A decorative graphic on the left side of the page. It features three circles: a large light blue circle at the top, a smaller light blue circle in the middle, and a large light gray circle at the bottom. Two thin blue lines cross the page diagonally, one from the top-left to the bottom-right, and another from the top-right to the bottom-left. The text is positioned to the right of the middle blue circle.

Student – Centered Classroom Assessment

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Student – Centered Classroom Assessment

" Assessment practices that provide opportunities for open-ended responses and that enable youngsters to play to their strengths fly in the face of assumptions about uniformity. . . . The good school . . . does not diminish individual differences; it increases them. It raises the mean and increases the variance."

—Elliot W. Eisner in “The Uses and Limits of Performance Assessment,” 1999

Introduction :

Student-centered assessment embodies sound assessment practices that can be incorporated into any educational setting but are especially critical in student-centered learning contexts, where active engagement in learning and responsibility for the management of learning are core assumptions (Lea, Stephenson, & Troy 2003). In this report, we begin to paint a picture of student-centered assessment by discussing existing classroom-based assessment practices in terms of its role in a comprehensive system and how well it represents our defining characteristics of student-centered assessment. The picture that emerges includes a blend of classroom-based assessments, such as: student self- and peer assessments, formative tests, and portfolios . We also feature computer-based assessments, which hold special promise in a balanced system. While all the assessments we discuss play a valuable role, some are more student-centered than others, according to the definition used for the Students at the Center project. We point out some of the challenges faced by each type of assessment and outline possibilities for advancements.

A DEFINITION OF STUDENT-CENTERED ASSESSMENT:

Like any good assessment, student-centered assessment articulates appropriately challenging and developmentally appropriate learning targets. It also provides feedback to students, teachers, districts, and states about how to deepen learning. It is valid and reliable for the given context, and it is practicable and efficient (McMillan 2011).

Our vision of student-centered assessment has several additional defining qualities. It is:

- > Individualized;
 - > Focused on learning and growth;
 - > Motivating;
 - > Amenable to actively engaging students in the regulation of their own learning;
- and
- > Informative and useful to a variety of audiences.

The first and most obvious feature of student-centered assessment is that it is individualized. Indeed, how could it not center on individual students' strengths, needs, and interests and still be student centered? Individualizing assessment involves differentiating learning targets, assignments, and tasks, providing focused feedback on students' learning (whether they are working alone or in groups), and adjusting teaching and learning processes as needed.

Student-centered assessment also focuses on learning and growth. That means it does more than measure and report student learning or the lack thereof—although it does those things as well. Student-centered assessment promotes learning and growth by providing useful feedback to the students themselves, their teachers, and others about what the students need in order to progress toward the learning target. This quality of student-centered assessment echoes modern conceptions of formative assessment in that assessment is a moment of learning, not just grading, ranking, or sorting .

Student-centered assessment involves the active engagement of students in setting goals for their learning and growth, monitoring their progress toward those goals, and determining how to address any gaps. Also called self-regulated learning, the ability to manage one's own learning and growth is a key type of expertise needed for 21st-century college and career success . Classroom assessment practices such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and portfolios have the potential to not only help students learn core content knowledge and skills, but also to develop important self-regulatory habits (Allal 2010; Andrade 2010).

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of our definition of student-centered assessment is that it is motivating. Many people associate being evaluated with mild to moderate anxiety, not motivation, and research has shown that grades can be associated with decreased motivation and lower achievement . However, recent studies have shown that formative assessment—particularly detailed, task-specific comments on student work—can activate interest in a task and result in better performance .

Recent studies have shown that formative assessment—particularly detailed, task-specific comments on student work—can activate interest in a task and result in better performance.

Finally, student-centered assessment is informative and useful to a variety of audiences. Daniel Resnick and Lauren Resnick (1985) have said that American students are the most tested and the least examined students in the world. We have test scores coming out of our ears, but we do not yet do a very good job of using assessment information to adapt curricula and instruction. Student-centered assessment provides useful information that stakeholders at all levels—including students, teachers, administrators, parents, districts, and states—can use to support learning. For an example of an assessment that is informative at the local level, consider public exhibitions of student work, which engage an audience from the community in discussions of the quality of student work and learning, and of the education students are getting (Davidson & Feldman 2010)

Assessment is key to creating a more student-centered classroom. Before proceeding, though, we want to clarify what we mean by *assessment*. We don't mean testing, nor do we mean grading. Unfortunately this term has been hijacked to mean more testing and knowing students only in terms of their test scores. We know this is unacceptable and does not meet the needs of all students. Yes, data such as test scores can give us a window into better serving our students, but it's not the whole window. If we truly want to know our students, we must view them as a stained-glass window with test data as only one of many pieces. Assessment can allow us to know the whole child as we create a more student-centered classroom.

