

VII. ASSESSMENT

A. THEORY AND KEY FEATURES

Guiding Principle 7 Assessment is an ongoing part of learning

Ongoing, or regular, assessment should take various forms and address the competencies that have been learned in class, so that the assessment can provide useful information on individual progress and achievement, which teachers and learners can review to aid learning.

There are multiple purposes for assessment in language teaching and learning: assessing *proficiency* for placement purposes, assessing *needs* in order to plan appropriate courses and lesson, assessing *progress* towards learning targets and assessing *achievement* of those targets (Bailey 1998, Graves 2000). For classroom teachers, assessment mainly focuses on the latter two—assessing progress and achievement. The purpose of classroom assessment is to provide information about learners' progress and achievement so that both teacher and learners know the extent to which they have attained their learning goals. It involves the collection and evaluation of information about what learners can and can't do in order to document progress and help learners improve.

Assessment addresses the following questions (Wiggins & McTighe 2005):

- 1) What is the learner supposed to learn/be able to do?
- 2) What is evidence of that learning?
- 3) What kinds of tasks will enable learners provide that evidence?
- 4) How will the evidence be evaluated?
- 5) What will happen with the results?

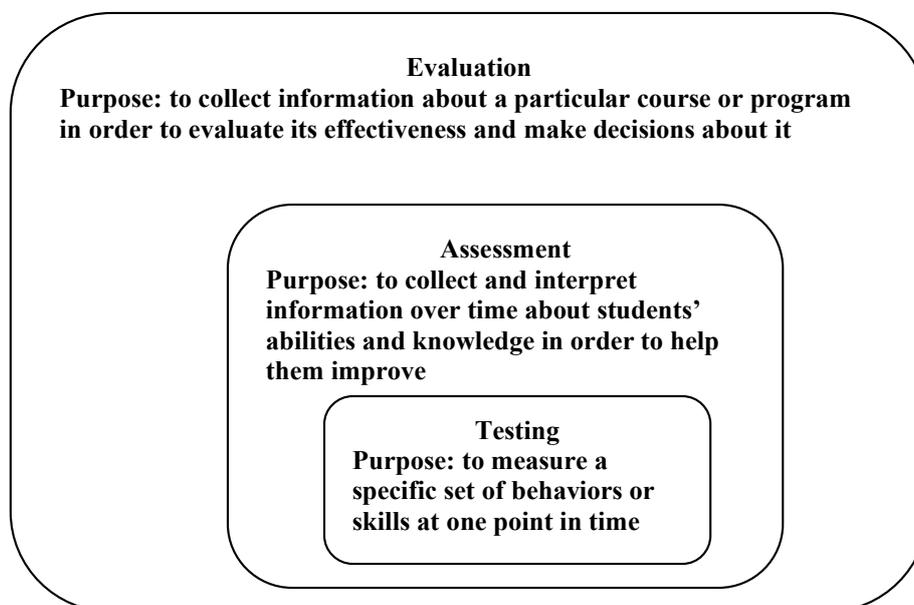
These questions will be addressed in detail below.

Relationship between testing, assessment and evaluation.

Too often, *assessment* is equated with *testing*. It is important to note that testing is only *one* of many ways to assess learning. Testing is a subset of assessment—it is one way to assess learning, but may only provide a limited picture of that learning because tests are designed to “measure a set of skills or behaviors at one point in time” (Katz et al. 2001: 4). Assessment, on the other hand, has a wider scope and “involves gathering information over a period of time.” (ibid.) Assessment is “the act of collecting information and making judgments on a language learner’s knowledge of a language and ability to use it.” (Chapelle and Brindley, cited in Brindley 2003) Testing is one vehicle for assessment (Shrum & Glisan 2005.)

Evaluation is a broader concept than testing and assessment. The purpose of evaluation is to make decisions about the effectiveness of a particular course or program. It involves collecting information, including data obtained from testing and assessment, and interpreting that information in order to make decisions. (Brindley 2003).

