think-alouds. These assessments provide feedback to the teacher and the student. They are not typically scored or graded.

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