What is Formative Assessment?

We assess students to understand what they have acquired from our instruction. The purpose of formative assessment is to adapt and accommodate our instruction based on student needs and readiness, to determine if we have achieved our goals and whether we can continue or should reteach the language .

Formative assessment guides us in many ways. It helps us to appropriately scaffold and provides feedback to us and to the students . Use formative assessment to check for understanding and adjust your instruction based on what you've found.

Do we grade formative assessments?

Often, formative assessments are not graded. We focus on qualitative rather than quantitative feedback. While we won't usually grade formative assessments, we might want to consider tracking them to see trends and improvements .

How does formative assessment differ from summative (traditional) assessment?

At base, we use formative assessment to alter our instruction and guide us toward discovering what students need more of, as compared to traditional quizzes that often serve to see what students don't know. Formative assessment transforms thinking about grades or points to thinking about progress or acquisition of the language .

Often, summative assessment, which is used to summarize or assess the development of learners at a specific time, can be used to identify weaknesses that formative assessment can then build on. A handy contrast is to think of summative assessment as assessment *of* learning, while formative assessment is assessment *for* learning .

Assessment for learning:

Students know at the beginning of a lesson or unit what they are expected to learn, work with the teacher to identify what she or he already knows about the topic and to see where any gaps or misconceptions exist. Together, the child and teacher work to determine learning needs, where and how improvement can take place and document the progress. Assessment takes place throughout the learning process, and is embedded in that. The assessment may be a learning experience at the same time, and has descriptive feedback but not typically a grade.

Assessment of learning:

Is measured more often at the end of a lesson or unit of study simply to assess what is known at the end (summative assessment) and is usually graded, and sometimes compared to a standard.

Electronic documentation: This refers to anecdotal notes, photos, scan of child's drawing or written work documented as a computer file, to be kept as an item in an electronic portfolio.

Formative assessment:

Is a measure of what students know and can do during the lesson or unit to guide instruction and reinforce learning.

National Assessment Policy: This refers to the National Assessment Policy prescribed by the Ministry of Education, Maldives.

Summative assessment:

Takes place at the end of a unit of study to determine the level of student understanding or skill. Examples: formal tests, final exams, final projects, term papers, etc. The information is often used in determining a grade, placement, or promotion.

The following picture will summarize what was mentioned above:

Nature of Assessment	Purpose
Assessment of Learning	Being summative, it measures student's attainment of standards.
Assessment as Learning	The student reflects on results of assessment, charts his/her own progress, and plans next steps to improve performance; builds metacognition as it involves the student in setting and monitoring own learning goals.
Assessment for Learning	Determines student's background knowledge and skills; tracks student's progress in understanding

Assessing Student Passions and Learning Styles

One key way to create a more student-centered classroom is by assessing students for their passions and interests. All of our students come with powerful experiences that have driven their lives, such as family stories, favorite books, hobbies, and trips. We can use a variety of assessment tools like one-on-one conversations, journals, and graphic organizers to learn more about our students and what drives them to learn. Tools like [learning profile cards](#) can allow us to differentiate appropriately, leverage our students' strengths, and push them to learn in different ways. Assessing for passions and interests can also push us to know our students more deeply and create a classroom designed for them.

Assessing 21st-Century/Success Skills

We know that some of our students collaborate better than others, just as some students have more global empathy than others. If we assess for these success or 21st-century skills, we can provide experiences and instructions that foster those skills and allow our students to grow in areas that are more than simply content knowledge or skills. Teachers can use [rubrics](#) and other assessment tools to let students know what these success skills look, sound, and feel like. In addition, they can use these assessment tools for self, teacher, and expert assessment.

Formative Assessment of Content and Skills

Test data lets us know how students are progressing toward learning content and skills from the standards. However, these standardized tests may only assess the bare minimum (if that) of the level of rigor that we want and expect from our students. Also, these assessments do not provide us with just-in-time data that we can truly use. What we get from them often comes too late for our purposes. While we can look at the data for trends, we may not be able to use this information in the immediate moment to meet the needs of individual students. Teachers instead should use low-stakes **formative assessments** to assess students' content knowledge and skills. This way, we can learn which concepts and skills need to be retaught, and which ones students have mastered. These assessments are not graded. Instead, we can use them to create a learning environment that is more student-centered.