Figure 1: Relationship and purposes of evaluation, assessment and testing



Assessment is *formative* when it takes place while the course or program is in progress. The information collected can help to shape what happens in the classroom and have a positive effect on learners' ongoing development. It is *summative* when it takes place at the end of a unit of instruction, a course or program and provides information about the learners' achievement. Evaluation of a course or program should be both formative and summative so that, based on formative data, the course or program itself can be adapted as it is in progress.

Characteristics of effective classroom assessment

Valid

The assessment assesses what it is intended to assess; for example, an assessment that is intended to assess oral proficiency must involve learners speaking the language. Using a written format is not valid because a person's ability to write does not provide information about his or her speaking ability.

Geared to learning targets

Instruction is geared toward learning targets: assessment is aimed at finding out how well the learners are achieving the targets. The learning targets address the competencies (interpretive listening/reading, interactive speaking & productive speaking/writing) and so assessment should address each of the competencies.

Fair

Assessment assesses what has been taught. If an assessment assesses something other than what has been taught, it is unfair to the learners and not an appropriate assessment of their learning. There can be novelty in assessment. For example, when assessing speaking competency, it is possible to put learners in a novel situation that requires them to use what they know. As long as the situation is one that allows them to use what they know, the assessment is considered fair.

Fairness also means that learners know what they are supposed to do when they are assessed. If learners are given instructions that they don't understand, and so they are unable to perform accordingly, the assessment is not fair.

Varied

Assessment takes a variety of forms so that there is a variety of information to build a comprehensive picture of a learner's knowledge and abilities with respect to the competencies. Learners have different strengths and weaknesses. Different assessments will allow them to know those strengths and weaknesses. Variety means variety of modes (speaking, listening, reading, writing), variety of genres (written, oral, visual) variety of participation styles (individual, interactive), variety of formats (role-plays, fill in the blank, short answers). If only one type of assessment is used, it favors learners who do well on that type of assessment. See the task typology in Section B for a variety of assessment tasks.

Ongoing

Assessment should occur at regular intervals during units and at the end of units in addition to designated exam periods. Ongoing assessment provides ongoing feedback to teacher and learners about the learners' ability and progress and thus helps to improve their learning on a continuous basis.

Involves learners

Assessment should involve learners so that they can benefit from it. Learners should understand how they are being assessed and should review the results of assessments so they can learn about their strengths and weaknesses and find ways to improve. Assessment should include learner self-assessment so that they become more self-reliant and confident in their abilities. By being involved in assessment, learners become more self-reliant and able to assess themselves.

Guiding questions

1. What is the learner supposed to learn/be able to do?

In order to assess progress or achievement we must know what the learners are supposed to make progress toward or what they are supposed to achieve. These are the learning targets or goals. There are learning targets on a macro and micro level. The Algerian English Framework (See Section V) outlines the macro level targets for each of the competencies. Each unit outlines the micro level targets that helps to achieve the competency.

2. What is evidence of that learning?

In order to know whether learners have made progress or achieved the learning targets, we need to identify the kinds of performance or knowledge outputs that constitute evidence for progress and achievement.

3. What kinds of tasks will enable learners to provide the evidence?

There are two major types of assessment tasks, those that require learners to select a response and those that require learners to construct a response (McTighe & Ferrara 1998.) *Selected response tasks* provide a range of possible answers (usually between two and five) from which learners must select the correct response. Multiple choice and true-false tasks are examples of selected response tasks. *Constructed response tasks* require the learners to construct a response to the task posed. Constructed response tasks range from controlled to open-ended. The most controlled are *brief constructed response tasks* that usually require learners to generate a predetermined correct answer. Fill-in-the-blank is an example of a brief constructed response. The most open-ended require learners to draw on their language skills, and, as much as possible, exercise their imagination and intellect to produce a product or a performance that demonstrates learning. These assessment tasks are collected under the category of *performance-based assessment tasks*. Projects, essays and presentations are examples of performance-based tasks. One type of performance-based task focuses on how the learner learns, i.e. the processes and strategies for learning. Through the task the learner demonstrates his or her learning process. A learning log is an example of a process-based task.

