

Criteria For Selecting Performance Tasks

Adapted from Herman, Aschbacher and Winters (1992)

The best performance assessment tasks are interesting, worthwhile activities that relate to your instructional outcomes and allow your students to demonstrate what they know and can do. As you decide what tasks to use, consider the following criteria that are adapted from Herman, Aschbacher and Winters (1992):

Does the task truly match the outcome(s) you're trying to measure?

This is a must. It follows from this that the task shouldn't require knowledge and skills that are irrelevant to the outcome. For example, if you are trying to measure speaking skills, asking the students to orally summarize a difficult science article penalizes those students who are poor readers or who lack the science background to understand the article. In that case, you would not know whether you were measuring speaking or (in this case) extraneous reading and science skills. Sometimes it is possible to provide pertinent background material that would enable students to perform well on the task, despite deficiencies in prior knowledge. Allowing students access to textbooks and reference materials they know how to use may also be helpful.

Does the task require the students to use critical thinking skills?

Must the student analyze, draw inferences or conclusions, critically evaluate, synthesize, create or compare? Or is recall all that is being assessed? The solution to the task should generally not be one in which the students have received specific instruction, since what is measured in that case may simply be rote memory. For example, suppose an instructional outcome included analyzing an author's point of view. If a class discussion is devoted to an analysis of the authors' points of view in two editorials and the students are then asked to write a composition analyzing the authors' positions expressed in the same editorials, what is really being measured is probably recall of the class discussion, rather than the student's ability to do the analysis. A better assessment would be to ask the students to analyze some editorials that haven't been discussed in class.

Is the task a worthwhile use of instructional time?

Performance assessments may be time-consuming so it stands to reason that that time should be well-spent. Instead of being an "add-on" to regular instruction, the assessment should be part of it.

Does the assessment use engaging tasks from the "real world?"

The task should capture the students' interest well enough to ensure that they are willing to try their best. Does the task represent something important that students will need to do in school and in the future? Many students are more motivated when they see that a task has some meaning or connection to life outside the classroom.

Can the task be used to measure several outcomes at once?

If so, the assessment process can be more efficient, by requiring fewer assessments overall.

Are the tasks fair and free from bias?

Is the task an equally good measure for students of different genders, cultures and socio-economic groups represented in your school population? Will all students have equivalent resources--at home or at school--with which to complete the task? Have all students received equal opportunity to learn what is being measured?

Will the task be credible?

Will your colleagues, students and parents view the task as being a meaningful, challenging and appropriate measure?

Is the task feasible?

Can students reasonably be expected to complete the task? Will you and your students have enough time, space, materials and other resources? Does the task require knowledge and skills that you will be able to teach?

Is the task clearly defined?

Are instructions for teachers and students clear? Does the student know exactly what is expected?