

Keys to effective assessment

1. Use summative assessments to frame meaningful performance goals.

Frame the standards and benchmarks in terms of desired performances and ensure that the performances are as authentic as possible. Teachers should then present the summative performance assessment tasks to students at the beginning of a new unit or course.

2. Show criteria and models in advance.

Present evaluative criteria and models of work that illustrate different levels of quality.

3. Assess before teaching.

Diagnostic assessment is as important to teaching as a physical exam is to prescribing an appropriate medical regimen. At the outset of any unit of study, certain students are likely to have already mastered some of the skills that the teacher is about to introduce, and others may already understand key concepts. Some students are likely to be deficient in prerequisite skills or harbor misconceptions. Armed with this diagnostic information, a teacher gains greater insight into *what to teach*, by knowing what skill gaps to address or by skipping material previously mastered; into *how to teach*, by using grouping options and initiating activities based on preferred learning styles and interests; and into *how to connect* the content to students' interests and talents.

4. Offer appropriate choices.

Responsiveness in assessment is as important as it is in teaching. Students differ not only in how they prefer to take in and process information but also in how they best demonstrate their learning. Some students need to “do”; others thrive on oral explanations. Some students excel at creating visual representations; others are adept at writing. To make valid inferences about learning, teachers need to allow students to work to their strengths.

5: Provide feedback early and often.

To serve learning, feedback must meet four criteria: It must be timely, specific, understandable to the receiver, and formed to allow for self-adjustment on the student's part (Wiggins, 1998).

6: Encourage self-assessment and goal setting.

Teachers help cultivate such habits of mind by modeling self-assessment and goal setting and by expecting students to apply these habits regularly.

7: Allow new evidence of achievement to replace old evidence.

New evidence of achievement should replace old evidence. Classroom assessments and grading should focus on *how well*—not on *when*—the student mastered the designated knowledge and skill.