See the assessment task typology in Section B for specific examples of assessment tasks.

4. How will the evidence be evaluated?

There are three suggested ways to evaluate the evidence. These may also be combined.

1) With numbers

A numerical rating is commonly used for selected response tasks such as multiple choice tests and controlled constructed response tasks such as fill in the blank or provide the correct answer. Each correct response is given a numerical value out of a total number. For example, if the total number is 10, and each correct answer is worth 10 points, then 6 out of 10 correct responses yields a score of 60%. If each correct answer is worth 2 points, then 6 correct responses out of 10 yields a score of 12.

2) With rubrics

Rubrics are commonly used to assess performance tasks such as essays, letters, posters, presentations, interviews. A rubric is composed of a matrix of characteristics of the task being assessed and a scale that rates the quality of the characteristics from low to high. For example, a rubric for a written essay might include these four characteristics: organization, appropriateness of content, grammatical accuracy and range of vocabulary. The characteristics might be rated along four levels, excellent, good, adequate, needs improvement. The rubric might be written holistically, in which case all the characteristics are combined and there are only four descriptions. It might be written analytically, in which case there is a separate scale for each characteristic. (See Blaz 1998). A sample rubric can be found below.

3) With narrative comments

Narrative comments are used to assess performance tasks and participation. They may include any or all of the following: brief comments, a statement of whether the student has met the learning target, a summary of strengths and areas to improve. For example, a teacher may watch student presentations and write brief comments about what she observes, state whether the student has met the learning target, and write a summary of the strengths and areas to improve. Learners may also write narrative comments about their performance.

5. What will happen with the results?

A distinction is sometimes made between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. Assessment *of* learning means that the purpose is to determine how well a learner can do or has done something. This is very important. However, if the results are only used to determine a mark for each learner, the assessment does not provide any feedback to the learner about what he or she needs to improve. Assessment *for* learning means that the purpose of assessment is to help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses so they can build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses. For that reason, learners need to know the results of assessments and what they show about their learning.

Example from sample unit “Famous places” (see Appendix)

1) “What is the learner supposed to learn/be able to do?”

Macro target (from AEF)

| |
|--|
| Can sustain a short oral narrative (story, experience or event) or a description |
| • on topics of interest |
| • as a series or sequence of connected points. |

Unit target:

| |
|--|
| Give a short oral description on the topic of a family vacation destination as a series of connected points. |
|--|

2) “What is evidence of that learning?”

Learner gives a one-two minute presentation about a familiar topic in which they introduce the topic, provide details and a concluding summary using appropriate vocabulary.

3) “What kinds of tasks will enable learners provide that evidence?”

Here is a description of the task:

Give a one – two minute presentation about the family vacation on the poster. Include Introduction – get the listeners’ attention

- For example, asking a question: *Football, a ravine, bridges and museums – and FOOTBALL! Your family will love Constantine!*

Details

- Reasons and description

Conclusion

- General reason and/or encourage people to go to the place

4) “How will the evidence be evaluated?”

With a rubric that includes:

Organization of talk

Fluency

Pronunciation

Vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy

Circle the rating (excellent, good, adequate, poor) that fits the student for each category (organization, fluency, comprehensibility, vocabulary & grammar

Student’s name: _____

| | Excellent | Good | Adequate | Poor |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| Organization of talk | Provided a clear, attention-getting beginning, at least four connected details, and a clear ending | Provided a clear beginning, some supporting details, and an ending | Provided the necessary parts of the talk, and the minimum supporting details. | Was poorly organized and difficult to follow |
| Fluency | Spoke confidently with only a few pauses and for more than one minute. | Spoke with some hesitations and some pauses for at least one minute. | Hesitated or paused often and spoke for one minute | Spoke haltingly with many hesitations and pauses and for less than one minute |
| Pronunciation | Pronunciation was always easy to understand: there may be a few mistakes. | Pronunciation was usually easy to understand. There are a few mistakes. | Pronunciation was understandable with some effort by listeners. | Pronunciation was difficult to understand. |
| Vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy | Used a wide variety of appropriate vocabulary words and correct grammatical structures throughout the talk | Used a variety of appropriate vocabulary words and used correct grammatical structures most of the time | Used some appropriate vocabulary words and used correct grammatical structures some of the time | Used a limited number of vocabulary words and rarely used correct grammatical structures. |

5) “What will happen with the results?”

