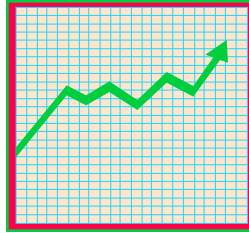


# BEST PRACTICES FOR ASSESSING SKILLS

Determine **WHAT** was learned and how well

Use progress charting



## Understanding the problem...

Typically, teachers evaluate students' skill development using techniques and materials that they have developed. Often, teachers will use question and answer techniques, during or at the end of the lesson, to determine which skills students have learned. In and out of class (homework) practice activities are also frequently used to monitor students' skill performance. Periodically, teacher made quizzes and/or drill and practice tests are also employed to determine how well students are able to perform a skill.

There are a number of problems associated with these approaches. For example, worksheet and test formats measure students' skills in a contrived manner (e.g., under circumstances where they would not typically be expected to perform the skill). If no evaluation is conducted prior to the skill related test, then students' errors cannot be corrected and the instruction cannot be adjusted accordingly. Teacher made materials and approaches can also be subjective and misleading about students' level of skill performance. Collectively, these problems result in faulty assumptions about students' skill performance and ability. In turn, this perpetuates cycles of ineffective instruction followed by poor student performance.

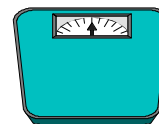
## A key to the solution...

Like effective instruction, effective evaluation must be planned. Strategically and consistently develop an assessment plan to evaluate student performance of the skill.



To generate a plan follow steps 1 through 4 in the Specific Tips section and check out ways to "jazz it up" to ensure your success!

***Teaching without an assessment plan is analogous to embarking on a weight reduction plan without scales!***



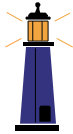
## Specific Tips

Effective teachers plan for systematic evaluation of student performance. The steps are:

1. Ensure you have determined what skills all students are expected to perform and how well. Establishing clear goals for skill development is essential to effective teaching and assessment. If you have completed the “think ahead” and “think during” sections of planning for skill instruction then you have already completed this step. If not, you need to review these procedures.

Tactics for beginning a strategy lesson  
Tactics for use during the strategy lesson

2. Address how performance of the skill will be assessed. Check lists, rubrics, portfolios, annotated notes, and % accuracy approaches are easy to implement and produce rich and abundant sources of information about skill performance.



### Decision Making Guidelines

*When do you use check lists, rubrics, portfolios, annotated notes, or % accuracy?*

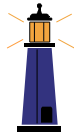
- 1) **Consider whether the skill is beginning or advanced.** For example, if a skill is new and unfamiliar to the students then checklists or % accuracy approaches would be appropriate because each step of the skill can be monitored separately.
- 2) **Consider the content area and nature of the skill by asking yourself if there is more than one correct way to perform the skill and how the skill is related to other content areas.** For example, if the skill involves the students' use of the PLAN writing strategy then there a number of content areas where they could apply the skill. Consequently, a writing portfolio that includes written reports in biology, american cultures, and composition and speech classes would be appropriate.

**Check lists** delineate the steps that are necessary to complete a skill. The evaluator documents the completion of each required step by recording check marks in the appropriate spaces.

**Rubrics** identify skill performance standards and dimensions using scales or graphic organizers. Numerical values (e.g., 1 to 3) and verbal descriptions (e.g., emerging to sophisticated) anchor the scales. The evaluator indicates student competency by subjectively rating skill performance in accordance with the scale.

**Portfolios** are a collection of students' works that are compiled to provide evidence of competent skill performance. The formats for portfolio presentation are flexible. A file, notebook, or box may be used to organize and display the contents. The items may be teacher and/or student selected. The evaluation of the portfolio rates the work in accordance with predetermined likert scale type standards (e.g., novice to distinguished).

**Annotated notes** are the teacher's daily observations regarding student performance. The written comments are subjective and reflect the teacher's



### Decision Making Guidelines

*When do you use check lists, rubrics, portfolios, annotated notes, or % accuracy?*

- 3) **Consider the ultimate goal for student performance of the skill.**  
If students will need to use the skill in the real-world then use assessment approaches that can be adapted to reflect real-world standards. For example, if students are expected to learn to balance a checkbook and calculate accrued interest, then use a % accuracy approach that incorporates banking standards.
- 4) **Consider top-down or bottom-up nature of skill performance.**  
Bottom-up approaches focus on measuring the details that are relevant and necessary to complete the task. Top-down assessment focuses on measuring the "big picture" skill and only assesses the task details that are missing or incomplete. Because top-down approaches are broader, they are useful in assessing skills that are in maintenance or generalization stages of learning. An example would be to use rubrics to assess how effectively and efficiently use interpersonal skills to complete a cooperative learning activity. Whereas, annotated notes and a checklist would be appropriate for measuring students' adherence to lab safety procedures.

thoughts about students' behavioral and academic achievement. The notes focus on teacher and student actions and are recorded as events occur in the classroom. For example, a teacher might jot down questions for follow-up activities or key components or steps that need to be revisited because students appeared to be confused and unable to perform the skill.