Assessing for Instruction

All of these data points and assessments should primarily drive instruction in the classroom, and they are all examples of powerful formative assessments. The intent of formative assessments is to **feed forward** in the instruction, and create learning activities that individual students need. Yes, this may mean whole-group instruction, but it often means small-group or individual instruction. When we use formative assessments carefully, we can discover whether students need a think-aloud or model, or if they are ready for independent practice and application. In addition, formative assessment can tell us if students need more collaborative learning. Whenever we plan instruction, we know it is never set in stone, and we use on-the-spot assessment to make immediate decisions for instruction, as well as using these assessments to feed forward for future instruction. If we use assessment to provide the right just-in-time instruction, we can increase student engagement in a more student-centered classroom.

Truly, assessment can be a powerful force for knowing our students and creating a classroom that can meet their needs. We simply have to move past the baggage that comes with the term *assessment*, and understand that it can mean a lot of things. We can assess for content and skills, yes, but we can also assess for passions, interests, success skills, and the like for the purposes of the right instruction at the right time.

Successful assessment:

1. Flows from the institution's mission.
2. Has a conceptual framework.
3. Has faculty ownership/responsibility.
4. Has institution-wides support.
5. Uses multiple measures.
6. Provides feedback to students and the institution.
7. IS cost-effective.

8. Does not restrict or inhibit goals of access, equity, and diversity established by the institution.
9. Leads to improvement.
10. Includes a process for evaluating the assessment program.

FORMATIVE STUDENT-CENTERED ASSESSMENT AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL

The purpose of classroom-based assessment in a balanced, student-centered system is to provide timely information to students and teachers about where students are in their learning, what gaps in knowledge and understanding exist, and how teachers and students can work to deepen learning (Perie, Marion, & Gong 2009). Particularly student-centered forms of classroom assessment include self- and peer assessment, process portfolios, and formative tests.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

The purpose of self-assessment is to identify areas of strength and weakness in one's work in order to make improvements and promote learning, achievement, and self-regulation. As defined by Paul Pintrich (2000), self-regulation is the tendency to monitor and manage one's own learning. Research suggests that self-regulation and student achievement are closely related: Students who set goals, make flexible plans to meet them, and monitor their progress tend to learn more and do better in school than students who do not (Zimmerman & Schunk 2011). Self-assessment is a key element of self-regulation because it involves awareness of the goals of a task and checking one's progress toward them. As a result of self-assessment, Dale Schunk (2003) found that both self-regulation and achievement can increase.

It is critical to recognize the nature of self-assessment as formative. Self-assessment is done on work in progress in order to inform revision and improvement; it is not a matter of having students determine their own grades. Given what we know about human nature, as well as research regarding students' tendencies to inflate self-evaluations that count toward final grades, we subscribe to a purely formative type of student self-assessment—that is, as feedback for oneself from oneself. Done correctly, self-assessment can play a fundamental role in a balanced system of student centered assessment. By encouraging students to critique their own work and explicitly identify both strengths and areas that need improvement, self-assessment is individualized. It involves active student engagement by putting ownership of the assessment process in the students' hands: They are in charge of monitoring progress toward goals by comparing their work to explicit criteria, identifying gaps, and making plans to close those gaps. Student involvement is even greater if their teacher involves students in generating the criteria for a task, perhaps by co-creating a rubric.

The focus of self-assessment is learning and growth: Students generate feedback through the self-assessment process and then have opportunities to use that feedback to improve their work. This process of identifying weaknesses and making improvements can be repeated until mastery is achieved. In this way, self-assessment provides useful information to the students themselves about the quality of their work. However, student self-assessments are of limited usefulness to audiences outside the classroom; hence, the need for other forms of assessment.

Effective self-assessment involves at least three steps:

1. Articulate performance targets. The teacher, the students, or, preferably, both clearly articulate the expectations for the task or performance. Students become better acquainted with the task at hand when they are involved in thinking about what counts and how quality is defined. Co-creating a rubric is an effective way to make expectations clear and readily available to students. A rubric is usually a one- or two-page document that lists criteria and describes varying levels of quality, from excellent to poor, for a specific assignment.

2. Checking progress toward the targets. Students take a first attempt at their assignment, be it an essay, lab report, choral performance, or speech. They monitor their progress on their assignments by comparing their performances-in-progress to the expectations, noting areas of strength and weakness and making plans for improvement.