Teacher will score rubric, share with learner. Learner will make a note of strengths and weaknesses.

Guidelines for teachers

1. *The teacher has realistic short and long term learning objectives for learners.*

The Algerian English Framework is a guide for teachers, but it should be adapted for their particular learners. They can use the AEF to devise realistic objectives for their learners. Realistic objectives are ones that learners can successfully meet. Success builds confidence and confidence builds improvement.

Example from the sample unit: The long term reading objective is for learners to be able to understand the main points and some important details of medium-length texts. Some short term objectives include being able to use non-text features to predict the topic and gist of the text and being able to skim for general meaning.

2. *The teacher regularly assesses learner learning using a variety of assessment activities.*

When planning a unit, consider different ways to assess the target abilities and knowledge. See comments above about using a variety of assessment activities.

Examples from the sample unit: Learners evaluate their reading strategies; learners peer review each other's writing; learners give an oral presentation which is evaluated with a rubric.

3. *The teacher plans and uses assessment activities that assess not only what learners know, but also what learners are able to do as speakers, listeners, readers and writers.*

In the past, assessments tended to assess what learners *knew about* the language rather than what they were able to *do with* it. As a result, importance was placed on knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and learners did not learn how to speak, interpret or write the language. By planning assessment activities that assess learners abilities as speakers, readers, writers and listeners, learners will be motivated to improve their skills.

Examples from the sample unit: Learners evaluate their reading strategies; learners peer review each other's writing; learners give an oral presentation which is evaluated with a rubric.

4. *The teacher teaches learners to assess themselves and their peers so that they are aware of their progress.*

In the past, assessment was the domain of the teacher in order to determine a mark. Assessment for learning means that we support learners to become more and more independent. Learners know they have learned something when they no longer depend on others to tell them whether they are doing something correctly or not.

Example from the sample unit: On the fourth day of the unit, students interview two people about the kinds of places they like. During each interview they are to show interest and ask at least one follow-up question. After the interviews they self-assess their interactional competency by filling in a chart about how they showed interest and which follow-up question they asked.

B. ASSESSMENT TASK TYPOLOGY

The following presents an overview of selected tasks and assignments which teachers may use to perform ongoing, performance-based assessment . The tasks are drawn from McTighe & Ferrara (1998), etc...

As teachers are likely most familiar with selected response (multiple choice, true/false, matching), and brief constructed response (fill-in-the blank, comprehension questions) task types, this outline focuses on open-ended **constructed response, performance-based assessment** tasks.

TASK TYPES

There are three categories of performance-based assessment tasks:

| Category | Description | Task types (See next section for examples.) |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| I. Product | Tasks require students to create a tangible <i>product</i> , such as an essay, a portfolio, or a project, which demonstrates their learning. Students may present products in class, either in pairs or groups or to the whole class, and/or turn them in to the teacher for feedback. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • essay • project • research paper • portfolio |
| II. Performance | Tasks generally involve oral/speaking assignments requiring students to <i>perform</i> in front of peers and/or the teacher. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • debate • demonstration • oral presentation • role play • teach a lesson |
| III. Process/Strategy-focused | Tasks are designed to assess individual students' learning processes and use of learning strategies, as well as to foster students' awareness of their own learning and progress. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conference • learning log • observation of learner • peer interview • think aloud |

TASK EXAMPLES

I. Product-based tasks

A. Essay—Students produce a piece of writing (a letter, a paragraph, a **multi-**paragraph essay) that requires them to correctly and appropriately use the target vocabulary, grammar, or language structures/functions.

Examples:

Students...

- write a paragraph (essay) about a memorable experience that has a topic sentence, describes the event, and states how they have changed because of the experience.
- write an essay about their hometown that includes paragraphs for an introduction to the town, favorite places to go, and the pros and cons of living in their town.