**Percent accuracy approaches** involve the direct measurement of a specific skill. The approach measures student's performance by calculating the number of skill steps performed correctly. This approach offers flexibility in terms of applicable content areas, student response modes, type and location of administration, and scoring. For example, student work samples can be scored, classroom quizzes or tests can be evaluated, or observations can be conducted. The results obtained from percent accuracy approaches indicate how well students are able to perform the skill. For example, students are able to follow lab safety procedures with 100% accuracy on a daily basis.


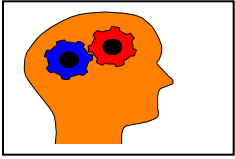
3. Identify the **situations** in which **assessment will take place**. Evaluation of student performance occurs either in a de-contextualized or a contextualized manner. The assessment is de-contextualized when the student is required to demonstrate the skill in isolation. Contextualized assessment occurs when the student is required to perform the skill in naturally occurring ways. Contextualized approaches to assessment are generally more authentic. This means that students are required to demonstrate the skill in a real-world context and that teachers measure the students' performance using

real-world standards. For example, when students are required to complete a worksheet or take a quiz to demonstrate their knowledge regarding lab safety procedures, then the assessment is de-contextualized. Whereas, if students are required to complete a daily checklist demonstrating their adherence to the use of lab safety procedures with 100% accuracy, then the assessment is contextualized because they are performing the skill in a naturally occurring way to ensure that safety procedures are followed routinely.

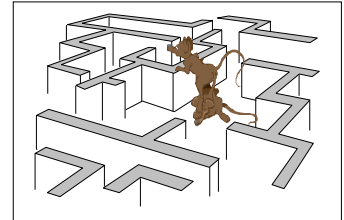
4. Consider **who** will assess the skill performance. Assessment can be conducted by teachers, a team of peers, an individual peer, or by the students themselves (self-assessment). Varying evaluators helps to ensure that conclusions about student performance are based on multiple perspectives and sources of information. Evaluations based on **only** the teacher's perspective may be biased and misleading. A well-rounded and eclectic approach to evaluation helps to ensure objectivity and accuracy regarding student skill performance.

5. Determine how student performance will be **documented**. Progress charts, grade books, and portfolios are teacher friendly methods that display evidence of student learning. These methods for illustrating performance are also vehicles to provide on-going feedback to students, parents, other teachers, etc. For example, students can use their portfolios to compare and contrast their skill development from one marking period to the next or progress charts can be used to effectively communicate several months worth of student performance data within the constraints of a 15 minute parent-teacher conference.

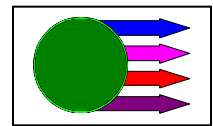
### *Jazzing it up...*

1. **Be specific about what skills you will evaluate.** Specific assessment plans are easier to stick to than vague ones. If your plan includes vague action that will guide you. Rather than, "I will evaluate lab skills" try, "I will use a checklist to evaluate student's skills in following lab safety procedures on Tuesdays. Students will use the same checklist to evaluate their skills in following lab safety procedures on Thursdays. "  
An icon showing a yellow pencil pointing to a checklist box with a red 'X' inside, symbolizing evaluation or assessment.
2. **Be creative, yet realistic with the creation of your assessment plan.** The procedures that you include in the plan should **not** be numerous. If you attempt to undertake too many assessment procedures, you will become overwhelmed and unable to conduct them. Select measures that are easy and convenient to implement. For example, if you want to evaluate students' skills in using the PLAN writing strategy, a checklist and a writing portfolio would suffice. There is no need to use annotated notes, teacher made quizzes, and percent accuracy approached as well. Less can be more!  
An icon of a human head profile with two interlocking gears (one blue, one red) inside, symbolizing thought, creativity, or cognitive processes.

3. **Anticipate confusion and roadblocks because they are bound to emerge.** Students, parents, and other teachers might become anxious or frustrated when you begin to use varied approaches to skill assessment. It is important to realize that resistance to change is a natural reaction. Be prepared to be supportive and plan to clearly communicate the value of conducting assessment in new and varied ways. Remind yourself and others to be patient until everyone gets the hang of things!



4. **Be patient and believe in yourself.** Any type of change is difficult. Departing from your familiar evaluation procedures may leave you feeling frustrated, anxious, or tense. Reinforce your belief in yourself and your students by finding realistic role models, other teachers who are doing or trying to do what you want to. There can be strength and success in numbers.



5. **Build a support system with the teachers in your building or district.** Encourage comradely relationships by facilitating regularly scheduled gatherings. Meet monthly to brainstorm ideas for evaluation and discuss successes and failures.



6. **Be a lifelong learner.** Audio or videotape your lessons. Enroll in graduate courses in assessment or read teacher-friendly professional journal articles (in all of your spare time!) related to assessment and evaluation. Continually evaluate your existing assessment related goals and generate new ones to guide your future evaluation practice.