3. Revision. Students use feedback from their selfassessments to guide revision. This step is crucial. Students, being savvy, will not assess their own work thoughtfully unless they know their efforts can lead to opportunities to make improvements and possibly increase their grades.

Heidi Goodrich (1996) has generated a list of conditions that are necessary for effective self-assessment. Students need:

- > Awareness of the value of self-assessment;
- > Access to clear criteria on which to base the assessment;
- > A specific task or performance to assess;
- > Models of self-assessment;
- > Direct instruction in and assistance with self-assessment;
- > Practice;
- > Cues regarding when it is appropriate to self-assess; and
- > Opportunities to revise and improve the task or performance.

Research has examined the effects of self-assessment in a wide range of content areas, including writing (Evans 2001). Findings suggest that student self-assessment can promote achievement and learner autonomy. Student reactions to self-assessment are generally positive, but they report needing support and practice to reap the full benefits of the process (Andrade & Du 2007).

PEER ASSESSMENT

The purpose of peer assessment is for learners to provide feedback to one another on the quality of a product or performance . Students engaged in peer assessment help one another identify strengths, weaknesses, and target areas for improvement. According to Keith Topping, peer assessment happens both inside and outside of school and across different times and contexts, leading to the development of valuable metacognitive, personal, and professional skills. Similar to self-generated feedback, peer feedback is available in much greater volume and with greater immediacy than is teacher feedback.

Peer feedback can play an important role in a balanced system of student-centered assessment. It is individualized, and it actively engages students in the assessment process as peers familiarize themselves with the assessment criteria, examine a particular piece of work, and identify its unique strengths, weaknesses, and need for improvement—all of which they then discuss with the creator of the work. The focus is on growth through feedback, followed by opportunities to revise, improve, and promote mastery. Peer feedback is informative and useful for all in a peer feedback group as they take turns giving and receiving feedback on works in progress. Like self-assessment, however, peer assessment information has limited value for parents, administrators, and policymakers.

Topping (2010) argues that effective peer assessment involves the following steps:

1. Students and teachers co-create assessment criteria
2. Peers are placed into pairs or small groups based on similar ability levels.
3. The teacher provides training by modeling how to assess a piece of work using explicit criteria.
4. Students get a checklist with peer assessment guidelines.
5. The activity to be assessed and timeline are specified.
6. The teacher monitors the progress of the peer assessment groups.
7. The quality of the feedback is examined.
8. Reliability is checked by comparing teacher- and peer-generated feedback.
9. The teacher provides feedback to the students about the effectiveness of their assessments.

Research suggests that peer assessment can improve the quality and effectiveness of learning across grade levels, particularly in writing (Yang, Ko, & Chung 2005). Furthermore, both the assessee and the assessor benefit from peer assessment (Topping 2010). As Topping notes, “[L]istening, explaining, questioning, summarizing, speculating, and hypothesizing are all valuable skills of effective peer assessment.” While an initial investment is necessary to establish effective peer feedback groups, it is likely to be worthwhile in terms of student learning.

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PORTFOLIOS

An academic portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that includes student involvement in its construction and student reflection on its contents (Belgrad, Burke, & Fogarty 2008). The purpose is to scaffold student reflection and self-regulated learning, as well as to provide nuanced information—about a student’s knowledge, dispositions, motivations, and needs—that can help teachers, students, and parents make decisions.

There are two general categories of portfolios: those that showcase a student’s best work; and those that demonstrate growth and learning over time (Brookhart 2008). The latter are sometimes called process portfolios or process-folios (Seidel et al. 1997). The key feature of a process portfolio is evidence of students’ learning processes and products. For example, a writing process portfolio typically includes several drafts, along with the student’s comments on each draft. Together, the writing and the student reflections show improvement over time, with each subsequent piece showing more developed skill than earlier works.

All portfolios are individualized collections of student work that trace progress and highlight strengths via physical artifacts. For portfolios to be successful and student-centered, students must be actively engaged in their creation, especially by setting goals for the learning and achievement, selecting the pieces to include in the portfolio, and reflecting on what those pieces communicate about their own progress toward their goals. In this way, portfolios scaffold self-regulation. Process portfolios are designed to show progression from novice to mastery. Both process and showcase portfolios can be useful and informative to students, parents, teachers, and, sometimes, administrators. However, research on the effectiveness of portfolios suggests they are best used formatively for classroom assessment purposes, rather than summatively as large-scale evaluations, thus limiting their usefulness to audiences outside the school (Brookhart 2008; Herman & Winters 1994). Barrett (2007) describes the value of electronic portfolios, or e-portfolios, that harness technology to enable archiving, linking, storytelling, collaborating, and publishing. Electronic portfolios use computers and/or the Internet as a container, allowing students to collect and organize their portfolio materials in audio, video, graphics, and text. A study by Chi-Cheng Chang and Kuo-Hung Tseng (2009) suggests that the use of electronic portfolios is positively associated with improvements in student performance, goal setting, problem solving, and reflection.