- write a paragraph stating their opinion on the use of man-made vs. natural materials
- write a persuasive essay on the advantages or pitfalls of eco-tourism

B. Project—Students create a piece of tangible work which shows evidence of their grasp of the target content, vocabulary, grammar, or structures/functions. Projects may be structured as individual, pair, or group assignments. Project work typically requires students to conduct research and spend time preparing outside the classroom.

Examples:

Students...

- create a travel poster/brochure for a family vacation in Algeria that includes a visual and a description of the destination and reasons for going there, and that uses adjective phrases and the simple past passive.
- generate a class newspaper/newsletter sharing students' opinions on a current issue in Algeria.
- create a blog/Web site with tips and recommendations for job interviewing
- record an audio/video tape of a talk show segment with several guests describing memorable experiences including use of present simple and continuous and the host asking follow up questions.
- create a class cookbook with favorite family recipes.

Note: *When assigning a project, it is helpful to show students an example of a pre-completed project, either created by the teacher, or by a previous student.*

C. Research paper—Students conduct research on a topic, either assigned or chosen, and then write a multi-page paper that requires them to appropriately use the target content, vocabulary, grammar, or structures/functions.

Examples:

Students...

- conduct research on a famous person and write a biographical paper
- conduct a survey of classmates' preferred language learning strategies and write a paper presenting the results/findings
- interview classmates, family members, or community people about their health habits and write a paper presenting the results
- do a comparative study of a cultural aspect related to how young people grow up across several cultures and write the results

Note: *Prior to assigning a research paper, teachers will likely need to spend time in class going over the research paper writing process including brainstorming topics, making an outline, research methods, drafting, and research paper format.*

D. Portfolio—Students compile a selection of their own work (writing samples, quizzes, tests, project work, etc.) from a particular unit, quarter, semester, or from an entire course, which demonstrates learning and progress over time. Documents are organized in a binder, and students write a brief rationale (a few sentences to a few paragraphs) for why they included each document, explaining the document’s significance and its role in the student’s learning.

Examples:

Students...

- compile selected documents to show progress in writing. They include in their portfolio, writing samples from the beginning, middle, and end of the course, along with a brief written analysis of each document’s significance.
- collect documents to show learning from a unit on memorable experiences. They include in their portfolio, grammar worksheets on the past perfect, graphic organizers, notes, and drafts of writing about a memorable experience, an audio recording of themselves narrating a personal experience and using reduced pronunciation of had in the past perfect along with a brief written analysis of each document’s significance.
- select documents to demonstrate overall progress during the first quarter of the course. They include in their portfolio writing and/or audio samples, quizzes, tests, and projects along with a brief written analysis of each document’s significance.

Note: *The process of portfolio data collection and analysis may be somewhat complex for students who have never engaged in this type of self-evaluation. Teachers who plan to use portfolios as part of their assessment procedures should plan to spend some time introducing the concept. Here are some suggestions for using portfolios:*

- *Introduce the concept of portfolios early in the course and show an example (examples) if possible.*
- *Remind students often to keep all of their work in the course, as it may be useful for the portfolios.*
- *Give students intervals of time to organize their work and choose documents for their portfolios, so as not to overload them with the entire task at the end of the semester or course.*

II. Performance tasks

A. Role play—Students assume the role of another person or character in a particular place or situation (a customer at the bank, a waiter in a restaurant, a visitor to a new city), and have a conversation with another student/other students. The interaction requires students to appropriately use target vocabulary, grammar and functions.

Examples:

Students...

- work in pairs to develop a job interview dialogue between an employer and a job applicant. They then perform the role play for the class.
- work in pairs or groups to create a news report role play. For the role play, “journalists” interview class members about their opinions on a current issue in Algerian society.
- create a television cooking show role play in which they play a TV show host giving the audience instructions for how to cook a popular Algerian dish. Students may also videotape their shows and play them in class as a project.