Formative tests differ in a very important way from practice tests, which usually involve students taking a test, passively listening as the teacher goes over the correct answers, then taking another test. It is not really hearing the correct answers to the test that makes formative use of testing work.

Assessment in the Context of Student-centered Learning: The Students at the Center

It is the hard thinking that happens in between the tests that matters (Bloom 1984). This approach to testing is based on Benjamin Bloom's approach to mastery learning, which emphasizes the value of formative assessment and corrective procedures that re-teach content to struggling learners in a new way (Guskey 2010).

Research shows that mastery learning is related to learning gains, especially for struggling students, and that it has positive effects on students' attitudes toward course content (Kulik, Kulik, & Bangert-Drowns 1990). In fact, after reviewing meta-analyses from over 40 areas of educational research, Chen-Lin Kulik, James Kulik, and Robert Bangert-Drowns concluded that "few educational treatments of any sort were consistently associated with achievement effects as large as those produced by mastery learning."

Formative uses of summative testing are individualized: they provide information about what each student does and does not know, at least in terms of what was tested. This approach to testing is designed with learning and growth in mind. The explicit goal of the first test is to activate learning about the content of the second test. Although teachers can do all the work of analyzing the results of the first test to identify areas that need to be retaught, testing at its best actively engages students in the regulation of their own learning when they themselves determine the gaps in their knowledge and make plans for filling in those gaps. Having a grasp of the targets for their learning (as articulated by the first test) and a chance to learn more and earn a higher grade is likely to be motivating, especially to students who need extra time or resources.

Of the four classroom assessment processes discussed in this section, formative uses of summative testing are informative and useful to the widest variety of audiences. The usefulness to administrators can be enhanced if the first test is also used as an interim test and analyzed in terms of the instructional and curricular needs of a class or entire grade level.

Testing at its best actively engages students in the regulation of their own learning when they themselves determine the gaps in their knowledge and make plans for filling in those gaps.

SUMMATIVE STUDENT-CENTERED ASSESSMENT AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL:

EXHIBITIONS

Exhibitions are public demonstrations of mastery that occur at culminating moments, such as at the conclusion of a unit of study or at high school graduation

(Davidson 2009). Their purpose is to support sustained, personalized learning while assuring commitment, engagement, and high-level intellectual achievement aligned with established standards. Exhibitions ensure continuity between formative classroom assessments and high-stakes summative assessments by employing teaching, learning, and assessment practices in classroom settings to rehearse, emphasize, and otherwise reinforce progress toward successful final exhibitions.

According to Jill Davidson, exhibitions represent a paradigm shift from evaluating academic achievement strictly through “seat time” toward a system of authentic demonstrations of mastery designed to simulate the kinds of open-ended challenges faced by people working in a field of study.

Exhibitions are a rare example of a summative assessment process that exemplifies each of our characteristics of student-centered assessment. They are individualized to student interests. They involve personalized, ongoing feedback from a variety of sources before the official, summative exhibition. They actively engage students in regulating learning by requiring them to set short-term and long-term goals and to seek out feedback in order to achieve a successful outcome.

Because exhibitions are typically presented to an audience that includes practicing experts, they provide an authentic, real-world task that can increase student motivation. By definition, exhibitions are demonstrations of mastery that provide useful information about student learning and achievement to students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community members.

According to Davidson (2009), successful exhibitions:

- > Provide multiple opportunities for revision based on frequent feedback;
- > Are open to the public;
- > Involve school-wide participation;
- > Are high stakes (e.g., associated with graduation requirements);
 - > Occur at culminating moments; and
- > Are demonstrations of mastery.

In addition to these key features, Davidson lists four supportive conditions that facilitate the effective implementation of exhibitions:

- > School-wide, exhibitions-aligned instructional and assessment processes;
- > Structures that support sustained collaboration and inquiry among students and teachers;
 - > Strong connections with the community outside the school; and
- > Active participation in a system or network of other exhibitions-driven schools.

Because exhibitions are typically presented to an audience that includes practicing experts, they provide an authentic, real-world task that can increase student motivation.

Yet even an exquisitely balanced assessment system would present challenges. For one, the breadth and depth of the data about learning provided by modern measurement systems is awe-inspiring. Never before have students, teachers, parents, school districts, states, and the nation had access to such large quantities of high-quality information. But the sheer quantity of assessment data threatens to overwhelm us all. Even as we design new assessment processes, we must work to ensure they are useful to and used by the appropriate audiences. Students must learn how to take advantage of feedback to improve their work, deepen their understandings, and regulate their own learning. Teachers must learn how to individualize instruction and assessments and to make adjustments to instruction based on assessment results. Schools and districts must learn how to combine formative, interim, and summative results and interpret them in meaningful ways. And policymakers must learn to create and use balanced assessment systems that inform but do not overburden or overwhelm those they are designed to assist.

If that were not enough, we must also continually assess the assessments. From the perspective of evidence-centered design, we should be articulating our claims and goals for our assessment system, such as “students are revising their work based on individualized feedback,” describing the observable evidence for those claims, and designing or identifying sources of that evidence. That is the job of researchers who, in collaboration with educators, can help ensure that recent advances in assessment are as student-centered as possible.

So, assessment is an integral part of the course design, but is it really measuring the learning that both you and your students most want to achieve? Assessment should integrate grading, learning, and motivation for your students. Carefully planned assessment questions and methods make the time you spend grading assignments and tests worthwhile. Here are five suggestions to help you when planning assessment:

- 1. Consider what you want your students to learn and tell them.**

Effective assessment practices begin when you can complete the following sentence: "By the end of the course, I want my students to be able to ..." Concrete verbs such as define, argue, solve, and create are more helpful for course planning than vague verbs such as know or understand or passive verbs such as be exposed to. If you write, "I want students to think like kinesiologists," elaborate on what that means. How does a kinesiologist think? Which aspects of that thinking do you want to cultivate in your students? Be as specific as possible and the students will be much more likely to reach the intended learning outcomes of the course. And remember to

put these learning outcomes on your course outline and assignments. For ideas on wording your learning outcomes, see the CTE Teaching Tips "[Matching Assignments to the Level of Study](#)" and "[Writing Learning Outcomes](#)."

2. Select assignments and tests that measure what you value most.

Because grading is perhaps one of the most labour-intensive things that instructors do, why spend time grading work that does not address your most important goals? Try to ensure that your tests, exams, and assignments will teach and test the knowledge and skills that you most want students to learn. And throughout your course, teach students how to answer the kinds of questions that you will ask on tests and assignments. Help them to be prepared by asking them exam-type questions in class and encouraging them to answer by saying, "If I asked you this question on an exam, could you answer it?" Other main ideas to consider are as follows:

3. Choose assessment methods that elicit from your students the kind of learning that you want to measure.

A combination of careful forethought, knowledge of your own students and analysis of their work are the keys here. For example, if you teach math problems, you may want students to demonstrate their ability to solve problems *and* explain the process. Putting too much emphasis on getting the right answers can take away from the goals. So consider adding the following requirement to some of your assignments and exams: have students draw a vertical line down the centre of their page, dividing it into two columns. In one column they solve the problem, and in the other, they write sentences for each step to explain what they did and why.

Also consider carefully how you label assignments and tests and how your students may interpret those labels. If you ask for a "term paper" but really want a literature review, your students will not complete the assignment you had hoped for. Make your assumptions clear in classes and on your course outline and/or assignment description. And be sure to teach students how to complete the task at hand; if a literature review is new to them, spend some time teaching them how to write one.

Finally, think about your use of "traditional" assessment methods and ask yourself how much students really need to do in order to achieve your goals. The most important point is that a test or an assignment is a valid measurement only if it will elicit from your students the kind of learning you want to measure.

4. Choose assessment methods that are interesting and challenging to your students.

The type of assignments and tests that you administer will influence your students' motivation (Baird, 1987; Lowman 1995, 1996). Consider creative kinds of assignments without being carried away by something "cute" that doesn't meet your

needs. For example, an American historian asked students to write diary entries for a hypothetical Nebraska farm woman in the 1890s. He liked this assignment because it required that students know about economics, social class, transportation, gender roles, technology, family relations, religion, diet, and so on, yet it also gave students a chance to exercise their imaginations. He found that if he was explicit that they use the diary to display the breadth of their historical knowledge, the assignment achieved his learning goals in an enjoyable way. See the CTE teaching tip on "[Types of Assignments and Tests.](#)"

5. Use peer collaboration.

One obvious advantage of group assignments is that you have fewer assignments to grade, but collaborative assignments can also have strong pedagogical and motivational advantages. One advantage is the power of peer instruction. Astin (1996) summarizes his comprehensive study of factors that influence college students' learning: "The strongest single source of influence on cognitive and affective development (in college) is the student's peer group ... the study strongly suggests that the peer group is powerful because it has the capacity to involve the student more intensely in the educational experience" .