Note: *When used as an assessment tool, role plays should require students to generate original language as they complete the task. That is, the role play should not generally include the use of a pre-scripted dialogue, unless the assessment is of students’ use of non-linguistic skills such as eye contact, or gestures.*

B. Debate—Students research a particular issue or topic about which people have differing opinions. They then choose to argue for or against the issue, and develop a supporting argument for their chosen side. Finally, students participate in class in a discussion of the two sides of the issue, either individually or as a team.

Examples:

Students...

- work in teams to research the advantages and disadvantages of eco-tourism. Then have a debate in class in which each team tries to persuade the audience to adopt the pro or con side.
- work in teams to research the pros and cons of using man-made and disposable materials in daily life. Then have a debate in class in which each team tries to persuade the audience to adopt the pro or con side.

C. Demonstration—Students give step-by-step verbal instructions for how to perform a particular task or skill, while also physically demonstrating the task or skill. Demonstrations may be structured as pair or small group tasks, or students may conduct them in front of the whole class.

Examples:

Students...

- prepare a demonstration on how to do a special skill or talent that they have, and present their demonstrations in class.
- research how to do a method of stress reduction (meditation, a yoga pose, etc) and give instructions in class for how to do it.

C. Oral presentation—Students prepare and give a formal presentation (two to five minutes long) in class. Presentations may include the use of visual aids such as posters or presentation software. Projects may be structured as individual, pair, or group assignments. Presentations typically require students to conduct research and spend time preparing outside the classroom.

Examples:

Students...

- interview a classmate and introduce him or her to the class, including a description of his or her personality traits and qualities.
- work in groups to create a poster on their preferred language learning strategies. Students then form new groups and present their group's poster.

Note: *Before assigning oral presentations, it is helpful to spend some time guiding students through some basic presentation skills such as presentation format (introduction, body, and conclusion), making eye contact, speaking from notes, etc.*

D. Teach a lesson—Students assume the role of the teacher, and teach the class a lesson on a particular topic. Lessons may be structured as group assignments, with students taking turns teaching in small groups, or students may teach the lesson to the whole class. The lesson may be a lecture format, or it may be interactive and require some participation from the other students. For example if a student teaches a traditional song or a dance, he or she may ask other students to try singing or dancing.

Examples:

Students...

- teach a lesson to the class on how to be successful at a job interview.
- work in groups to prepare a lesson on useful language learning strategies and skills. Then divide into new groups and teach the lesson to their classmates.
- research a grammar point and teach it to the class.

III. Process/Strategy-focused tasks

A. Conference—Students meet with the teacher to set goals, and discuss progress in the course, including strengths and areas for improvement. Conferences may take place at the beginning of a course, and then at intervals (quarterly, mid-term). Ideally, conferences should be conducted one-on-one with individual students, so that students feel confident discussing their strengths and areas for improvement.

Example conference questions:

- *What are your English-learning goals for this term?*
- *How do you feel about your progress in the course so far?*
- *What has been especially enjoyable for you?*

- *What has been especially challenging?*
- *What do you feel are your strengths?*
- *What areas would you'd like to improve? What are some ways you could improve them?*

Note: *As much as possible, during conferences students should be guided to come up with their own assessment of their progress, rather than the conference focusing on the teacher's evaluation of the student's progress.*

B. Learning log—Students keep a learning log or journal (a notebook designated for reflective writing about their learning in class). The teacher may collect students learning logs periodically and hand them back with written comments or words of encouragement. He or she may also ask students to discuss the contents of their learning logs during a conference.

Examples:

Students...

- write daily or every other day at the end of class what was clear and what they still have questions about.
- write at the end of a unit which activities were the most and least helpful, and why.

C. Observation of learner—The teacher chooses one or two students to observe daily in order to examine individual students' learning process. For example, teachers may observe how students react to certain task types, what kinds of coping strategies they use when they don't understand a task, or how they are affected by working alone versus working in pairs or groups.

Example focus questions for observations:

- *How does the student interact with others during group activities? Does he or she choose to lead or stay in the background?*
- *How does the student's level of interest/participation differ during different task types?*
- *What does the student tend to do when new language is being presented? Write, listen, focus on visuals, repeat the new language?*