Assignments that encourage student involvement with one another and with you as the instructor may draw on this powerful force. Further, when well-managed, collaborative work can increase students' sense of their own control and power in the classroom (Perry, Menec, and Struthers, 1996). When poorly managed, however, collaborative assignments can decrease students' sense of control and increase their anxiety and anger. Careful planning and guidance of students is crucial to success. The most important principle to remember is that successful group assignments are those that can be better done by a group than by an individual student. It is crucial that students understand why they are participating in a group project rather than completing the assignment on their own. If you do that, the group's motivation to work together, solve group tensions, and deal effectively with non-participating members will be strong.

Don't be hyper-corrective.

Instead, focus on key content when you are evaluating work, and circle mistakes rather than fix them. If you really want students to learn from their mistakes, help them identify one problem at a time.

Construct an assessment skeleton:

Once you have chosen assessment methods and their general features, the next step is to combine all your tests and assignments into a bare-bones assessment "skeleton." This skeleton helps you see whether your assignments and tests fit both yours and your students' course goals and whether they are manageable in terms of workload. Ask yourself: "Is the workload reasonable, strategically placed, and sustainable?" The rest of the course outline can then be structured to help students learn what they need to know if they are to do well on the tests and assignments. For more information about course design, refer to the CTE teaching tip, "[Course Design Heuristic](#)".

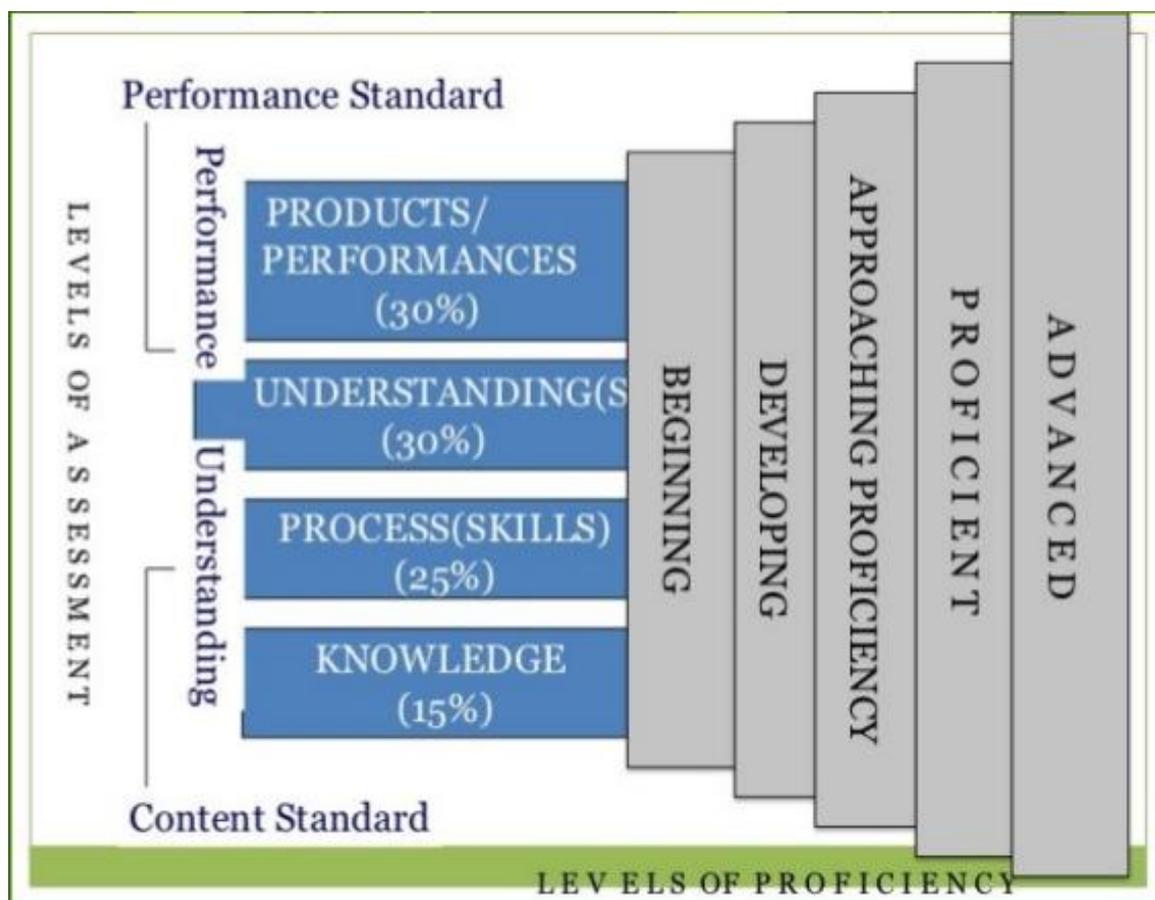
Collaborate with your students to set and achieve goals.

Your goals as an instructor are not the only ones in your classroom. Your students' goals are also very powerful. An understanding of those goals is crucial to designing effective assessment methods because if the instructor and students are on different wavelengths, the students may not complete the assignments in the way the instructor planned.

Student input can come in varying degrees. Try asking the students on the first day you meet with them what they think the purpose of the class is and what they want to learn from it. You may ask them to record their personal learning goals for the course and some strategies by which they can accomplish those goals. Alternatively, ask them to recall the most successful course they've had in the past. What assessment methods worked for them there? Can they use or adapt these strategies for your class? Some instructors even wait to finalize their goals and syllabus until after meeting with their students once or twice so that the students can help set the course goals. However, the input that you allow the students can also be very minimal, for example, allowing them to decide whether they would like an assignment to be worth 10% vs. 20%. If you take the liberty of establishing the goals without direct student input, you should still be somewhat flexible because each cohort of students will be different - do not assume that the same goals and methods will work equally well with any group. The degree of collaboration that is acceptable will vary across disciplines and institutions, but the bottom line is that it is very important to know the types of goals your students have in order to create assessment methods that will motivate them to learn.

Make assignment and test instructions clear to students.

How can we assess learning when students define the task in different ways? Once you have assignments and tests that assess what you most want your students to learn, you need to ensure that your instructions for the assignment are clear to your students. Tell the students what you are looking for by means of a rubric or by providing examples. Sometimes it is also useful to ask for pieces of the assignment along the way (for example, an essay proposal/outline, or a scientific hypothesis) to ensure that students are on the right track. Remember that with sketchy or ambiguous instructions, you risk having students draw on previous learning that may not be relevant or desirable in your situation. Help them to succeed by being as clear as possible and limit both student and instructor frustrations.



Standards and Assessment :

Setting appropriately high and challenging standards and assessing the learner as well as learning progress -- including diagnostic, process, and outcome assessment -- are integral parts of the learning process.

Assessment provides important information to both the learner and teacher at all stages of the learning process. Effective learning takes place when learners feel challenged to work towards appropriately high goals; therefore, appraisal of the learner's cognitive strengths and weaknesses, as well as current knowledge and skills, is important for the selection of instructional materials of an optimal degree of difficulty. Ongoing assessment of the learner's understanding of the curricular material can provide valuable feedback to both learners and teachers about progress toward the learning goals. Standardized assessment of learner progress and outcomes assessment provides one type of information about achievement levels both within and across individuals that can inform various types of programmatic decisions. Performance assessments

This historical document is derived from a 1990 APA presidential task force (revised in 1997). can provide other sources of information about the attainment of learning outcomes. Self-assessments of learning progress can also improve students self-appraisal skills and enhance motivation and self-directed learning.

* The development of each principle involved thorough discussions of the research supporting that principle. The multidisciplinary research expertise of the Task Force and Work Group members facilitated an examination of each principle from a number of different research perspectives.

CONCLUSION:

Remember that the most important thing is to choose assessment methods that will assess the type of learning you are trying to achieve in your course. That means that the methods that other instructors before you have used are not necessarily the only way or the best way to assess. It is all right to step outside your own comfort zone and outside what has traditionally been done if you feel that an alternate assessment method will serve your students' and your interests and goals better. Even if you are a new instructor, remember that you have spent many years as a student and therefore have information and experiences that will guide you in this process. Reflect on those experiences and decide if you want to do what you experienced and use those experiences in your own assessment design or whether you want to change the way you assess. If you do think change is necessary, ask yourself why and how you will change things?

(Adapted in part from Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson, Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment.)

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